

Mar 06, 2022



# Oaks Early Risers Bible Class

**The Oaks  
Baptist Church**  
Grand Prairie, Texas

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**Lesson Leaders:**

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**Class Leaders:**

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**FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

**THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:**

Living for Christ brings true freedom

**COMMENT FOR THE WEEK:**

Celebrate our freedom in Christ by taking the time to thank God for the things we are able and free to do as His servants

**SCRIPTURE FOR THE WEEK:**

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death  
**(Rom 8:2 NKJV)**

*(from "Our Daily Bread", July 04, 2017)*

**Series: God Frees and Redeems**

**UNIT 1: Liberating Passover**

**NEXT WEEK**

**Free to Worship  
(Ezra 6:1-12)**

## **Freed from Captivity Ezra 1:1-8, 11; 2:64-70**

### **Lesson Background and Introduction**

After a 2019 fire destroyed parts of the cathedral of Notre-Dame, an international competition redesigned the building's destroyed rooftop and spiral. Architects had to keep in mind a variety of concerns: rebuilding costs, the cathedral's history, and the relationship between the cathedral and the city. Similar concerns are present in the narrative surrounding the return of Jewish exiles to their homeland. In 539 BC, the Persian King Cyrus destroyed the Babylonian Empire. He solidified the Persian Empire's dominance in a region that extended from modern-day Greece to modern-day India. Cyrus demonstrated tolerance of the religious practices of his subjects. A notable decree in this regard was written on a clay cylinder and is known as the Cyrus Cylinder. This decree culminated with the command to repatriate exiled peoples and rebuild their houses of worship. Isaiah prophesied that Cyrus, commissioned by the Lord, would provide an opportunity for the Jewish exiles to return to their homeland (Isaiah 44:28). Cyrus's decree fulfilled a promise made earlier by the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 29:10, 14). However, the prophecy's fulfillment did not necessitate the return of all exiles, only a "remnant" (Isaiah 10:22). This week's lesson speaks of the exiles' history, their promised return, their relationships, and even their economic needs. While their return could have been disastrous, God provided direction through a decree of Persia's King Cyrus. Modern readers of Ezra may face major rebuilding efforts. These may be physical buildings, like a house, business, or church. However, the rebuilding effort may be less tangible, like relationships. These rebuilding projects invite the participants to envision a new reality, something wholly different from what was before. In those moments, we have to be available for God's provision and work.

*(Adapted from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)*

**God Is Faithful** - In 538 B.C., around 50,000 Jewish exiles left Babylon and headed home to Judah, a trip of 1,000 miles over four months. They committed themselves to rebuild the temple and the city of Jerusalem. Isaiah and Jeremiah had prophesied Judah's downfall and promised God would allow them to be delivered. After 70 years in captivity, under the leadership of Zerubbabel (Sheshbazzar), the group returned to the city's ruins with God's promise of re-establishment and His blessings. The nation had failed God, but God never forgot His people. The Lord had raised up a Persian king named Cyrus who conquered Babylon and then allowed the captive Jews to go and rebuild their land. King Cyrus generously gave the remnant funds, wealth, and protection, and he also returned over 5,000 valuable artifacts stolen from Solomon's temple. The Jews remaining in Babylon also contributed to the remnant who returned.

**The Remnant** - In several places in the Book of Ezra, families are listed. Many of the old records had been lost or destroyed. Ezra and the other historical writers needed to list the names and count the numbers of those who left Babylon. The congregation included heads of households and their families. The crowd also included priests, servants, and the singers for festive occasions. When the crowd reached Jerusalem, the families contributed generously to the temple building project. Their offerings might have also been a way to express their thanksgiving to God for allowing them to make the long trip home.

**God is in the Reconstruction Business** - The Lord has allowed Christians to realize their freedom and deliverance from the bondage of sin. Their salvation is now secure. But when some individuals look at their lives, like the remnant returning from Babylon, they see only ruins, a life in complete destruction and disarray. However, those returning from their captors to rebuild depended on God for His plan and provisions to reestablish their land. The Father's children can still do the same. A shame-filled, broken human being cannot reconstruct his own life. It's beyond human capabilities. But like the remnant, that person can surely place their trust in a God who is able to do more than they could ever think or imagine.

*(Adapted from the Echoes Commentary)*

## NOTES AND CROSS-REFERENCES

### **Freed by Divine Intervention on a King (Ezra 1:1-4)**

#### *God stirred up the spirit of the King (1-2)*

God directs the heart of all kings (Prov 21:1)

God established all authorities (Rom 13:1)

The kings of the earth belong to God (Ps 47:9)

It is God's plans and purposes that all nations must perform (Ps 33:10-11)

When a king's heart becomes arrogant, God knows how to humble him (Dan 5:18-21)

#### *God provided the release of the people (3-4)*

God releases His people because He hears their cries (Ps 69:33)

God releases His people because He looks down from on high (Ps 102:19-20)

God releases His people because He came to do so (Luke 4:17-21)

God releases His people because He rescues through Jesus (Col 1:13)

God releases His people because upholds their cause (Ps 146:7)

God releases His people because it is His favor (Isa 49:8-9)

### **Freed by Divine Intervention on Spiritual Leaders (Ezra 1:5-6)**

#### *God stirred up the spirit of the leaders (5)*

God stirs the hearts of leaders so that they are aware that it is God who provides strength (Zech 12:4-6)

God stirs the hearts of leaders to strengthen their faith (1 Tim 3:9,13)

God stirs the hearts of leaders according to His good purpose (Phil 2:13)

God stirs the hearts of leaders as they follow the example of Jesus (1 Cor 11:1)

God stirs the hearts of leaders as part of the gift of being a leader (1 Tim 4:14)

#### *People supported the leaders (6)*

People should support their leaders because of consideration of their works (Heb 13:7)

People should support their leaders to make their work a joy (Heb 13:17)

People should support their leaders because they deserve it (1 Cor 9:11-12)

People should support their leaders because it will be credited to the people's spiritual account (Phil 4:17-18)

People should support their leaders because there is a reward for doing so (Matt 10:41-42)

People should support their leaders because of the judgment (Matt 25:34-40)

People should support their leaders because God will remember it (Heb 6:10)

### **Freed by Divine Intervention through Blessings (Ezra 1:7-11)**

#### *Blessings of the returned vessels (7)*

A blessing because it is God who gathers up treasures (Joel 3:5-7)

A blessing because when valuables are lost, one rejoices much when they are returned (Luke 15:8-9)

A blessing because many times God blesses with more than what was taken (Job 42:10-12)

A blessing because when the lost returns, it is like bringing the dead back to life (Luke 15:20-24)

A blessing because there is more happiness over the recovered lost than for all that remained (Matt 18:10-14)

#### *Blessings of entrustment (8)*

Entrustment that has been earned through being honest with little and now being given much (Luke 16:10-12)

Entrustment that results in one being given charge over many things (Matt 25:21)

Entrustment where much is demanded when much has been given (Luke 12:48)

Entrustment that has been proven through faithfulness (1 Cor 4:2)

Entrustment that requires the help of the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 1:14)

Leaders have an entrustment of God's work (Titus 1:7-9)

All saints have been given an entrustment of faith (Jude 1:3)

### **Freed though the People Returning (Ezra 2:64-70)**

#### *Returning to an assembly (64-67)*

Assembled to simulate love and good deeds (Heb 10:23-25)

Assembled in the presence of God (Matt 18:20)

Assembled for fellowship (Acts 2:42-47)

Assembled for prayer (Acts 1:14)

#### *Returning with an offering (68-70)*

Offering that is done willingly (2 Cor 8:12)

Offering that is offered right (Gen 4:2-7)

Offering that is given out of love (Eph 5:1-2)

Offering that is sacrificial (Phil 4:16-18)

Offering that is from a steadfast faith (2 Tim 4:6-8)