

The God Who Sets Things in Motion

A Story of Revival, Ezra 1:1-11

Introduction

- If I am brutally honest about myself, it's easier for me to start a project than to finish one. I'm not saying that I never finish projects, it just always takes more time and energy than I anticipate going in.
 - I have a pile of project plans on my desk right now – some of them are goldmines - but I just can't work out all the details.
 - My doctoral project took the maximum number of semesters allowed (plus one) before I could get it done (To be fair, I changed churches, had a fourth child, and moved while I was in school)
 - I've done some really neat carpentry projects around our house the last couple of years, but I just can't get Sarah's home office finished.
- Our world is full of the disappointment of abandoned dreams & discarded plans.
- That had to be how some of the Jews felt in exile – neglected & forgotten.
 - And for good reason - they had rebelled against God time & time again.
 - God had warned them that He would remove them from the land He had given them – time & time again – and then He finally did it.
- From a narrative perspective, the plotline of the Bible just disappears.
 - Human history “veers off the road” with no one seemingly at the wheel anymore.
 - The plan of redemption that was announced in Gen 3:15 & other places is abandoned halfway through the Old Testament.
 - The nation of Israel, “a light to the nations,” is snuffed out. (Is. 49:6)
- The book of Ezra is a story of renovation, renewal, and revival.
 - It was originally combined with the book of Nehemiah.
 - Together, they explain how the Jews were reestablished as a people in 3 phases under 3 different leaders.
 - They rebuilt the temple under Zerubbabel in Ezra 1-6.
 - They resettled their families under Ezra in Ezra 7-10.
 - They restored the walls of the city under Nehemiah in Neh. 1-13.
 - As the resumed their worship, prayer, and obedience toward God, the fire of revival began to grow.
- The story begins with a foundational truth: **God always finishes what He starts.**
 - The God of Heaven is the one who sets everything in motion here.
 - He's not frustrated by mighty rulers & He doesn't overlook lowly refugees.
 - These two groups of people are the focus of God's activity in this passage.

Body

I. God Moves Kings (v. 1-4)

- A. The Medes & the Persians conquered Babylon (modern Iran) in 539 B.C. & Cyrus the Great became ruler over everything from modern day Turkey & Egypt in the west to central Asia & India in the east.
- B. The King enacted a new policy that allowed exiles to return to their homeland and to rebuild their places of worship.

- C. The Jews saw this as a fulfillment of prophecy. (Jer. 25:11-12)
 - 1. They would be conquered by the Babylonians.
 - 2. The Babylonians themselves would be conquered.
 - 3. After 70 years, they would be allowed to return to their homeland.
- D. The policy was written down so it could be distributed through the kingdom.
- E. There's no king, president, or dictator that is above God or beyond His reach.
 - 1. God is never helpless, frustrated, or at a loss with the actions of human leaders.
 - 2. He used the self-interest of a world leader to accomplish His own plan.
 - 3. “The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes. (Prov. 21:1)

II. God Motivates People (v. 5-11)

- A. There were 3 groups of people that responded to the King's policy.
 - 1. **The Elders (v. 5)**
 - a. These were the heads of household, the priests, & the Levites.
 - b. They were needed to organize the people & worship in the temple.
 - 2. **The Neighbors (v. 6)**
 - a. The Jews were surrounded by Gentile neighbors in Babylon.
 - b. This is a reference to way their ancestors “plundered” the Egyptians. (Ex. 12:36)
 - 3. **The Enemies (v. 7-11)**
 - a. The Babylonians took the equipment from the temple as trophy to their religious victory over Israel's God.
 - b. Year's later, the Babylonians had their own religious defeat, and King Cyrus returned the utensils to the Jews as a sign of the reversal.
 - c. Even the enemies of God's people responded to God's command.
- B. The phrase “fly over states” is based on the understanding that some parts of country are more important than others. It's not really true & neither is the idea of “fly over people.” Everyone is equally important is God's eyes and everyone has access to God's plan of redemption.

Conclusion

- The 1st chapter in the story of revival begins with the understanding **God always finishes what He starts.**
 - This applies to the high and the lowly.
 - This applied B.C. (Before Christ) & it applies A.D. (After His death).
 - This applies individually and collectively
 - He will finish the saving & sanctifying work He started in your life. (“He who began a good work in you...” Phil 1:60)
 - He will bring His plan of redemption to completion (“The summing up of all things in Christ.” Eph. 1:9-10)
- The *Mona Lisa* is one of the most famous paintings by one of the most famous artists of all time, Leonardo da Vinci. It was a long, messy, & time-consuming process, but it allowed him to produce a masterpiece. **God always finishes what He starts**, and He is making a masterpiece out of me & you.