

## IN THE BOOK OF EZRA, 3 PAGAN KINGS WORK FOR GOD

Jer. 25:11; This whole land will be a desolation, and a horror, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon for 70 years. ...Jer. 29:11; 'For I know the plans that I have for you' declares the Lord, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity, to give you a future and a hope <sup>12</sup> that you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you.'

[Disclaimer: Please note that God did not say that I have plans to give you a future and a hope so that you may worship the god of your choosing and do your own will. He said that "you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you". End of disclaimer]

God has a long and illustrious history of using unlikely characters to fulfill His will. One analogy to help illustrate this would be a chess match between God and the devil at which the final move is the resurrection of the One who will crush the head of Satan. Because God is the creator of the chess being played and the creator of creativity, He knows how to use the creation in a manner that will befuddle the devil. In this case amongst many others, He uses unusual suspects to accomplish His goal.

If we were to choose the starting nine for the world's greatest baseball team, we would likely choose men like Ty Cobb, Babe Ruth, Mickey Mantle, Joe DiMaggio, Nolan Ryan, and Tony Gwynn. God, on the other hand, would choose a rag tag group of men that we have never heard of, encourage them, strengthen them, build them up and utilize their strengths in a way that would completely confuse the other team. You see, the aforementioned players are already great, they don't necessarily need any help, but the others have strengths and abilities that have yet to be recognized. God has a love for those that are doing His will and He will not forsake them, but He also has a love for those that have the ability and potential to do His will and He will use them so that they may see His glory and turn to Him for their salvation (see Mark 2:17).

Such is the case with the three kings of Babylon, Cyrus, Darius, and Xerxes, three kings who studied the monotheistic religion of Zoroastrianism. They did not necessarily turn to God, worship God or make Judaism the premier religion of the land but they did fulfill the prophecy of Jeremiah that came 150 years earlier by releasing the Jews so that they could return to their land. Their kindness was not exclusive to the Hebrews, as they allowed all of those that had been captured from foreign lands to return home. They did however, single out the Jews when it came to their release so that the house of the Lord could be constructed (Ezr. 1:2-4). They even authorized the use of building materials funded by the kingdom, as well as reissued the articles of the temple that had been seized by Nebuchadnezzar 70 years prior. This was accompanied by a freewill offering of the people because they recognized the struggle of God's people.

This is more than just a short book report on a small section of the writings of the prophet Ezra. This is a lesson that can be carried with us day in and day out. You see, God has a way of taking less than perfect people and doing marvelous things with them. Pharaoh helped elevate Joseph to near king status although Joseph was a Jewish ex con amongst the Egyptians. Rahab was a prostitute that helped Gods people overcome Jericho. Jacob was a deceiver of the worst kind, but God knew how to use him to fulfill His promises of a great nation. These are just three of countless examples of God using the flawed to create magic. In Mat. 5:44-45 Jesus tells us "But I say to you, "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven: for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." This should be a lesson to us that we should never look at anyone as if they are less than Gods creation. We never know what God has in store for the one in front of us, or how He will use them to bring glory to Himself. It may seem strange but Joseph wouldn't have had the opportunity to save Egypt as well as his father and brothers if it hadn't been for the harlot that was Potiphers wife. If she hadn't lied about Joseph then he wouldn't have had the opportunity to interpret dreams in prison that led to him being discovered by the pharaoh that led to him sitting side by side with the pharaoh. I suppose we owe a debt of gratitude to Potiphers wife for being a conniver, because just as Joseph said to his brothers who sold him into slavery prior to all of this "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive." I suppose technically, if we go back, if Joseph's brothers hadn't sold him into slavery he wouldn't have been there to save the kingdom during the time of the famine. The Lord used jealous brothers to create gold.

In the end, praise God for struggle, strife, less than perfect people and less than perfect situations. I say this because there has to be a compare and contrast. The Jews had fallen into lives of idolatry and sin therefore God had to issue punishment, otherwise they never would have seen the need for repentance. The fall of the nation Israel and 70 years of captivity was the penance, so when the time came for release and redemption they praised God and immediately began constructing a temple to show their gratitude. We must experience struggle in our lives otherwise we have no recognition of Gods glory and grace. In the same token, not everyone can be an Ezra. Some have to be pagan kings so that they can grow with the Lord and assist the likes of Ezra. Praise God for using the three kings to lead His people to redemption and repentance.