

When God Rules and Overrules Leaders

International Bible Lesson

Ezra 6:13-22

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“And kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the LORD had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel” (Ezra 6:22—KJV).

“With joy they celebrated the festival of unleavened bread seven days; for the LORD had made them joyful, and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria to them, so that he aided them in the work on the house of God, the God of Israel” (Ezra 6:22—NRSV).

In 516 BC, the Jews who returned from exile in Babylon dedicated their rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. Obeying the Law of Moses, they celebrated the Passover and other festivals at their newly consecrated temple. Ezra explained that God’s people experienced joy in their worship at the temple of the Lord because the Lord made them joyful. After God moved the kings of Persia to conquer Babylon and Assyria, He made the Jews joyful by turning the hearts of the kings so they would rule favorably with respect to His people. God made King Cyrus decide that God’s people could leave Babylon. God made King Cyrus rule that their neighbors in Babylon had to help the Jews prepare for moving back to Judea. God made pagan kings, King Cyrus and King Darius, rule that the returnees had to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem with funds from the royal treasury and taxes from their neighbors surrounding Judea. God made the Jews joyful by moving their pagan political leaders in ways that brought them religious and spiritual benefits in their worship and service of the God of Israel.

More than 2500 years ago God made these two pagan kings do His will in behalf of His people, and throughout history God has sometimes turned the hearts of political and religious leaders to achieve His purposes. God still makes His people joyful by acting in history and by ruling and overruling some decisions of this world’s leaders.

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Thinking Further

1. What does the fact that God moved King Cyrus and King Darius to do His will to help His people make you think about what God can do today?
2. How might your answer to the question above influence the way you pray today?
3. What influenced the exiles to finish building the house of the Lord?
4. What do you think influenced the exiles to dedicate their temple with joy?
5. Why do you think they offered a sin offering for all of Israel instead of just for the exiles who had returned from Babylon?