

Interpret and evaluate

INTERPERATE, NOT JUST RE-TELL EZRA 1. ASK, WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Below is a re-telling of the story and it is too long with too much unnecessary detail:

In vv.1-4 God's Spirit stirs up Cyrus, the king of Persia to issue a proclamation throughout his kingdom to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem in Judah. He encourages all those around them to support them with gold, silver, goods and cattle. In vv.5-11 the people whose heart God had stirred decide to go up to rebuild the house of the LORD and all those about them give them articles of gold, silver, goods and cattle on top of the freewill offerings. [81 words]

Here is an interpretation of what happens (the interpreted bits are in italics)—notice that it is shorter and yet it communicates more of the meaning/significance of the events:

The book opens *with the hope of restoration* through Cyrus' decree to rebuild the Jerusalem temple, a *symbol of God's presence with his people and a sign of his returning favour* (vv.1-4). In vv.5-11 *both people and priests* respond in a *new exodus* encouraged by their neighbours with gold, silver and goods *reminiscent of the 'plundering of the Egyptians'* (Exod 12:35-36). Throughout, God is active stirring the heart of both *pagan monarch* (v.1) and *faithful Jews* (v.5). [77 words]

EXAMPLE OF AN ARGUMENT AND EVALUATION OF VIEWS

Below is an evaluation of arguments around the question of what Ezra 1:1 refers to when it speaks of the fulfilment of Jeremiah's prophecy. (I put in italics my evaluation of the arguments.)

The fulfilment of Jeremiah's prophecy is frequently taken to be a reference to Jer 25:12; 29:10 which both predict seventy years of exile.¹ Others point out that God stirring up Cyrus and his authorisation of the return and rebuilding of the temple fit many of the Isaianic prophecies better (Isa 41:2, 25; 44:28; 45:13 cf. 45:1) and that the author/editor of Ezra 1 simply confused the names of the two.² *In order to overcome the apparent discrepancy, Williamson convincingly* argues that the reference is to Jer 51 where the spirit of the kings of the Medes is stirred up to destroy Babylon (v.11). He suggests that the writer of Ezra would have expected his readers to have in mind, along with this negative prophecy of destruction from Jeremiah, the more positive ones from Isaiah as well.³ *This is an attractive proposal as it maintains the integrity of the Ezran text and makes better sense of the evidence than a reference to Jer 25:12 or*

29:10. *Perhaps the Ezran author also had in mind Jeremiah's detailed description of the temple vessels taken to Babylon (52:17-23).* [184 words]

If it is a marginal debate, keep it short. A shortened version of the above:

The precise source of the prophecy identified by Ezra 1:1 as from Jeremiah is debated. Jeremiah's prophecy of seventy years in exile (Jer 25:12; 29:10) seems at first glance the most obvious answer,¹ although Isaiah's language of stirring up the heart and temple building (Isa 41:2, 25; 44:28; 45:13 cf. 45:1) is closer to Ezra's formulations.² Williamson's argument that Jer 51:11 both combines some of the language (stirring up the spirit of Median kings to destroy Babylon) and retains a Jeremianic source is most convincing.³ [85 words]

SOME EXPRESSIONS FOR INTRODUCING AND ENGAGING WITH SCHOLARLY ARGUMENTS/OBSERVATIONS

X argues, contends, suggests, notes, observes...

X convincingly/correctly/rightly/in my view rightly argues/points out...

X's argument is most convincing because...

X's argument is to be preferred over Y's because...

X fails to notice/this view does not take into account/does not explain why...