

## Week 20, Lecture 58.<sup>1</sup> The Cyrus Cylinder, Biblical Background.

### Who was Cyrus?

#### 2 Chr 36:22-23

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, **the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus** king of Persia so that he made a proclamation **throughout all his kingdom** and also put it in writing:

<sup>23</sup> Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may **the LORD** his God be with him. Let him go up. || (RSV)<sup>2</sup> [End]

**End of 2 Chronicles.** The next book is Ezra. Not how it is the same, word-for-word, up to my mark: ||

The only exception is that Ezra 1:3 does not have the expression "**the LORD**"

Just as there is a connection between Deuteronomy, the DH [Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings], and Jeremiah So there is some connection between Ezra, Nehemiah, and 1 & 2 Chronicles (The Chronicler's History).

Some scholars use "The Chronicler's History" to refer to **all four** of these books.

Note also that the biblical author has no problem with the idea of **the LORD inspiring non-Israelites**

#### Ezra 1:1-4

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, **the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus** king of Persia so that he made a proclamation **throughout all his kingdom** and also put it in writing:

<sup>2</sup> Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. <sup>3</sup> Whoever is among you of all his people, may [ ] his God be with him, and let him go up || to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel -- **he is the God who is in Jerusalem**; <sup>4</sup> and let each survivor, in whatever place he sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts, besides freewill offerings for the house of God which is in Jerusalem.

### Not a Monotheist

Reading this, on first glance one could imagine that Cyrus was a monotheist, or at least a worshipper of the LORD However, note the phrase "he is the God who is in Jerusalem." For Cyrus the LORD is one of many gods. It is "good policy" to keep the local gods happy -- and "good politics!"

**Ezra 6:1-5.** . . . Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in Babylonia, in the house of the archives where the documents were stored. <sup>2</sup> And in Ecbatana, the capital which is in the province of Media, a scroll was found on which this was written: "A record. <sup>3</sup> In the first year of Cyrus the king, Cyrus the king issued a decree: Concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, let the house be rebuilt, the place where sacrifices are offered and burnt offerings are brought; its height shall be sixty cubits and its breadth sixty cubits, <sup>4</sup> with three courses of great stones and one course of timber; let the cost be paid from the royal treasury. <sup>5</sup> And also let the gold and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple that is in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, be restored and brought back to the temple which is in Jerusalem, each to its place; you shall put them in the house of God."

Notice that this is a very different text from Chronicles 36 || Ezra 1

### Isa 44:24-28. An Oracle of Second Isaiah (the anonymous prophet of the Exile)

Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer,

"Who" clauses modify "your Redeemer"

**who** formed you from the womb: "I am the LORD, who made all things, who stretched out the heavens alone, who spread out the earth -- Who was with me? --

<sup>25</sup> **who** frustrates the omens of liars, and makes fools of diviners;

**who** turns wise men back, and makes their knowledge foolish;

<sup>26</sup> **who** confirms the word of his servant, and performs the counsel of his messengers;

<sup>1</sup> Lectures are numbered consecutively. Although this is this week's first lecture, its number reflects its place in the **total** sequence.

<sup>2</sup> All scripture quotations are from the RSV, accessed via BibleWorks, unless otherwise specified.

who says of Jerusalem, 'She shall be inhabited,' and of the cities of Judah, 'They shall be built, and I will raise up their ruins';

<sup>27</sup> who says to the deep, 'Be dry, I will dry up your rivers';

<sup>28</sup> who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfil all my purpose'; saying of Jerusalem, 'She shall be built, and of the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid.'" [End of chapter 44]

The brief reference to Cyrus at the end of this "who -litany" refers to his decree allowing captive peoples to return.

### Isa 45:1-7

Intro

Thus says the LORD to his anointed (*māshiah* [Heb.] / *christos* [Grk.]), to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and ungird the loins of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed:

#### Non-Davidic Messiah!

Note the astonishing statement -- the messiah is not a descendant of David!

Josephus (1st century A.D.) possibly held a similar view -- or was this just political expedience?

Sometimes Christians are more doctrinal than Jews about the Messiah being the Son of David.

#### Three "I-will" statements

<sup>2</sup> I will go before you and level the mountains,

I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut asunder the bars of iron,

<sup>3</sup> I will give you the treasures of darkness and the hoards in secret places, that you may know that it is I, the LORD, the God of Israel, who call you by your name.

<sup>4</sup> For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen,

Many Jewish scholars cite this passage in arguing that the "Suffering Servant" of 2nd Isaiah is the People of Israel.

#### Present Tense

I call you by your name, I surname you, though you do not know me.

Second Isaiah is aware that Cyrus is not a worshipper of YHWH.

#### First Monotheist

##### I am the LORD

<sup>5</sup> I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God;

I gird you, though you do not know me,

<sup>6</sup> that men may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me;

I am the LORD, and there is no other.

<sup>7</sup> I form light and create darkness,

I make weal and create woe,

I am the LORD, who do all these things.

This magnificent poetry of YHWH as creator of all probably inspired the P author's account in Genesis 1.

Genesis 1 is the Jewish response to the claim that Marduk was the creator of the whole world.

Before this, the only "creation story" the Jews had was of their God making a little garden & creating people.

This is the creation story of Genesis 2.

The exilic encounter with a "great power" forced Israel's theology to develop.

## Week 20, Lecture 59. The Cyrus Cylinder.

### What is the Cyrus Cylinder?

an ancient clay cylinder, now broken into several fragments, on which is written a declaration in Akkadian . . . in the name of . . . Cyrus the Great. It dates from the 6th century BCE and was discovered in the ruins of Babylon in Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) in 1879. It is currently in the possession of the British Museum, which sponsored the expedition that discovered the cylinder. It was created and used as a foundation deposit following the Persian

conquest of Babylon in 539 BC, when the Neo-Babylonian Empire was invaded by Cyrus and incorporated into his Persian Empire.<sup>3</sup>

Foundation Deposit: archaeological remains of materials ritually buried under the foundations of buildings.<sup>4</sup>

### An Archaeological Ruin

Not a copy of a copy of a copy.

Not found in some scroll, where the editor might have altered it.

This is the original "real deal."

### Excerpt 1<sup>5</sup>

ANET = *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, edited by James B. Pritchard, Princeton University Press, 1969.

**Marduk** . . . on account of the fact that the sanctuaries of all their settlements were in ruins and the inhabitants of Sumer and Akkad had become like (living) dead, turned back, his anger (abated) and he had mercy. He scanned and look through all the countries, searching for a righteous ruler willing to lead (Marduk) in the annual procession. Then he pronounced the name of Cyrus, king of Anshan; declared him to be the ruler of all the world . . .

Note: the inscription ascribes this to Marduk, the Babylonian god, not to the LORD, God of Israel.

Recall the words of Second Isaiah: ". . . **though you do not know me . . .**"

### Excerpt 2

When I (Cyrus) entered Babylon as a friend and when I established the seat of government in the palace of the ruler under jubilation and rejoicing, **Marduk** the great lord (induced) the magnanimous inhabitants of Babylon (to love me), and I was daily endeavoring to worship him . . .

The previous king, Nabonidus, had left Babylon some time previously for a place "in the provinces."

The rites of Marduk, which required the presence of the king, had been neglected for some time.

### Excerpt 3

I returned to these sacred cities on the other side of the Tigris, the sanctuaries of which have been in ruins for a long time, the images (of the gods) which live therein, and established for them permanent sanctuaries. I (also) gathered all their (former) inhabitants and returned (to them) their habitations. Furthermore, I resettled upon the command of **Marduk**, the great lord, all the gods of Sumer and Akkad whom Nabonidus has brought to Babylon . . . (ANET 315-316)

### Salvation History

What would our newspapers sound like if reporters wrote in "Salvation History" style?

**The Berlin Wall?** The ancients were unabashed about ascribing causality to the gods / the God of Israel.

**Important Post-Lecture Note.** Their experience of life was not fundamentally different from our experience, but the spoke often about their experience in ways different from our habitual customs. For us, "salvation history" is something that we hear only "in Church;" we do not read it in newspapers, or hear it on the evening news. If we forget this, we will imagine that God "spoke" more -- or more clearly -- in ancient times than God "speaks" today.

### Our Recent Election?

### Final Comments

Of course, not everyone agrees with the editorial interpretation of the writer

In the modern world

Or in the ancient world!

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<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyrus\\_Cylinder](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyrus_Cylinder)

<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foundation\\_deposit](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foundation_deposit)

<sup>5</sup> These excerpts are found in Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament*, second edition page 365; first edition, page 416.