

## Cyrus and Christ

*Jer. 50:5-8 "They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the LORD in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten. My people hath been lost sheep: their shepherds have caused them to go astray, they have turned them away on the mountains: they have gone from mountain to hill, they have forgotten their restingplace. All that found them have devoured them: and their adversaries said, We offend not, because they have sinned against the LORD, the habitation of justice, even the LORD, the hope of their fathers. Remove out of the midst of Babylon, and go forth out of the land of the Chaldeans, and be as the he goats before the flocks."*

The Spirit of the Lord was transporting the mind of His prophet Jeremiah to a period of time beyond his day. Jeremiah was witnessing the rise of Babylon, that great power with roots way back in history, yet in his day to rise to a new pinnacle, a new position in which it was to dominate the nations around it. The ways of Babylon were foreign to the people of the covenant, or rather, they should have been if they had remained alert and faithful to that covenant. Sadly, in every other sense than name, they had forsaken the God Who had brought them forth. Now, having abandoned their Rock, they had in effect asked Him to release them from their covenant, and the Lord was about to allow them to learn the full implications of the course they had chosen.

Their long captivity was about to begin. It was a time of deep grief to the prophet of the Lord. The pathos of the scene was not lost to Jeremiah, and it saddened him to witness such resistance to those outstretched arms of the Lord's abiding faithfulness and love. It was an act of national suicide and self-destruction. Yet it would take more than the foolishness of human hearts to thwart the purpose of God, and the Lord granted Jeremiah a vision that was to lift his mind beyond the immediate darkness of that sad hour of Israel's history. At the time the prophet received the divine message Babylon was rising and Israel going down. He was given a glimpse of the time when this process would be reversed, when Israel would be rising as Babylon was going down.

Israel and Babylon are the two principle actors of the two chapters Jeremiah 50 & 51. A century before a similar message had been received by Isaiah, a message then even more remarkable in that Babylon was at Isaiah's time quite a different entity and no obvious threat to Israel. In Isaiah chapters 13 & 14, the Spirit prompts some of the most beautiful and elegant language to describe the same events. In speaking of the downfall of literal Babylon of old we know that the Lord was depicting something more far-reaching in time and consequence. In this way does the Lord sow light for the righteous one day to discover, like the handfuls of corn left in the fields of Boaz for Ruth to find. The clues are there in the text, for as the prophet speaks of the defeat of Babylon he finds himself describing the shaking of the whole earth. Isa. 13:11 & 13 *"And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible... Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger."* Verse 14 tells us that Babylon was to become like a hunted gazelle completely powerless before its enemy, like a sheep with no shepherd to defend it. "Behold", the Lord says in verse 17, *"I will stir up the Medes against them."* What a remarkable prophecy, for at the time of these words the Medes were themselves a subject people under the Assyrians.

Thus, with such detailed precision did the Lord depict the events that were to bring an end to the seventy years captivity of Israel in Babylon. Isaiah was even used to name the man, a man not then born, who was yet to rise as the king of the Medes, the man who would be used to fulfil the Lord's pleasure. It was to be the coming of Cyrus that was to result in the downfall of Babylon and the rising up of Israel. Again in Isaiah 45, the prophet is prompted to speak of Cyrus as the Lord's "Anointed", His "Messiah", or in the Greek version of the Scriptures, His "Christ." Isa. 45:1-4 *"Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel. For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me."* To loosen the girdle means to make feeble, the girdle being drawn tight represents preparedness for action and is a symbol thus of strength and readiness. When this prophecy was shown to Cyrus in due time we may well wonder what his response would be. Here was the God of the Jews calling him His shepherd, and promising him victory over Babylon and deliverance of Israel, but the Lord was, of course, using Cyrus to demonstrate His Own great wisdom, foresight and power over the kings of the earth. The Lord was also using Cyrus as part of a sequence of events that would foreshadow in the language of type events of even greater import that would take place at a later stage of the divine programme.

The ending of the captivity and the coming forth from Babylon and return to their own land was a remarkable period in the history of Israel, yet not half so remarkable as the greater deliverance it prefigured, a deliverance in process now in this our day. Only the rubbled walls of Babylon remained in the days of the apostle John on Patmos, yet in vision he saw Babylon rise again, and as he watched, a further captivity took place with an ultimate wonderful reversal of both these events under the direction of another "Anointed" of Jehovah, the "Christ", of Whom Cyrus was but a figure. As Jeremiah saw the new rise of that ancient power of Babylon in more formidable array, so the John class of this age, the Church, have seen the rise of this same old system of religious and temporal power only in a new, more formidable form. Hyslop, in his "The Two Babylons" demonstrated just how apt the title of "Babylon" has been to describe the great church-state system of this age. Portending to be the kingdom of Christ, the great Papal system has made war against the saints and overcome them, just as did Nebuchadnezzar against the Jews of old.

When we use the term "papal", we all know at once to what we refer. The church system itself owns the name. It is intriguing to discover in a modern book, a dictionary of Archeology of the Bible, the remarkable link between this word and the Babylon of old. There it is pointed out that the most ancient traceable name for what the Jews later called Babel was that used by the ancient Euphratean people themselves. This was the name "Papel", or "Papal", which the Jews, it is claimed, misheard and mistook the name for "Babel." So the name "Papal" has been around for quite a long time, shared by and linking the ancient and the more modern power. Now neither the Babylon of Jeremiah's day nor the Babylon of this age rose overnight. They each rose in stages. Papacy's rise took place over centuries, from the first Christianised Pagan emperor, Constantine, to the later paganised Christian fathers or popes. There were outstanding dates, just as there were in the captivity

of Judah under Babylon of old, but the process occupied a period of time. This was also to be an important factor when the great reversal took place. The fall of Babylon of Ezra and Nehemiah's day and the return and restoration of Israel were both to occupy a period of time, Babylon's destruction and Israel's recovery, each process spread over many years. BOTH PROCESSES WERE SET IN MOTION BY THE COMING OF CYRUS!

Take Babylon first. The four years leading up to 536 BC and the proclamation of Cyrus then for the captives freedom to begin to return to their land, these years were critical in the fatal events leading to Babylon's inevitable slide towards destruction. First the subduing of the provinces of the empire of Babylon began. The outlying districts became influenced by the fame of Cyrus. At the same time they had become dissatisfied with their king Nabonidus because of his bringing of various foreign gods into Babylon. This led to open uprisings against Nabonidus and in favour of Cyrus for whom they had more respect. Then, in 538 BC Cyrus marched in, and Babylon was taken. In Daniel 5, we have record of the great feast of Belshazzar, eldest son of Nabonidus who shared his father's throne. Following his defeat at Accad, Belshazzar, who was commander in chief of the army, had retreated to Babylon, and fancied himself safe within its mighty walls, notwithstanding the recent disasters. Any lingering fear he now sought to drown in the wild revelry of a sacrificial feast to his gods. A thousand nobles sat down to the banquet headed by the king and a dazzling array of princes. The feast described by Daniel brings before us a scene of luxury and splendour only to be found in the greatest of Oriental courts. An extravagant display was made of pomp and grandeur, the table laid with gold and silver vessels plundered from half a world, the vessels of the Temple of Jehovah among them. Then, in the midst of all the revelry, many being in a drunken state of stupor from which they were never to rise in accordance with the word of the Lord to Jeremiah (51:39), then it was that strange and awing apparition suddenly hushed the revelry as there came forth fingers of a man's hand over against one of the many branched candlesticks or lamps which filled the hall with light, and the hand wrote on the smooth stucco surface of the wall. The message spelt Babylon's downfall. All present could see it was a bad omen, but only Daniel, the Lord's servant, was able to interpret and recognise the full significance of those solemn words. It was to mark the beginning of the end for Babylon, but understood at first only by "the wise." *"In that night was Belshazzar, the king of the Chaldeans, slain."* (Daniel 5:30).

Cyrus had entered the scene, taken that great city, and placed a prince of the Medes, Darius, as its king. Two years later, as the 70 years of the predicted captivity of Israel ran out, Cyrus himself took over as sole king, and gave forth the declaration that was to commence the long process of Israel's restoration. Babylon had been stripped of its temporal power. No longer could it appoint kings and princes throughout its once vast domain. Yet, notwithstanding this conquest, Babylon of old continued as a large and important part of the world of that day, a great city, a religious centre, and a seat of trade. It remained the capital city of the plain watered by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. For many years in Babylon life went on. Its temples were repaired, and it became evident that the final state of utter desolation predicted in such passages as Jeremiah 50:39, was yet to be realised. This destruction was fulfilled not immediately, but by degrees. Cyrus first took away Babylon's supremacy and temporal power at his coming. Twenty years later Babylon was revolting, and Darius Hystaspes squashed the rebellion and deprived it of fortifications, removing its great gates of brass and iron. Many years later Seleucus Nicandor removed its citizens and wealth to Seleucia which he founded in the neighbourhood. In the course of time the Parthians

removed all that was left to Ctesiphon. Eventually only its walls remained, and they in turn crumbled into decay until it required the excavations of archeologists to discover the site. Babylon, the great city, had become the domain of the wild creatures of the desert as predicted in God's Word, but what a long period of time was involved to completely fulfil that Word.

As with the type, so with the antitype. As Mystic Babylon came up in stages, a long drawn-out process of development, so she submits to the judgment that sits to take away her riches, her temporal power, eventually her religious influence already undermined by the civil powers that once supported her, and by defecting bishops and disputing priests, something once unheard of, until she is no more. Babylon of old had for years heard of Cyrus and his great power, but had failed to recognise the threat to her security. She remembered her great walls and huge gates capable of withstanding any invader. She had her history, a history of conquests and glories, a line of despotic kings. Babylon felt insolently secure in her heart.

So it was with the Babylon of John's vision. As God's representative on earth there was no thought in the mind of popes of coming destruction. She had her two great walls, ignorance, and superstition, and her illustrious past and heritage and the security of her many earthly treasures. Papacy had not been without her problems any more than Babylon of old in that period leading up to the advent of Cyrus. From about 556 BC Nabonidus had reigned. He entrusted the care of the army to his son Belshazzar. Meanwhile, after some skirmishes with various enemies, Nabonidus desperately tried to carry out some of the needed work of restoration in Babylon. His main task was to restore the Babylonian temples, temples of the moon, of the sun, and the temple of Anunitum, the "lady who walks before the gods." Eventually it seems some progress was achieved and sacrifices were again being offered to Babylon's old gods. Nabonidus arranged that all the images of the gods were taken in grand procession around Babylon, and there is in existence a kind of newspaper clipping in the form of a clay tablet depicting the event. After describing this parade the tablet states, "In the month Tammuz (June,) Cyrus made battle... the men of Akkad made revolt... The soldiers took Sippara on the 14th day (June 14th) without fighting, and Nabonidus fled away. On the 16th day... the army of Cyrus came to Babylon without any opposition..." The army of Babylon of old would not go out to fight the army of Cyrus, just as the Lord foretold through Jeremiah. Jer. 51:30 *"The mighty men of Babylon have forborn to fight, they have remained in their holds: their might hath failed; they became as women: they have burned her dwellingplaces; her bars are broken."*

The correspondences with the Babylon of this age are of interest here. From the time of reformation one half of Christendom has been in revolt with the other half. Satan's house has been divided. Efforts were made to restore some of the esteem for the gods of Papacy, and for those things once counted sacred, such as Papal infallibility and divine authority of popes, together with that old system of worship of the woman god, "the lady who walks before the gods..." the virgin Mary, mother of God, these things were once more acclaimed. But the soldiers of Babylon, the civil powers so long made to jump at her command, were losing heart, their allegiance costing too much.

There is not space here to recount all the events leading up to the Papal fall. It is in the light of these happenings that we perceive the enormity of what has taken place in this earth concerning this doomed system. Let us just remind ourselves of the ultimate most striking scene when Pope Pius 9th, who had become Pope in 1846, turned from his first attempts at

liberal reform with which he might have regained some support of the masses, and pursued instead the tyrannical course of his predecessors. He re-opened the dungeons of the inquisition, and deliberately set himself to reorganise Europe on the model of the darkest days of the dark ages. On his own sole authority, without the concurrence even of a council, a thing that no pope had done before, he added a new dogma, "the immaculate conception", which all men were required on pain of death to receive. He reorganised a Roman Catholic hierarchy for Protestant England, canonised saints, and gathered around him in Rome imposing bodies of dignitaries and bishops from every part of the world. He enforced in Rome a law prohibiting Protestant worship, except at the embassies. He persecuted those who dared to read the scriptures in their homes. He gathered his great Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, and so managed it that the assembled archbishops, princes, cardinals, patriarchs, bishops, abbots, generals of orders, etc, had no liberty even to discuss the great question brought before them but were fraudulently forced to pronounce in favour of the dogma of papal infallibility. This new canon was decreed July 1870. All the old gods of Babylon were thus taken and paraded before the people. Yet on that same day, 18th July 1870, "on which the pope read ... the decree which marked the climax of papal pretension, the announcement of his own infallibility," a great storm shook the place, and Napoleon III dispatched his challenge to Germany. The writing was on the wall!

The domino effect of Napoleon's act was within weeks to result in the fall of Rome and the final irreversible loss of the Papacy's temporal power. We had a "newspaper clipping" in the shape of a tablet of clay recording the similar events in the days of Nabonidus. Today we have a witness, a Roman Catholic at that, in Cardinal Manning. He records, "There is one point in which the present crisis of the Holy See and of the Christian Church differs from all that has gone before it. Always in ages past, when one or more of the European powers were in conflict with the Holy See, one or more of the other powers were friendly and gave it protection. Now not one stands in its defence; they have all with one accord hid their faces from the Vicar of Our Lord; they are all consenting to the deed. The princes and rulers of Christendom have forsaken their Master, and their silence in the hour of danger is flight. Never until now have all the nations of Europe consented in the deed of the nations who have usurped Rome. Never till now has the public law of Europe been changed to sanction the usurpation. For the first time the Head of Christendom is excluded from the senate of Christian sovereigns, though the temporal sovereignty of the supreme pontiff is of divine institution!" The mighty men of Babylon, the civil powers that once supported her, have forborne to fight. They have remained in their holds. (Jer. 51:30.)

In Jer. 51:31, we read, "*One post shall run to meet another, and one messenger to meet another, to shew the king of Babylon that his city is taken at one end.*" So immense was the great city of Babylon that it took days to walk right through. When Cyrus diverted the waters to march in under the great gates at one end of the city there were parts of the city that did not get to hear for up to three days. They knew the city was besieged, but had such confidence in the enormous walls they would laugh off the thought of genuine threat. Those two walls are reported to have been nearly as high as St Paul's cathedral, and not eight but eighty-seven feet thick, and surrounded by a great ditch filled with water. One might understand their complacency! It was in this false sense of confidence that Belshazzar's feast took place. The city had been taken, they knew not the hour of their visitation, but cavorted in drunken stupor until they fell exhausted in sleep which was to become the sleep of death. Jer. 51:57, "*And I will make drunk her princes, and her wise men, her captains, and her rulers, and her*

*mighty men: and they shall sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake, saith the King, whose name is the LORD of hosts.*" After that great event Papacy would never regain temporal power. Let us turn to the other great event of our day depicted by Jeremiah and Isaiah as SUBSEQUENT TO THE COMING OF CYRUS type of Christ—the long process of Israel's restoration.

When Cyrus gave the signal one might have expected a rush of captives to get back to their land and to freedom. Such was not the case. Why was that? What had happened? At the outset of their captivity it is reported that the iron of slavery had entered deeply into the souls of the Israelites. Contempt and hatred seem to have been lavished upon the race, culminating not infrequently in the dungeon, even in death. They are spoken of, as previously warned in the Word of God, as a people robbed and spoiled, snared in pits, hidden away in prisons. Pitiless cruelty, unrestrained by law, crushed their spirits, till despair settled widely on the various communities. Psa. 137:1 *"By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion."* Gradually, however, matters improved. After a while many were allowed to even live in the capital itself where a happier lot was afforded. Bitterness gradually subsided, and the Israelites began to fall into their place as a recognised portion of the general community. The language of Babylon, moreover, was so closely related to Hebrew, its use being so easy, that it ultimately supplanted Hebrew. Once again the long unused dialect of Abraham, once of Ur of the Chaldees, became adopted by his seed, but not, alas, his faith!

Oh yes! some clung to the faith of Israel. Some realised the cause of their captivity, and sought a life of closer conformity to the requirements of their God, but by no means all. It was these more zealous ones with vision in their hearts that were first to gather together and muster that first company that were to ask the way to Zion. Jer. 50:5 *"They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the LORD in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten."* Out of the whole nation little more than forty thousand formed that band, one tenth of these being priests. Yet out of 24 courses of priests only four courses were here represented, and the defection of twenty courses from the faith of their fathers is here testified. The Levites response was even worse. By far outnumbering priests as a people, yet now only 74 Levites cared to leave Babylon.

Even so in our day the return and restoration of Israel began in a similar small way. More were to leave to join them in dribs and drabs from time to time as things got a little easier in the desolate land across the desert, but it was in troublous times and with many setbacks that the temple, and later, the city of Jerusalem was rebuilt. Some of those who remained in Babylon, including the richer Jews, though contented with their position, and faint-hearted when it came to the thought of forsaking their gains to face the desert and what lay beyond, nevertheless felt rather proud of the braver spirits who, having little to lose, more readily joined that movement. These liberally contributed whatever might be useful on the way or in the land. We do not need to detail further that typical return to illustrate how forceful and various are the points of comparison with what is taking place before our eyes in this our day. The work then took many years just as the return and restoration of Israel today. It was not to be the work of a moment. Lives were to be spent, many tears shed, before even the first-fruits of their endeavours were to be realised, and this applies to both events. There were moments in Israel's first return when it seemed their position was almost untenable, their hope for progress doomed. So again has it been in this our day. A long trail of events has led to the present stage of Israel's restoration. From the first revival of Jewish hope, the

work of Zionists, the first little bands that set out to settle in the cherished land, through events of two world wars, the shaking of nations and international tension that was to mark the end of the Gentile Times, there have been conflicts without and conflicts within. Yet again Israel returns, and again in troublous times.

We live in the time depicted by the Lord through His prophets of old and portrayed in the history of His people, the time when Babylon is ON THE WAY DOWN, and Israel, the people scattered and peeled, is ON THE WAY UP. So it is written, and so inevitably will it be, and we are witnesses of these things. As in the type, Babylon still exists, a great religious power, but stripped of her old temporal sovereignty. Her decline and doom is sealed. Her daughter systems too show the signs of a grievous sore of spiritual lifelessness. Jer. 51:55-56 *“Because the LORD hath spoiled Babylon, and destroyed out of her the great voice; when her waves do roar like great waters, a noise of their voice is uttered: Because the spoiler is come upon her, even upon Babylon, and her mighty men are taken, every one of their bows is broken: for the LORD God of recompenses shall surely requite.”* These two long processes, the downfall of Babylon and the uprising of Israel both trace back to one event that precipitated and caused and began each process. This was the coming of Cyrus, the Lord’s “Anointed.” We cannot help but see the counterpart today in the coming of the Christ of God. What more can He say than to us He hath said!

There is, of course, a spiritual aspect that runs alongside both of these events. Spiritual Israel too are much involved. To them the cry has gone forth, *“Come out of her My people that ye partake not of her plagues.”* (Rev. 18:4) We are in fellowship today because over a century ago scores of telegraph boys were deployed outside the churches of Christendom with the message “Food for thinking Christians.” Some believe today that the message was untimely and inappropriate. We believe it was exactly on time and truly pertinent to the hour, and this the great signs both in Babylon and in Israel confirm.

During this harvest period two gatherings are in process. One a visible gathering of the natural seed back to their land. The other is an invisible gathering to the Lord of His saints which cannot be seen. The fact of the one which can be seen is indication of the other beyond our natural senses. The restoration and gathering of Israel is taking place before our eyes and requires no stretch of imagination to perceive. Likewise the going down of Babylon. Anyone who has knowledge of the power of that great system prior to 1870 cannot but realise the dramatic changes already evident in her undoubted decline. The two take place alongside. According to the Word of God both are precipitated by the same event, the coming of Cyrus. They confirm to us that a greater than Cyrus is here, the One Cyrus was used to prefigure... The Shepherd and Christ of God.

The drawn-out time periods involved in the out-working of the divine programme have proved a test of faith to many of the Lord’s people. Nevertheless, that such long periods would be involved is testified in type just as it is today confirmed by undeniable history. Prior to 1914 Bible students were still expecting a fairly rapid winding-up of the pilgrimage of the last of the church on earth. From the time of Peter brethren have been “hasting the day.” With the test of time some views of the Truth movement became reviewed, and gradually views of others outside the Truth movement became adopted with regard to the matter of the Lord’s return. Today we have learned to share a charitable view and attitude towards those, our brethren in Christ, who no longer share our own views of truth. It seems that, in the Lord’s wisdom, such a situation was needful for the final proving and rounding off of the Christian character as the last of the little flock finish their course.

That first step out of Babylon was by no means the end of the matter, the quest goes on. We too, like Israel, are asking our way to Zion, our faces turned thitherward. Israel still have much to learn about leaving the ways and attitudes of the Gentile way of life behind. The Lord will see to it that they receive those needful experiences, painful though some may be, that will clear their vision, and help them to define their highest and most satisfying goal. They must be the first to realise, after the church have gone, the divine blessing of truth. They must be seen to be the people the Lord has blessed. Israel will then be used in turn to bless all the families of earth under the higher direction of spiritual Zion, the saints in glory with the Lord. Both natural and spiritual Zion are sharing parallel experiences in this respect. For each the way is turning out to be not quite what was once expected, a long and somewhat difficult way, not without tests. Yet with each pitfall there is a lesson to be learned.

The same Lord is behind the work with each of these chosen peoples of God. The last days of the preparation both of the natural and the spiritual seed is to reveal something of the depths of divine wisdom and love. None of us are worthy for such things. Israel proved her unworthiness long ago. We never knew any sense of worthiness even from the start. Certainly the state of the Truth movement today does nothing to fill our hearts with pride or satisfaction. We think of the sadness of heart of Nehemiah many years after the coming of Cyrus, the Lord's Christ. How much real building work of the walls of Zion is taking place today? Sadly our history of the Truth movement these years, like that of Israel then, has been at times a history of factions and divisions, undermining of faith rather than building up. In spite of this He continues His work in us, and He perseveres with Israel too, a people also known for her factions and lack of unity. When at the end His work is finished in both peoples, when He presents to the Father and to the world this new government in heaven and in earth, His workmanship, then the work of grace in each will shine out. Out of Zion, Zion in heaven, Zion on earth, Zion the perfection of beauty, God will shine, and Zion will become the joy of the Father and the joy of the Lord Jesus, and the joy of the whole earth.



*Ezra 1:7,11 "Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the LORD... All the vessels of gold and of silver... were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem."*

