

**EPISODE 10: Persia and the Return**

**11/03/2022**

***12****Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the Lord, making the land an everlasting waste.*

Jeremiah 25:12

*Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and to loose the belts of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed…*

Isaiah 45:1

**PERSIA**

1. **Who were the Persians?** 
   1. Origins: The Medes and the Persian
   2. The Descendants of Japheth
      1. Indo-European stock perhaps from South Russia; and its language and early religion reveal its close kinship with those people who crossed Afghanistan to become the ruling caste of northern India.
      2. The ancient Persians spoke of a primitive homeland known as Airyana-vaejo—*Aryan*
      3. *Ariana*= *Iran*.
2. **Kings** 
   1. The rulers of the Empire were:
      1. **Cyrus (king of Anshan ca. 560 b.c., d. 530);**
      2. Cambyses (530-522);
      3. **Darius I (522-486);**
      4. **Xerxes I (486-465) (Ahaseurus of Esther);**
      5. **Artaxerxes I (465-424);**
      6. Xerxes II (424);
      7. Sogdianos (424-423);
      8. Darius II (423-405/4);
      9. Artaxerxes II (405/4-359/8);
      10. Artaxerxes III (359/58-338/37);
      11. Artaxerxes IV (338/37-336);
      12. and Darius III (336-330).
   2. **Cyrus (**ca. 560 B.C., d. 530)
      1. “The Bible remembers him as an enlightened monarch. His unparalleled, swift and brilliant rise to power was marred by no deed of violence. His able and humane policy made him one of the most attractive figures in the ancient orient.
      2. Founder of the Achaemenid dynasty (ruled Babylonia 539-530 b.c.).
      3. Cyrus’s military victories eventually put him in possession of the largest empire the world at that time had yet seen. They began with the conquest of Media (549), followed by Lydia (546) and Babylonia (539). It would seem that the Babylonian provinces of Eber nāri (today’s Syria, Lebanon, and Israel) fell to him after the conquest of Babylonia, although no specific mention of them is extant in contemporary records.
      4. Cyrus’s policy toward the peoples of his empire was one of tolerance and understanding. His authorization of the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple by returning Judeans (end of 2 Chronicles; beginning of Ezra) accords well with what we know from contemporaneous documents.
      5. Cyrus was followed by his son Cambyses II (530-522 B.C.). With the conquest of Egypt Persia became under him the greatest empire that the world had ever seen: it stretched from India to the Nile.
   3. **Darius**
      1. Becameone of the wisest administrators in history, and set himself to reestablish his realm in a way that became a model of imperial organization till the fall of Rome.
      2. “At its greatest extent, under Darius, the Persian Empire included twenty provinces or “satrapies,” embracing Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Phoenicia, Lydia, Phrygia, Ionia, Cappadocia, Cilicia, Armenia, Assyria, the Caucasus, Babylonia, Media, Persia, the modern Afghanistan and Baluchistan, India west of the Indus, Sogdiana, Bactria, and the regions of the Massagetæ and other central Asiatic tribes.
3. **Life in Persia**
4. **The Religion of Persia**
   1. Originally polytheistic pagan until the advent of the Prophet Zoroaster (Zarathustra) c.600 BC.
   2. Principle Deities
      1. *Ahura-Mazda.* Belief in divine beings, *Ahuras,* was probably part of the older Aryan religion. Zoroaster appears in a new personal relationship to Ahura-Mazda, whom Zoroaster may have seen as the personification of all of the other divine qualities.[[1]](#footnote-1)
      2. *Angro-Mainyus* or *Ahriman*, Prince of Darkness and ruler of the nether world.
   3. Zoroastrianism
      1. According to Zoroaster, the history of the world was divided into three ages of three thousand years each. The first was the golden age of Ahura-Mazda. The second was a period of warfare with evil that ended with the coming of Zoroaster. The prophet brought a new force enabling humans to participate in separating truth from falsehood. The final period would extend until the renovation of the world.
      2. “By picturing the world as the scene of a struggle between good and evil, the Zoroastrians established in the popular imagination a powerful supernatural stimulus and sanction for morals. The soul of man, like the universe, was represented as a battleground of beneficent and maleficent spirits; every man was a warrior, whether he liked it or not, in the army of either the Lord or the Devil; every act or omission advanced the cause of Ahura-Mazda or of Ahriman.” (William Durant)
      3. Some elements of this belief appear to have influenced the development of angelology, dualism, belief in an evil power, Satan, and a periodized story of the world that we find in the Judaism of the Greco-Roman period, especially in apocryphal writings such as Daniel.[[2]](#footnote-2)
   4. The Magi
      1. “Wise Men.”
      2. A high reputation for wisdom.
      3. Origin of the word Magic.
   5. Zoroastrian elements in Persian religion faded away; they were revived for a time under the Sassanid Dynasty (226-651 A.D.), but were finally eliminated by the Moslem and Tatar invasions of Persia.

* 1. Zoroastrianism survives today only among small communities in the province of Fars, and among the ninety thousand Parsees of India.

1. **Persia and the People of God**

*Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.* ***2****Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.*

-Isaiah 40:1-2

***22****Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, 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:* ***23****“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.’”*

*2 Ch 36:22–23*

***4****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 that is in Jerusalem.”*

*Ezra 1:4*

* 1. Cyrus conquered the Babylonians. He allowed the people to return. Ezra, Nehemiah tell of Judah’s return—first of the rebuilding of the Temple and then (in Nehemiah) the rebuilding of the wall and the city, beginning in 538 B.C.
  2. Cyrus is hailed as the chosen deliverer of the Jews from Babylon (Isa. 44:28, ‘my shepherd’; 45:1, ‘my anointed’) and as stirred up by God to rebuild the Jerusalem Temple (2 Chron. 36:22–23; Ezra 1:1–2; 3:7; 4:3).
  3. The reign of Darius I provides the dating framework for the books of Haggai and Zechariah. Artaxerxes is mentioned in Ezra 6:14; 7:1; and 9:9 and in Neh. 2:1; 5:14; and 13:6. The story of Esther is set in the reign of Ahasuerus (Xerxes, 1:1–2). A later Darius (II or III) is named in Neh. 12:22.

1. **Conclusion: From Malachi to Matthew—The Second Temple Period**
   1. The Hellenistic Period (331–164 B.C.).
      1. Alexander the Great of Macedonia (ruled 334–323).
      2. Egyptian Ptolemaic Empire (320 to 198 B.C.).
      3. Syrian/Seleucid Empire (198 to 164 B.C.)..
   2. The Hasmonean (Maccabean) Period (164–63 B.C.).
   3. Roman Period (63-B.C—4th Century A.D.).

1. Achtemeier, P. J., Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature. (1985). In [*Harper’s Bible dictionary*](https://ref.ly/logosres/hbd?ref=Page.p+1167&off=5119&ctx=het+whose+followers+~worshiped+the+deity+) (1st ed., pp. 1167–1168). San Francisco: Harper & Row. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Achtemeier, P. J., Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature. (1985). In [*Harper’s Bible dictionary*](https://ref.ly/logosres/hbd?ref=Page.p+1168&off=420&ctx=ould+acquire+later.%0a~According+to+Zoroast) (1st ed., p. 1168). San Francisco: Harper & Row. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)