

THE HERALD OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM

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Returning from Babylon

The Rise and Fall of Babylon • Zechariah's Visions
Haggai and the Second Temple • The First Return from Exile
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In the Beginning

The Return from Babylon

“Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees’ excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.” - Isaiah 13:19

Nebuchadnezzar had not only built Babylon, with the beauty of its spectacular hanging gardens, into the showplace of the middle east, but had expanded its territory from the borders of India to the edge of Egypt. This Babylonian empire dominated greater Mesopotamia for 70 years.

Then a growing insurgency of the Medes and Persians, under the leadership of Cyrus and Darius, attacked the heart of this great kingdom and, diverting the waters of the mighty Euphrates and entering under the walls through the dry riverbed, overthrew the city and the empire in a single night.

Among the captives held by Babylon were thousands of Israelites captured by invading armies over a half-century earlier. Cyrus, the head of the new ruling powers, issued an edict permitting the return of these exiles to their ancient homeland of Israel. It is this return that forms the theme for this issue of the Herald.

The opening article, *The Rise and Fall of Babylon*, sets the stage by describing the geo-political situation of the sixth centuries. Two Jewish prophets predicted and encouraged the people of Israel to return, restore their ancient temple and rebuild the cities. The messages of these two prophets, Zechariah and Haggai, are treated in the next two articles.

In *The First Return from Exile*, a reprint from our journal of some 82 years ago, the author discusses the initial reaction to the edict of Cyrus and the consequent beginning of the return to the Jewish homeland.

Returning, their first work was the rebuild their temple, a modest structure compared to the glorious temple of Solomon destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar’s army. This rebuilding work, depicted in the third chapter of Ezra, is the subject of a verse-by-verse study in the treatise entitled *Rebuilding the Temple*.

The key actors in the reconstruction project of the city of Jerusalem were Ezra in the priestly function and Nehemiah fulfilling the administrative role. Their backgrounds and activities are the subject of *People With a Purpose*.

The final article, *Fleeing Mystic Babylon*, suggests a parallel between these events of the sixth century before Christ and a similar flight from a religious oppression by true Christians at the return of the Messiah, a parallel drawn largely from the writings of Jeremiah and the book of Revelation.

It is our desire, in preparing this issue, to not only review an interesting segment of past history, but to be encouraged by its New Testament application to flee mystic Babylon as “the he-goats before the flock” (Jeremiah 50:8).

The Rise and Fall of Babylon

Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it.--Isaiah 46:11

David Rice

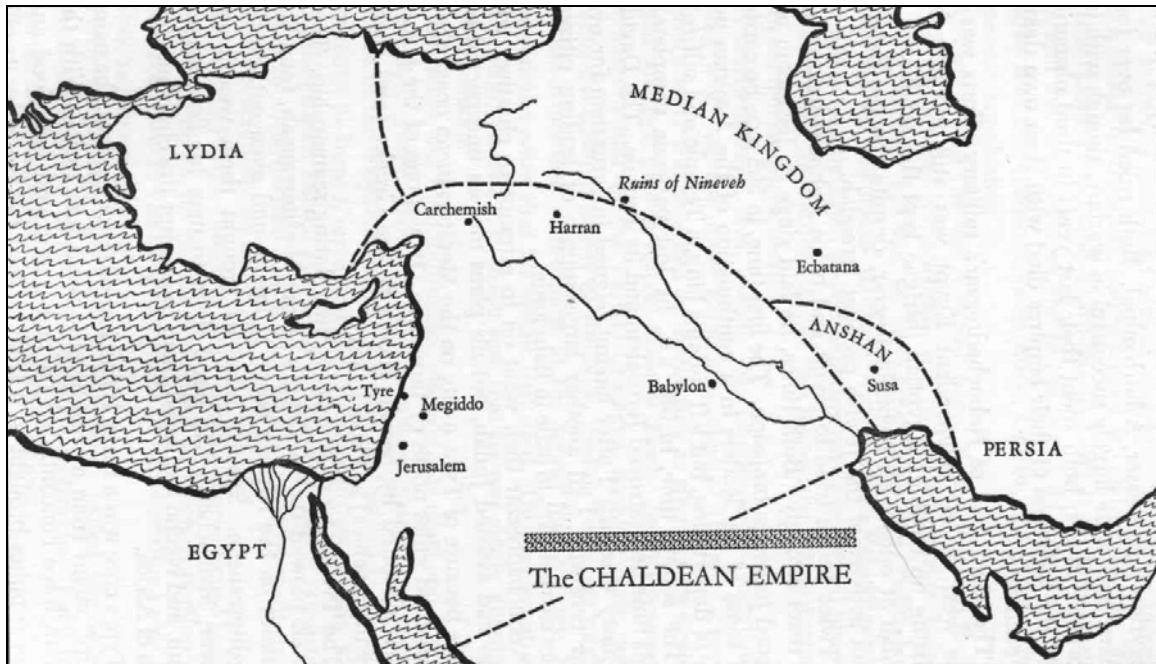
Early in the sixth century B.C. Babylon was the instrument of God's punishment on wayward Judah. But from the beginning God had decreed a limit to its power. It would extend for only seven decades, then fall to the Persians, who would release the Israelites and permit their return to Judea.

Babylon was not the first extensive empire of the Middle East. Assyria preceded it, used by Jehovah to break the power of the northern ten-tribe kingdom of Israel 136 years earlier. The flood of Assyrian armies even flowed southward and engulfed Judah, as Isaiah predicted: "He shall overflow ... he shall reach even to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings [armies] shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel" (Isaiah 8:8). It did indeed rise to the "neck" of Judea; Sennacherib laid siege to Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah. But because of Hezekiah's prayer of faith, God decimated Sennacherib's army, apparently by plague, and Judah retained their independence. Thus Assyria was not among the four "world empires" which conquered Judah and which were represented in the book of Daniel.

Four Empires

The first of those four empires was Babylon. Babylon broke away from Assyria under the leadership of Nabopolassar, the first king of "Neo-Babylonia," who ruled twenty-one years before the government passed at his death to his more famous son Nebuchadnezzar.

The armies of Nabopolassar, and their allies the Medes, jointly sacked the Assyrian capital Nineveh in 612 B.C. Two years later the Babylonian army took Harran, where the retreating Assyrian forces gathered for a last sanctuary. The following year Egypt came northward to shore up the remnants of the Assyrian field army, meeting and killing good king Josiah on the way (2 Kings 23:29, NIV). The Assyrians were initially successful, but were unable to retake the city that was relieved by reinforcements from Babylon.



Four years later, the year Nabopolassar weakened and died in Babylon, crown prince Nebuchadnezzar marched the Babylonian army to Carchemish on the west bank of the Euphrates, north of Israel. Pharaoh Necho of Egypt came northward again to confront the Babylonians, but it proved disastrous for him. Nebuchadnezzar chased him southward to the border of Egypt, taking all the intervening area, including Jerusalem (Jeremiah 46:2; Daniel 1:1; 2 Kings 24:7).

Nebuchadnezzar's reign of forty-three years was followed by his son Evil-Merodach (2 Kings 25:27). After two years he was overturned by a former commander, Neriglissar (the Nergalsharezer of Jeremiah 39:3). He was succeeded briefly by his son Labashi-Marduk, whose ineptness led to his replacement by the statesman Nabonidus. Evidently he was married to a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar, making his son Belshazzar a grandson of Nebuchadnezzar. Nabonidus remained in power until the fall of Babylon, but tiring of the routine of government, he committed the kingship to his son and co-regent Belshazzar in year three of his seventeen-year reign. Nabonidus himself was absent from Babylon for prolonged periods of time. Thus Belshazzar was on the throne in Babylon the fateful night in October 539 B.C. when the armies of Cyrus took the city while the nobles were in festival behind their massive walls.

The mother of Nabonidus was a devotee of the moon god Sin, and evidently it was a festival in honor of this god that the Babylonians were observing the night of their demise. This was on the sixteenth of Tashritu by the Babylonian calendar: "On the sixteenth day (of Tasritu), Ugbaru, governor of Gutium, and the army of Cyrus entered Babylon without a battle ... on the third day of the month, Arahshamnu, Cyrus entered Babylon ... there was peace in the city when Cyrus spoke greetings to all of Babylon. He (Cyrus) appointed Gubaru governor of all the governors in Babylon."—Babylonian

Chronicle, from *The Reign of Nabonidus*, Paul-Alain Beaulieu, pp. 224-225. Mention of the festival is on page 226.

Thus were Jeremiah's words fulfilled: "And all nations shall serve him [Neuchadnezzar], and his son [Evil-Merodach], and his son's son [his son-in-law Nabonidus' son, Belshazzar], until the very time of his land come: and then many nations and great kings shall serve themselves of him" (Jeremiah 27:7).

Cyrus the Great

The "many nations and great kings," heir to the spoils at the fall of Babylon, were those allied with Cyrus the Great, ruler of Persia. According to Herodotus, Cyrus had a Persian father (Cambyses) and a Median mother (Mandane), who was the daughter of Astyages, King of the Medes. Cyrus became king of Persia about 559 B.C. and defeated his grandfather Astyages about 550 B.C., assisted by troops from the Medes who rebelled against Astyages. Cyrus, known for his generous conduct, treated his defeated foe generously. "As for Astyages, Cyrus did him no further harm, and kept him in his own house till Astyages died" (Herodotus 1,130).

Daniel 7:5 represents the Persian Empire as a bear, a large, ponderous animal which overcomes its enemies with bulky strength, as the Persian armies ponderously overwhelmed their enemies. In the mouth of this bear were three ribs, thought to represent three powers overwhelmed by Persia on its rise to power--Lydia, Babylon, and Egypt. Lydia was governed by Croesus, defeated in 546 B.C., seven years before Cyrus took Babylon proper. King Croesus was noted for his wealth, which would have fallen to Cyrus and helped prepare his later conquests.

In 540 B.C. Cyrus massed his forces and moved toward Babylon. After some losses in the field, the Babylonians regrouped behind their defensive walls. But by diverting the Euphrates which ran through the city, Cyrus was able to march soldiers up the riverbed into Babylon on the famous festival evening. Thus he took Babylon by surprise, even though Belshazzar within was well aware of the besieging hosts without. This stratagem is the basis of Revelation 16:12, which represents Christ taking Mystic Babylon by drying up their support, represented by the Euphrates River. This may represent a drying up of the financial resources of Christendom in plague six, preparatory to their fall in plague seven. Babylon was the second "rib" to fall, and Egypt would be the third, but that conquest would await the reign of the son of Cyrus, who like his father was named Cambyses.

Cyrus was the "ravenous bird from the east" of Isaiah 46:11 whom God employed to terminate the kingdom of Babylon. Isaiah speaks of him as Jehovah's "anointed ... Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations ... and make the crooked places straight" (Isaiah 45:1,2). It is easy to see in these expressions how aptly Cyrus was a type of Christ. In his kingdom also, "the crooked places" will be made straight.

Darius the Mede

The book of Daniel speaks of Cyrus by name, but it names "Darius the Mede" as the leader who took the city and put Belshazzar to the sword. Who is he? This question has long engaged the minds of Christian believers and been a charge against the sacred text by unbelievers since it is apparent that Cyrus, not another royal predecessor, took Babylon and rode triumphantly into Babylon.

One reasonable suggestion is that Darius was a governor appointed by Cyrus. This position is nicely represented in the book *Darius the Mede, A Study in Historical Identification*, by John Whitcomb, 1963. However, a more attractive option may be that Darius and Mede and Cyrus the Persian were the same person, as maintained by Donald Wiseman, formerly of the British Museum before his retirement. This view notes that Cyrus' parentage showed him to be Median through his mother, and Persian through his father.

This view observes that the words, "Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus" (Daniel 6:28)--which at first seems to distinguish two persons--follows the same construction as 1 Chronicles 5:26, speaking of Pul and Tiglath-Pileser, who are known today to be two names for the same person. Modern translations of the latter text say, "Pul, king of Assyria, even ... Tilgath-pileser [a less familiar spelling of the famous king's name]," equating the two (NASB). The Hebrew *waw* can be translated either "and" or "even" according to context. The character of Darius as expressed in the narrative of Daniel chapter six (Daniel and the lion's den) certainly accords with the just character generally attributed to Cyrus.

Cyrus is a type of Christ. If Darius is the same person, then he is a type of Christ. It is of interest that his age at the fall of Babylon is recorded--an unusual record for Scriptures to register about a foreign king. The fall of Babylon occurred the same night as Daniel was interpreting the cryptic handwriting on the wall--"Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin"--numbered, numbered, weighed, divided. This referred to the judgment of Babylon. Being found morally wanting, the kingdom was divided to the Medes and Persians when it fell to Cyrus.

Commentators have noted the similarity of the cryptic words to monetary values that were numbered and weighed, namely the mina and shekel. If this similarity is pursued, the message refers to mina, mina, shekel, division. A shekel was 20 gerahs, and a Babylonian mina was 50 shekels. Thus these would refer to 1,000 gerahs, 1,000 gerahs, 20 gerahs, 500 gerahs (a divided mina). The total is 2,520 gerahs, which is coincident with the 2,520 years of Gentile rule, of which the 70 years of Babylon was the first and representative part (those seven decades foreshadowing the entire seven prophetic times).

The 2,520 years of Gentile rule expired in 1914, prefigured by the fall of literal Babylon when Darius was 62.

Dates of Daniel's Visions

The book of Daniel contains twelve chapters. The first six contain six sequential narratives about prominent experiences of Daniel or his Hebrew friends. The last six chapters contain four sequential visions which Daniel himself had. Each of these visions is dated. Daniel 7, which shows four world empires as four beasts rising from the sea, was given in the first year of Belshazzar. Since Belshazzar was appointed co-regent in the third year of his father Nabonidus, the first year of Belshazzar was the same as the third year of Nabonidus, namely 553 B.C.

Daniel 8, which shows Persia, Greece and Rome as a Ram, Goat, and Horn respectively, was dated to the third year of Belshazzar, thus 551 B.C. Daniel 9, containing the seventy-week prophecy, was given in the first year of Darius. Daniel 10, which begins a three-chapter narrative covering world history from Daniel's day until the millennial kingdom of Christ, was given in the third year of Cyrus.

Thus, taking Darius to be Cyrus, we have visions in years 1 and 3 of Belshazzar, and years 1 and 3 of Cyrus--a curious repetition of dates. The first two, during the reign of Babylon who represented the Gentile kingdoms, are similar to each other in that they both picture the kingdoms of this world as various beasts. The last two, in the reign of Cyrus who represented Christ, are a natural couplet because they climax at the first and second advents of Christ respectively.

The first vision, in 553 B.C., falls at the end of the forty years of Ezekiel 4:6. The second, in 551 B.C., is thirteen years before the Israelites' release in the first year of Cyrus, the same span as between the fall of Jerusalem and Ezekiel's vision of its restoration (Ezekiel 40:1), and between Ezra and Nehemiah. The third vision, in 538 B.C., was in the year of Israel's freedom from Babylon. The fourth vision, in 536 B.C., follows a delay of twenty-one days, representing the twenty-one-year delay before the temple at Jerusalem was completed in 515 B.C. (Ezra 6:15). Thus all four visions fall on dates of some significance.

Freed from Babylon

The wonderful thing about the reign of Cyrus was his decree releasing the Jews from bondage: "Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:2-4).

This was a formal decree, which the king put "also in writing" (Ezra 1:1) and registered in the royal archives, where it was later appealed to, searched for, and located to settle a

dispute in the reign of the King Darius who followed Cyrus' son Cambyses. Evidently this is but a portion of Cyrus' edicts on the matter, as the later reference adds detailed specifics which are not mentioned above (Ezra 5:17 to 6:5).

Cyrus was evidently generous by nature, but in this spirit there were also political benefits for his government. The Babylonian kings had enriched themselves by spoil and conquest, and if subject peoples were not submissive, they were dislocated and scattered. Thus Babylon did to Judah as Assyria had done to Israel--displaced large populations to avoid sedition. Cyrus took a different tact. He became an emancipator and respected the various customs of worship, as later Persian rulers seem also to have done (Ezra 6:10). This afforded his subjects a reason to appreciate his administration, thus stabilizing his rule.

In Daniel 4 the restraints put upon Israel by Babylon were represented by bands of brass and iron around the stump of a tree. These metals are the strongest among those representing Gentile powers in the metallic image of Daniel 2. They are also used in Leviticus 26:19 to represent the strength of foreign kingdoms oppressing Israel.

When Isaiah says that for Cyrus God will "break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron" (Isaiah 45:2), this evidently refers to breaking the power of Babylon. This also breaks the power restraining Israel from sprouting. Thus Israel was free to return to their land and grow again as a people in their homeland.

In the larger picture, now that the seven prophetic "times" against Israel have expired, Christ has broken the restraints and Israel has blossomed again as a nation in their ancient homeland. Psalm 107:16 speaks of what God does for Israel, whom he formerly punished for their disobedience: "He hath broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder."

Isaiah Chapters 52 and 53

The first twelve verses of Isaiah 52 speak of Israel's deliverance from Babylon, capped with the exhortation of verses 11 and 12, "Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD. For ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight [as for example they did at the Exodus], for the LORD will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your reward."

Paul applied the passage in a higher sense to spiritual Israel in his day, citing a portion of Isaiah 52:7 in Romans 10:15. The brethren today apply this passage also to spiritual Israel fleeing mystic Babylon. These are both reasonable applications. The immediate and direct meaning, however, was to Israel fleeing literal Babylon.

After Israel's regathering and an unspecified hiatus, the next prophetic episode mentioned by Isaiah was the appearance of Messiah: "Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled," leading to Isaiah 53, the famous Messianic prophecy of

Christ who "hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted" (Isaiah 53:4).

Under his administration Israel will be gathered, nourished, blessed, redeemed, and spread the knowledge of their Messiah throughout the earth. "As many were amazed at him--so marred was his appearance from that of a man, and his form from that of the sons of men--so shall he startle many nations, on account of him kings shall shut their mouths; for what has not been told them shall they see, and what they have not heard shall they contemplate. Who could have believed what we have heard?" (Isaiah 52:14 to 53:1, Smith-Goodspeed).

Thus will all the kingdoms of earth appreciate the incredible news of Redemption, and the sweet gospel of our Redeemer

Zechariah's Visions of God's Plan

Then thou spakest in vision to thy holy one, and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people.--Psalm 89:19

Condensed from a discourse by Joseph Megacz

Did you ever see a stone with seven eyes? Zechariah did. Did you ever see a bushel basket with a cover made of lead and a woman inside? Zechariah saw all these things and more, and he saw them all in one night!

The visions he saw are highly symbolic and some of their details can have more than one reasonable interpretation. We will see an example of that in the first vision. Here is an overview of the eight visions and the primary lesson from each:

- The first vision: horses among myrtle trees, a picture of the kingdom on earth.
- The second: four horns and four carpenters, foretelling the Gentile times.
- The third: a man measuring Jerusalem, a portrayal of the restoration of Israel.
- The fourth: Joshua the high priest who represents those called to the high calling.
- The fifth: a candlestick and two olive trees, showing God's watchcare over the church.
- The sixth: a flying scroll, depicting God's law in letter and spirit.
- The seventh: a woman in an ephah, or basket, predicting the rise of the nominal church systems.
- The eighth (two visions in one): horses and chariots giving an overview of the entire plan of God, plus Joshua the high priest, but this time a picture of the glorified church helping mankind along the highway of holiness.

Vision One

The first vision of horses among myrtle trees is recorded in Zechariah 1:7-17, and it is a beautiful picture of the peaceful kingdom on earth: "I saw by night and behold a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that were in the bottom and behind him there were red horses, speckled and white."

Here God shows Zechariah the end from the beginning by giving him a glimpse of the ultimate goal of his entire Divine Plan of the Ages, the peaceable kingdom of righteousness. The main character in this vision, the man on the red horse, pictures our Lord Jesus. It is through his work of redeeming and restoring mankind that this kingdom will be established. Horses usually symbolize doctrines, and so the red color of this horse represents the doctrine of the ransom sacrifice, the merit of Jesus' blood which satisfies God's justice and secures man's release from the penalty of Adamic death. The myrtle trees symbolize perfect mankind. White flowers on the myrtle trees suggest the righteousness of those who have completed their walk up the highway of

holiness. The words “in the bottom” indicate that this peaceful meadow is in a valley—protected on all sides by mountains, the mountain of God’s everlasting kingdom.

What might the other horses represent? There are two reasonable interpretations. Horses usually symbolize doctrines. As the first four of seven seals on a scroll are opened in Revelation 6, John beholds four horses—white, red, black, and pale—with riders; these have come to be known as the four horsemen of the apocalypse. These horses represent the corruption of truth during the beginning of the Gospel age. The truth was at first pure when our Lord and the apostles were on the scene, pictured by the white horse. Then errors crept in such as the trinity, and the mass, which denied the ransom sacrifice. The red horse pictures these corruptions of truth. Later more errors darkened the truth to an even worse state pictured by the black horse. Finally the teachings of the nominal systems were devoid of any truth, pictured by the pale, colorless horse. The sequence of horses picturing the corruption of truth was white, red, black, and pale.

Perhaps Zechariah’s horses in their improving colors—red, spotted, and white in that order—represent the atonement doctrines of resurrection, sin offering, and restitution which make possible man’s progress up the highway of holiness from a sinful, red condition, through a spotted condition as the old Adamic patterns of thought and habit are eradicated, to a white or perfect condition.

Another possible interpretation of these horses is suggested by the words of verses 9-11: “These are they [i.e., the horses] whom the LORD hath sent to walk to and fro through the earth, and they answered the angel of the LORD that stood among the myrtle trees, and said, We have walked to and fro through the earth, and, behold, all the earth sitteth still, and is at rest.”

The horses appear to be watchful sentries on the earth who observe and report back to the man on the red horse that all is well. These faithful sentries, sent by the Lord to walk to and fro in the earth, might well picture the ancient worthies. In the last vision we will see a use of various colored horses to represent classes of people in God’s plan.

But whether the horses represent doctrines that lead to mankind’s perfection, or the ancient worthies, the picture of the kingdom, the ultimate goal of God’s plan, is presented with clarity and beauty in this first of Zechariah’s eight visions.

Vision Two

Zechariah’s second vision is recorded in verses 18-21: “Then lifted I up mine eyes, and saw, and behold four horns. And I said unto the angel that talked with me, What be these? And he answered me, These are the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem. And the LORD shewed me four carpenters. Then said I, What come these to do? . . . these are come to fray them, to cast out the horns of the Gentiles, which lifted up their horn over the land of Judah to scatter it.”

Horns symbolize power and these four horns are said to have scattered God’s chosen people, Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem. We can easily identify the horns as the four universal empires of Gentile dominion: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. God gave these four Gentile powers dominion over the nation of Israel and the entire world. But who are the carpenters? They represent God in his four attributes of wisdom, justice, love, and power. God frays the horns, like a carpenter measures, cuts, shapes, and carves wood. Then God casts them out each in turn,

ending with the last of the four Gentile empires when their seven times or 2,520 years of dominion expired in 1914.

Vision Three

Zechariah's third vision takes up the entire second chapter. "I lifted up mine eyes again, and looked, and behold a man with a measuring line in his hand. Then said I, Whither goest thou? And he said unto me, To measure Jerusalem, to see what is the breadth thereof, and what is the length thereof" (verses 1 and 2). This is a vision of the restoration of Israel after the times of the Gentiles, pictured by the four horns in the previous vision. God had judged Israel and punished them seven times for their sins. Now their punishment at the hands of the Gentiles is complete and God's favor returns to Israel. This measuring line is called a measuring **reed** in other Scriptures, and it was used in the construction and building of cities. Consider it a long yardstick.

The vision continues: "Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein: For I, saith the LORD, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her. Ho, ho, come forth, and flee from the land of the north, saith the LORD: for I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heaven, saith the LORD."

Here the vision portrays the restoration of natural Israel to peace and prosperity after God regathers them from where he had scattered them during the times of the Gentiles. He will be a protecting wall of fire around them and no enemy shall scatter or trouble them again. His presence will be within them in their midst. We have already seen the beginning of the fulfillment of this vision as God is regathering his people to the land of Palestine. And the glorious completion of this vision of the restoration of natural Israel will come soon.

Here are some of the comforting words God speaks to Israel in the remainder of chapter two:

- "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of my eye."
- "Sing and rejoice O daughter of Zion, for I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the LORD."
- "Be silent, O all flesh before the LORD, for he is raised up out of his holy habitation."

What a fitting picture this is of God's favor returning to Israel and of Israel's restoration.

There is an application of this vision to spiritual Israel, the church in the Gospel age. The vision includes the words, "Deliver thyself O Zion, that dwellest with the daughter of Babylon." During the Gospel age, true spiritual Israel was captive in Babylon until Jesus returned and the call to the daughters of Zion to come out of Babylon went forth. Now our Lord has come to gather his bride, the apple of his eye, unto him, and now we rejoice with him.

Vision Four

Zechariah's fourth vision takes up the entire third chapter. "He shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel" (Zechariah 3:1-3).

The Hebrew name Joshua is identical to the Greek name Jesus. In this vision Joshua the high priest represents The Christ, head with body members. The filthy garments show the unrighteousness of the body members before they are justified. From the beginning, Satan stands in the way to tempt keep them from making a consecration; he tries to thwart God's plan to select a bride class for his son.

The vision continues: "Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. Let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD stood by."

The scene has changed and the church class, the body members, are clothed with the robe of Christ's righteousness, justified by faith in the merit of Jesus' sacrifice. The King James translation says a "fair miter" is placed on Joshua's head but the New American Standard better translates the Hebrew as a "clean turban." Satan is still in the picture, trying even harder to oppose and keep the church from fulfilling her vows of consecration.

"Thus saith the LORD of hosts; If thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, then thou shalt also judge my house, and shalt also keep my courts, and I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by" (Zechariah 3:7).

"If thou wilt walk in my ways," that is, the narrow way, and "if thou wilt keep my charge," that is, be thou faithful unto death, "then thou shalt judge my house and keep my courts," that is be kings and priests in the kingdom.

At this point the vision leaves behind the sacrificing church in the Gospel age, and takes a giant leap forward in time to the kingdom: "For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone shall be seven eyes: behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day" (verses 8 and 9).

The engraving, or writing, on the stone is similar to words in Revelation: "To him that overcometh will I give a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving him that receiveth it" (Revelation 2:17). The seven eyes on the stone picture the divine wisdom of Jesus and his church in the kingdom as the chief cornerstone, just as it is shown on the chart of the ages in the kingdom period when the iniquity of the people is removed. May we be faithful to our covenant, be part of this stone, and receive our new names.

The final verse of Zechariah 3 pictures of the peaceable kingdom of God: "In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree" (Zechariah 3:10).

Vision Five

Zechariah's fifth vision follows: "And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof: and two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof" (Zechariah 4:2,3).

The vision goes on to describe how these two olive trees are connected to the bowl by two golden pipes. The candlestick is like the candlestick in the tabernacle with two notable additions: there is a bowl on the top filled with oil from which pipes carry the oil to the seven lamps, and there are the two olive trees. In the tabernacle, the golden candlestick with its daily renewal of the oil by the high priest pictured the supervisory work of Jesus in seeing that the holy spirit is always available to the church. The trimming of the wicks by the high priest pictures the trimming and pruning of the old nature by trials and experiences. In Zechariah's vision this candlestick represents the complete organization for the care and development of the church.

This candlestick, like the one in the tabernacle, represents the church as a whole as it is supplied with the holy spirit from the one head, the bowl on the top representing our Lord Jesus. In verse 11 the prophet asks what the two olive trees are. He is told in verse 14: "These are the two anointed ones that stand by the Lord of the whole earth." The Bible margin says "sons of oil" for the phrase "anointed ones." There is a similar expression Revelation 11:3,4 describing God's two witnesses, the Old and New Testaments, as two olive trees standing before the God of the earth. The two olive trees in Zechariah's vision are also the Old and New Testaments picturing how we receive the holy spirit, the spirit of truth, from our Lord through the word of God.

Vision Six

Chapter 5 contains the sixth vision: "Then I turned, and lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a flying roll. And he said unto me, What seest thou? And I answered, I see a flying roll; the length thereof is twenty cubits, and the breadth thereof ten cubits" (Zechariah 5:1,2).

Zechariah beholds a roll, or scroll, flying through the air. And it's a big scroll: twenty by ten cubits (thirty by fifteen feet) when it is unrolled. The angel explains: "This is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth: for every one that stealeth shall be cut off as on this side according to it; and every one that sweareth shall be cut off as on that side according to it. I will bring it forth, saith the LORD of hosts, and it shall enter into the house of the thief, and into the house of him that sweareth falsely by my name: and it shall remain in the midst of his house, and shall consume it with the timber thereof and the stones thereof." (Zechariah 5:3,4).

This scroll is a curse on two classes of people: it is a curse to those who steal, or thieves, whose names are written on one side of the scroll, and it is a curse to those who swear falsely by God's name, or covenant-breakers, whose names are written on the other side. The scroll entering the house of the thieves and covenant-breakers affects this curse upon them; it remains in the house until the house is destroyed. What does this mean?

A clue is that the writing is on both sides of the scroll. It is like the writing on both sides of tablets of stone containing the law: "Moses turned, and went down from the mount, and the two tables of the testimony were in his hand: the tables were written on both their sides; on the one side and on the other were they written" (Exodus 32:15).

The ten commandments are divided into two groups: the first four describe man's responsibility to God, the last six describe his responsibility to his fellow man. Perhaps the covenant breakers who swear falsely represent those who disobey the first four commandments relating to God and the thieves those who disobey the last six commandments, stealing from their fellows their goods, family harmony, reputation, and even life. This vision is a warning to natural Israel to obey God's law covenant or else their house would be destroyed. As we know, the Jewish people did not keep

God's law and they were cast off, their house was left unto them desolate, as our Lord stated shortly before he was crucified.

There is also a lesson for the Gospel age church in this vision. Those who have made a covenant by sacrifice with God must be sure to not break their covenant, denying the faith, nor as thieves attempt to rob God of the loyalty and devotion of those hearts promised to him. We do **not** want our names written on this scroll of the disobedient; we want our names written in the Lamb's book of life.

In this vision the house is our hearts and the characters we build. If we have the spirit of God's law abiding in our hearts and controlling our thoughts, words, and deeds, if we build with gold, silver, and precious gems, into a character-likeness of Christ, our work will stand. If we build with wood, hay and stubble, our work will crumble and be consumed.

Vision Seven

Zechariah's seventh vision of a woman in an ephah is next: "Then the angel that talked with me went forth, and said unto me, Lift up now thine eyes, and see what is this that goeth forth. And I said, What is it? And he said, This is an ephah that goeth forth. He said moreover, This is their resemblance through all the earth. And, behold, there was lifted up a talent of lead: and this is a woman that sitteth in the midst of the ephah. And he said, This is wickedness. And he cast it into the midst of the ephah; and he cast the weight of lead upon the mouth thereof. Then lifted I up mine eyes, and looked, and, behold, there came out two women, and the wind was in their wings; for they had wings like the wings of a stork: and they lifted up the ephah between the earth and the heaven. Then said I to the angel that talked with me, Whither do these bear the ephah? And he said unto me, To build it an house in the land of Shinar: and it shall be established, and set there upon her own base."—Zechariah 5:5-11.

In Zechariah's day, an ephah was a unit of dry measure, like our bushel, only a bit smaller, and was used to measure grain, such as wheat. The woman in the ephah is at first pure, and she pictures the true church, the true wheat at the beginning of the Gospel age in its purity. But the church became corrupt in its doctrines and practices. The angel casting wickedness into the ephah and slamming the lid of lead upon it pictures this corrupting transformation. Lead is a kind of counterfeit gold; it is similar in weight but without the beauty and incorruptibility of gold. Gold in the Scriptures is a symbol of things divine, particularly divine truth. Thus the lead cover aptly pictures the counterfeit doctrines and corrupt practices promulgated by the nominal church systems.

The two women picture mother and daughter, Catholic and Protestant church systems. They have wings and bear the ephah to the land of Shinar to build a house for it there. In Genesis 11:2 we read that the land of Shinar is where the tower of Babel was built; it is a flat plain between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and it further identifies this vision with the development of Babylon. The wind in these women's wings represents the power of Satan, the prince of the power of the air. The house built in Babylon upon its own base, the nominal church system, is Satan's masterpiece, built upon its own foundation of error, not upon God's truth.

Vision Eight

Zechariah's last vision is more like two separate visions: "Behold, there came four chariots out from between two mountains; and the mountains were mountains of brass. In the first chariot

were red horses; and in the second chariot black horses; and in the third chariot white horses; and in the fourth chariot grised and bay horses.” (Zechariah 6:1-3)

Brass [copper] in the Scriptures represents the perfect human nature and mountains represent kingdoms. These two copper mountains represent the two perfect human kingdoms, the first in Eden which Adam lost, and the second a future kingdom on earth when what was lost will be restored. The four chariots come from between the two mountains. It is the entire plan of God—the Divine Plan of the Ages—which lies between these two mountains. Notice that there are four chariots pulled by horses possessing five colors: red, black, white, and, with the fourth and last chariot, grised and bay horses.

“The black horses which are therein go forth into the north country; and the white go forth after them; and the grised go forth toward the south country. And the bay went forth, and sought to go that they might walk to and fro through the earth: and he said, Get you hence, walk to and fro through the earth. So they walked to and fro through the earth. Then cried he upon me, and spake unto me, saying, Behold, these that go toward the north country have quieted my spirit in the north country.” (Zechariah 6:4-8).

The horses and chariots come out from between the mountains but only the horses, without the chariots, go off in various directions. Horses possessing **five** colors come out from between the mountains—red, black white, grised, and bay—but horses possessing only **four** colors go toward a destination. What does this mean?

The four chariots may represent God, his attributes, and his agencies that bring to fruition his plan for mankind. The five colors represent five classes developed by this plan. The black, which go toward the north and quiet God’s spirit, are the church class. Black is rarely associated with the little flock, but in Song of Solomon 1:5 the queen says, “I am black but comely.” The white horses, which follow the black to the north, are the great company whose robes are washed white in the blood of the lamb. These follow the church both in time and honor. The grised horses are mankind in the kingdom. They go to the south, the opposite direction, just as the earth is opposite the heavens. The bay, or strong horses as some translations have it, are the ancient worthies who “walk to and fro in the earth” just as in the first vision. And the red horses? They came out from between the mountains but do not go in any direction. They represent the second death class.

In the second scene in this vision, verses 9-15, the word of the Lord comes to Zechariah telling him to make crowns of silver and gold and put them on the heads of Joshua and others. Much is similar to the fourth vision except that the high priest wears a crown, not a turban, and sits on a throne. It represents the glorified Christ, head and body, kings and priests in the millennial age.

The chapter and the visions end with these words: “And they that are far off shall come and build in the temple of the LORD, and ye shall know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you. And this shall come to pass, if ye will diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God” (Zechariah 6:15).

The “they that are far off” represent the world of mankind who are far from mental, moral, and physical perfection when first awakened from the grave. But by and by these come and build the temple of the Lord, meaning they walk up the highway of holiness, build righteous characters, and are fit for eternal life on earth with the help of the glorified church.

God's closing words to Zechariah were spoken to encourage him and strengthen his faith. "And [all] this ... shall come to pass, if ye will diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God."

- Be obedient to the vows of consecration.
- Keep faith in the coming kingdom strong.
- Trust in God's abiding protection in life.
- Be neither a thief nor a covenant-breaker.
- Resist the devil and keep the robe white and unspotted.
- Be filled with the holy spirit.
- Hold fast so no man takes our crown.
- Make our calling and election sure.

If we do all this, we will fulfill our part of the visions, Zechariah's visions of God's plan.

Haggai and the Second Temple

And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king. - Ezra 6:14

Dariusz Siwek (Reprinted from "Beauties of the Truth," November 1996)

Shortly after they returned from their captivity in Babylon the Jewish people began to reconstruct the temple in Jerusalem. They had received permission from Cyrus and the construction began during his reign. After the next king, Cambyses, began his reign, the construction was halted due to the intervention of the surrounding nations. Two years after King Darius assumed the throne, the prophet Haggai came to Jerusalem and urged the Jews to begin the work anew.

Haggai was the first prophet of Israel after the Babylonian captivity. His words were heeded and the reconstruction continued. Darius gave his permission and financial aid, and the work was completed in four years.

The book of Haggai tells about the world of that prophet, whose objective was to encourage the Israelites to finish the rebuilding of the temple. The book is divided into five parts, each containing a separate message from the prophet.

In the first message Haggai pointed out that the lack of the Lord's blessing upon the nation of Israel was because they had given up the temple reconstruction. He urged them to restart the work. After approximately twenty-three days the work was restarted and the prophet came back with his second message. This message was an assurance of God's help: "I am with you" (1:13). A month later, on the next to the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles (this was probably observed, although there is no mention of it in the account), the prophet brought another message. In this third message he again assured them of God's help and uttered a prophetic statement about the glorious future of the temple. He also spoke of the "shaking of the heavens and the earth" In the fourth message, he reminded them that before the reconstruction began they were unclean, but now were cleansed from their uncleanness. We believe that this cleansing must have occurred during the observance of the Atonement Day, in the seventh month. The final message was directed at prince Zerubbabel, who was from the royal line. Haggai foretold of his exaltation while all other nations would be engrossed in wars, each man fighting against his brother.

THE INTERPRETATION

An interpretation of the complete prophecy is not found in the works of Bro. Russell. Of the 38 verses in the book of Haggai, only eight are prophetic statements regarding the future. Only these eight are commented on in the reprints. These comments are connected with the interpretation of the picture of the Jews returning from captivity and rebuilding the temple. These are found on reprint pages 2251, 1483 and 3576.

According to this interpretation, the reconstruction of the temple pictures the building of the church after the papal captivity. In his chronological analysis, Bro. John Edgar identifies the rebuilding of the temple with the issuing of the book "Defensor Pacis" by Marsiglio [Marsilius of Padua¹], which exposes Papacy. This work was the precursor of the Reformation in Europe. This interpretation is based on the assumption that the nation of Israel returning from captivity

represents spiritual Israel, and the temple being rebuilt pictures the spiritual temple, the Gospel Age church. There is no reference to the remaining 30 verses in this interpretation.

When does a prophecy relate to natural Israel and when to spiritual? There are prophecies referring to Israel which leave no doubt that they apply to literal Israel. Examples include the establishing of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31) and the prophecy of the dry bones (Ezekiel 37). We would next ask, can the interpretation of Haggai be applied to the literal nation of Israel?

ISRAEL REBUILDS A TEMPLE

The obstacle here is the symbol of the temple. We know that during the Gospel Age the church is said to be building just such a temple. We know of no temple that the nation of Israel was supposed to build during this age. However, looking deeper, we do find such a temple. The tabernacle in the wilderness was accessible and visible to the people of the camp in two different ways. The court was accessible and visible from the gate. The Holy and Most Holy were inaccessible and practically invisible from outside the court. How will spirit beings communicate with fleshly men? Most likely it will not be through direct contact but through a special class of people. Such a class will be the visible, earthly representation of the new temple. This earthly part will be literal Israel. Descending from heaven to earth, the new Jerusalem will rest on the earthly foundation prepared earlier. In this way, Israel also builds a temple. But, just like the temple rebuilt in the days of Haggai, the Most Holy was empty (the ark was not there), so in the new temple built on earth, the Most Holy, not made by human hands, will be the spiritual part of the temple, which is the church.

Based on this thought, we proceed to see how the picture of the rebuilding of the temple applies to literal Israel. Looking to Haggai, what elements can his prophecy contribute to this picture?

THE RETURN FROM CAPTIVITY

The return from captivity could also be seen as a picture of the return of the Jews to Palestine from their dispersion at the close of the Gospel Age. It would be synonymous with the regathering of the dry bones in the prophecy of Ezekiel. The reconstruction of the temple would correspond to the making of a new social order based on individuals who have come to trust in God's guidance and direction. As the work of the original rebuilding of the temple was interrupted, so too, this work will be interrupted and only renewed as a result of the urging of an antitypical Haggai. Haggai's mission was to persuade the Jews to continue their reconstruction work.

A long time after the rebuilding stopped, the prophet came and spoke of the fact that blessings were not coming from God. Perhaps this referred to some economic and political problems. The prophet maintains that blessings would return only after the construction work was resumed. He also talked about the approaching time of trouble for all nations and the filling of the temple with glory during the time of this trouble. This trouble is also foretold in other prophecies, such as Joel, Zephaniah, and Zechariah. In all these places we find Israel being exalted at that point in the time of trouble. This might indicate that all these prophecies, including Haggai, speak about the same events and the same time.

What could we learn from these prophecies? Both Joel and Haggai indicate that the regeneration of Israel should occur before the trouble.² Joel calls to repentance before the imminent day of the Lord. The day of the Lord in this prophecy does not represent the Millennial Age but the battle of

the Lord with all the nations rising against him. It is a relatively short time dedicated to destroying the nations gathered to fight against Israel. In that day God himself will fight for his people. Haggai presented this process of spiritual regeneration as the reconstruction of the temple. Only after the temple is rebuilt are all the nations shaken.

ISRAEL AND THEIR TROUBLE

It is the general thought that the trouble sent upon Israel will cause their repentance. These two prophecies seem to indicate something different. The process of the regeneration is started much earlier and the coming trouble affects mainly the nations who rise against regenerated Israel. It is logical to think that God himself will fight for the nation after it has been regenerated. If Israel were not regenerated at that time, we might ask why God would fight for a nation not much better than others.

Historically, God fought for Israel only when they turned away from sin. On the other hand, when they sinned, other nations executed God's punishment upon Israel. The same will be true of the future battle. God will stand on Israel's side because they will have already been regenerated. This puts the book of Haggai in a new light. It describes the process of Israel's regeneration. And this will not be a result of the trouble upon the nation but a result of the mission of antitypical Haggai. This mission could probably be identified with the call for repentance in Joel and the prophesying to the wind in Ezekiel 37:9.

Yet someone might say, Israel never repented as a result of a prophet's mission alone. The prophecies indicate that indeed there will be something more than just the mission of the prophet.

In the book of Joel we find mention of a plague of locusts which will precede the great day of the Lord. Similarly, in Zephaniah, we find two plagues described. The first is the Day of the Lord's sacrifice, described in chapter one. The second plague is the day of the Lord itself described in chapters one and three. In the second chapter of this prophecy we find information of the destruction of the nations surrounding Israel between these two troublous times.

Thus these prophecies indicate that there will be two times of difficulty for Israel. The second time will affect primarily other nations, although not exclusively so. From Zechariah we can infer that even after the first time of trouble and the first mission of the prophet, the whole nation is not converted.

In chapter 13 we read about the three parts of Israel. Two of them will be destroyed and one will be purified as gold in the fire. These two parts could possibly be those who will not be converted and who will be treated just like the other nations.

WHEN WILL IT HAPPEN?

When will be the fulfillment of these prophecies? I suggest that they are still in the future. The beginning of the Jewish settlements in Palestine could be seen as the beginning of the reconstruction of the temple. The reconstruction was interrupted. What was being built then was a state patterned after the Western world. It is estimated that some 80% of the people currently living in Israel are not interested in religion. It is likely that there will be another wave of anti-Semitism in the Western countries and another wave of Jews immigrating back to Israel. Israel is

not yet ready to hear a prophet. As far as the antitypical prophet himself, it would be hard to identify who that would be today. It seems that it will not be the church which would fulfill this mission, since they will be taken from the scene before the final trouble. Perhaps this work will belong to the Great Company.

SUMMARY

If the above interpretation is correct, we briefly summarize as follows:

- (1) The main theme of the prophecy is the prophet's mission urging Israel to rebuild the temple.
- (2) The reconstruction of the temple may represent a spiritual regeneration of Israel.
- (3) This process will begin before the final trouble which will come upon the angry nations.
- (4) Preceding the mission calling for a regeneration, a different trouble can be expected, one which would prepare Israel to hear the prophet's message.
- (5) Regenerated Israel will constitute the earthly part of the temple whose Most Holy will be the church of Christ.
- (6) Not all of Israel will be converted before the final trouble.
- (7) Converted Israel, under the New Covenant, will lead the way for all nations to Christ's Kingdom. The above thought is only a suggestion. Time will indicate the correct interpretation. What remains is for us to study and share our ideas so that our understanding of the time to come is more accurate and complete.

The First Return from Exile

We know that to them that love God all things work together for good.--Romans 8:28

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Jeremiah's twenty-ninth chapter is a letter which he wrote to the exiles in Babylon. This letter is "the nearest analogue to be found in the Old Testament to the Epistles which form so large a part of the New" (Samuel Cox). The purpose of the letter was to assure them that, in spite of the false prophets who were foretelling a speedy return, they should remain in captivity seventy years. No shorter period would suffice to teach Israel the lessons it needed to learn from this bitter experience. But they were not to despair for at the end of the seventh decade the nation would surely be restored to its own land. Professor Beecher dates the letter B.C. 595, in the second year of Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, the first deportation having taken place ten years before and the second three years before.

This prophecy contains some of the most eloquent sentences of Holy Writ. The Jews might think that God had forgotten them, "but I," said Jehovah, "know my thoughts toward my people, and they are thoughts that seek their peace and not their evil, their hope and not their despair. The days are coming when your hard hearts, that have so often turned toward senseless idols, will turn again to your loving Father. Nor will you turn in vain. Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." That last sentence is the great promise to prayer, good for all ages and all peoples. It is the climax of the prophecy. To find God is the reward of all search, and compared with that the promise of a turn of their captivity back to their homeland is only a slight thing. Having found God, any country would be their homeland.

The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah are not prophetic, but historical; they take up the history of Israel where it was laid down by the scribes who wrote the Books of Chronicles. Ezra, the writer of the book bearing his name, was a scribe or educated man, whose genealogy is traced back through the priesthood to Aaron (Ezra 1-6). Ezra was not amongst those who went up first to Jerusalem under the proclamation of Cyrus; indeed, he was probably not born until a considerable time after that notable event.

The record of the first six chapters of Ezra covers a period of twenty years; and then an interval of about fifty years transpired before the events recorded in the seventh chapter--Ezra's commission under King Artaxerxes of Persia to go up to Jerusalem and establish the worship of God. The history of the return from captivity, and the experiences of the people and their difficulties in connection with the rebuilding of the temple, Ezra probably got from the records of the scribes at Jerusalem.

The Book of Second Chronicles closes with the declaration that the king of the Chaldeans, Nebuchadnezzar, carried away the treasures of Jerusalem, broke down its walls, burned its palaces, and carried its people captive to Babylon, and then declares that this period of captivity of the Jews and the desolation of the land and the city was in fulfillment of prophecy, the word of the Lord by Jeremiah, for Jeremiah had predicted that the Jews would go into captivity to the kingdom of Babylon seventy years (Jeremiah 25:11). Those seventy years, commencing with the

third year of Jehoiakim in Nebuchadnezzar's first year, 606 B.C., would reach the first year of Cyrus, 536 B.C. More than this, the servitude to the kingdom of Babylon became the occasion also of bringing in a period of desolation of the land, which began approximately 589 B.C. and extended to about 520 B.C.--Zechariah 1:1,7,12; Haggai 2:1,15-19.

It seems to be no easy matter to determine the chronological order of Medo-Persia. Cyrus is called the Persian, and Darius is called the Mede, and whether they reigned jointly for a time seems difficult to determine. It would appear that Cyrus was in some respects the chief, yet that Darius was the representative of authority in Babylon for a time, and that upon his death Cyrus became sole emperor. Daniel most positively declares that Darius the Mede succeeded to Belshazzar's kingdom (Daniel 5:31; 6:28), and this was before even Daniel had thought to search the prophecy of Jeremiah and to calculate the date when the seventy years of captivity would end, and to pray for the preparation of Israel for the promised deliverance when it should come (Daniel 9:1-16).

The Lord Stirred up the Heart of Cyrus

We are not told by what agencies the Lord operated when he "stirred up" the heart of Cyrus to fulfill his will in letting go the captives, and hence we are at liberty to surmise on the subject. We presume it likely that, as Daniel was speedily made a high officer in the kingdom, he had access to King Cyrus and quite probably called his attention to the Scriptural predictions which marked him as the divine agent, even referring to him by name (Isaiah 44:26,28; 45:1-5; Jeremiah 25:1-12; 29:10).

It is quite possible, also, that the Lord used other means in stirring up the heart of Cyrus. Possibly he reflected that by such a course he would firmly establish himself in the good will of the Israelites who numbered millions amongst his new subjects, and comparatively few of whom he might feel sure would avail themselves of his generous offer of liberty to return to their native land. It would appear that this was the custom of Cyrus in respect to the religions of all the various peoples whom he conquered. Nebuchadnezzar had thought to unify the people by bringing to their minds one god and compelling worship to him. Cyrus seems to have followed an opposite rule, and sought to make himself popular with his subjects of various religious inclinations by doing something to the honor of every prominent god whose devotees he conquered. Thus he posed as a general deliverer of the people and as the servant of all the gods.

Moreover, he may have had in mind the fact that Egypt was a country of rich fertility, and that it would be of great convenience to have Jerusalem as a friendly way-station between his capital and Egypt, so that in case of war he would have friendly representatives at Jerusalem to spy upon the enemies and to render assistance to his forces. Possibly some of these, or all of these, were the considerations by which the Lord stirred up the spirit or will of Cyrus to make the proclamation of liberty to the captives of Israel.

It was not an expulsion of the Israelites from the province of Babylon, for evidently as a people they were highly esteemed of their neighbors. The proclamation merely gave liberty to those who desired that they might return to Palestine, with the king's approval; and that those who remained might not feel that the king would be offended if they gave of their substance to help the enterprise, the proclamation made special mention of the fact that such co-operation would be pleasing to the king.

The Children of Israel Sifted

We may readily suppose that the majority of those who thought upon the Lord and who trusted in the promises made to the fathers which centered in the Holy Land and the Holy City, were poor, for it seems that in every case poverty is more favorable to religious faithfulness and zeal than wealth; and yet that there were some both wealthy and zealous is abundantly testified to by the liberal contributions made by the captives themselves for the rebuilding of the temple. The vast majority, however, were evidently well pleased with their foreign home in which many of them had been living for fifty years, some for sixty-three years, and some for seventy years (those carried away captive at the same time as Daniel), while many of them were born in Babylonia. Many had intermarried with their neighbors, many were immersed in business projects, and many perhaps felt themselves too old for such an undertaking. Thus did the Lord sift them, that he might gather back to the Land of Promise such only as had a fervent zeal for the Lord and full trust in his promises.

The sifting of Israel began in the separation of the two tribes from the ten tribes, for the rapid spread of idolatry in the ten tribes gradually drew those faithful to Jehovah to the two-tribe kingdom whose king was of the line which the Lord had promised to bless. Subsequently, when the two tribes also had grievously gone into idolatry, the Lord carried them all captive to Babylon; now he stirred up Cyrus to make a proclamation for volunteers to return to the Land of Promise. The Lord, we may be sure, did not wish the return of any except those who had reverence for him and faith in his promises. We may therefore conclude that the company which did return, numbering in all not quite fifty thousand, was composed of the very choicest of all Israel out of all the tribes, the tribes of Judah, Benjamin and Levi being most prominently represented amongst these returning ones, as most of the faithful ones for several centuries had been found in their tribes. It should be noticed, however, in reading Ezra's account of the return from captivity, that the division of the nation of Israel was no longer recognized after the return--they are invariably spoken of as "all the people of Israel," and the sacrifices offered were for "the twelve tribes of Israel," and these statements are repeated over and over again. The ten tribes were no more "lost" than were the great body of those carried captive from Judah lost when they neglected to return under the proclamation of Cyrus.

The chief men of Judah and Benjamin and the priests and Levites took the lead in the matter of accepting the provisions of King Cyrus' decree, and we read concerning the others that they were "those whose spirit God had raised to go up to build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem." In what way the Lord raised their spirit or disposition we are not informed. We may suppose, however, that those whose hearts burned with faith in the divine promises to Israel and with zeal to be and do what would be acceptable in God's sight, would be awakened, quickened, by the decree of Cyrus, which was of God's instigation. Moreover, the Lord may have providentially directed other matters not here particularized, in channels favorable to the return of those who had confidence in him and faith in his promises. The fact that many of these returning ones were of the poorer class is implied by the statement that many of their neighbors "strengthened their hands" with presents of money, goods, beasts, and other valuables. Such offers would be a great encouragement and would probably be considered as the leadings of divine providence in the direction of the return by such as were looking for providential leadings. Furthermore, the generosity of Cyrus was manifested in his sending back the precious vessels of the temple which must have been of immense value. The larger vessels are enumerated, in all 2,499. These, with the smaller articles not specified, amounted in all to 5,400 as stated in verse eleven.

Sheshbazzar (otherwise called Zerubbabel, which means "Born in Babylon"), who was of the royal family of David and Solomon, was appointed the governor of the colony, which was nevertheless subject to the Persian empire and its successors--the kingdom authority, removed from Zedekiah, never being restored to the present time--as was foretold by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him"--Messiah, at his second advent (Ezekiel 21:27; Luke 21:24).

The Return from Captivity to Mystic Babylon

We have already seen that natural Israel's captivity in Babylon is Scripturally represented as a figure of the captivity of spiritual Israel in mystic Babylon; and that the deliverance by Cyrus was to some extent a representation of the deliverance of spiritual Israelites from mystic Babylon by Christ; that the fall of Babylon before Cyrus was figurative of the fall of "Babylon the Great," and that the message, "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin," applied not only to literal Babylon, but also now applies to mystic Babylon. In view of these things it is but proper that we should consider Israel's return from Babylon as to some extent representing the deliverance of the zealous of spiritual Israel from mystic Babylon--a work now in progress. "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (Revelation 18:4).

But now, as then, comparatively few, even of the consecrated class, are willing to undertake the trials and difficulties incident to the leaving of the settled affairs, comfortable quarters, contracts, engagements, etc., entered into in Babylon. The only ones disposed to risk the hardships and to go forth into the desert, leaving the strong walls and protection of sectarianism, are those who have great confidence in God and great respect for the promises made to the Seed of Abraham. The call to return to the old paths, and to rebuild the temple of the Lord and to replace therein the vessels of gold and silver (the precious truths of the Divine Word--setting them in order as at first) is appreciated by the few only; yet these are encouraged by the Lord's providences, by the riches bestowed upon them from every quarter--not riches of an earthly kind, but of a spiritual sort--precious truths, valuable lessons and experiences, providential leadings, etc. These encourage such as are of faithful heart to go forward and by obedience to become heirs of those glorious things that God has promised to them that love him.

As all the bitter experiences through which Israel passed were, under providential guidance, used to sift, separate, purge, and purify the proper class to be ultimately brought back into the Land of Promise as the heirs of the kingdom, so the experiences through which the Lord's people have passed during the "Dark Ages" in captivity to Babylon, no less than through recent experiences, all tend to show us the necessity for separation from the world and its spirit, all lead us to appreciate more than ever the divine arrangements by which the Lord is making ready for himself and his service a peculiar people, zealous for the kingdom, zealous for the Lord's word, and zealous for all good works (Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:9).

It is not for those who rejoice in the Lord's promises and leadings to be sad, and to leave Babylonish conditions with regrets ("Remember Lot's wife!"). They should be full of joy in the Lord and hope in his good promises; saying in the language of the psalmist, "The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad" (Psalm 126:3). Those not thus stirred in spirit may as well stay in Babylon as they would only prove snares and stumbling blocks to others.

Rebuilding the Temple

Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?--Haggai 2:3

Carl Hagensick

An multitude of nearly fifty thousand responded to the edict of Cyrus permitting a return to Jerusalem for the Jews of the Babylonian captivity. They must have included many of the more prosperous Jews for over seven thousand were servants and maids (Ezra 2:64,65).

The trek would be some eight hundred miles if they traversed the intervening desert, and longer if they followed the Euphrates north into Syria before turning south to Israel. The journey is likely to have taken about five months.

Arrival in Jerusalem—Ezra 3:1

And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem.

If the journey did take about five months, the Israelites would have left Babylon about the first of May. To avoid the fierce summer desert heat, it is likely they followed the fertile Mesopotamian crescent and then went south along the Mediterranean coast or through the Beqaa valley that separates the Lebanon and Ant-Lebanon mountain ranges.

Finding the city of Jerusalem in shambles, the party formed small village settlements in an area surrounding their former capital for about twenty-five miles. Once they settled in and made arrangements for their herds and flocks, they unitedly turned their attention to Jerusalem.

Rebuilding the Altar--Ezra 3:2,3

Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God. And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD, even burnt offerings morning and evening.

Leadership of the work was placed in the hands of the heads of the Levitical priestly family and the heir of the line of David. Joshua, the high priest, was the grandson of Seraiah, the chief priest at the beginning of the captivity who was taken prisoner and executed by the forces of Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25:18-21). Zerubbabel, the grandson of Jeconiah, appears to be the biological son of Pedaiah, who was presumably killed, and raised by Salathiel (1 Chronicles 3:17-19).

The religious zeal and enthusiasm of the returning captives are well attested by their quick attention to rebuilding the temple and its altar. The altar was a prime necessity for at least four reasons:

1. They feared their enemies with their superior size and armament and therefore felt the need of an altar to offer sacrifices and seek God's divine protection.
2. The Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles were fast approaching and these festivals called for the offering of many animals.
3. They desired to reestablish the daily sacrifices that were a fundamental part of their religious worship.
4. They felt the need to seek the aid of Jehovah in the great work of rebuilding a suitable house of worship.

Evidently the foundation of the altar of Solomon's temple was still standing and it was there, on Mount Moriah, they placed the rebuilt altar. It was there that Abraham offered Isaac. It was there that David had placed the tabernacle when he brought the ark to Jerusalem. It was there that Solomon had constructed the first temple. And it was there that Jesus preached so frequently in the magnificently refurbished temple of King Herod. Indeed it was a holy spot and it must have been with great jubilation that the people willingly set about their task.

The Feast of Tabernacles--Ezra 3:4,5

They kept also the feast of tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required; And afterward offered the continual burnt offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of the LORD that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the LORD.

The religious fervor of the returned exiles was so great that they not only observed the sacred feast of tabernacles, but also all of the other sacrifices prescribed in the Mosaic Law. The Israelites had learned a great lesson from their long captivity in Babylon and were now ready to observe all of their God-given rituals. Although there was a falling away from this original zeal, there is no historical record of the returning Jews ever again turning to outright idolatry.

The freewill offerings that were proffered to the temple ministry were in addition to the thousand sixty drams of gold, five thousand pounds of silver, and one hundred priestly garments previously given (Ezra 2:69). This offering is said to have equaled some \$400,000 in 1899 dollars, apparently contributed in roughly equal sources by the Jews who remained in Babylonia, the wealthy of the returnees, and the poorer classes chipping in about three dollars each (Nehemiah 7:71,72; see *Reprints* p. 2511).

The energy and human resources that were given so voluntarily well illustrates the enthusiasm and ready hearts and purses that contributed to the more significant return from mystic Babylon in the early days of the Lord's second advent; a return so well pictured by the dramatic events recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

The Temple Foundations--Ezra 3:6-9

“From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the LORD. But the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not yet laid. They gave money also unto the masons, and to the carpenters; and meat, and drink, and oil, unto them of Zidon, and to them of Tyre, to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa, according to the grant that they had of Cyrus king of Persia. Now in the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of

Jozadak, and the remnant of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem; and appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to set forward the work of the house of the LORD. Then stood Jeshua with his sons and his brethren, Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together, to set forward the workmen in the house of God: the sons of Henadad, with their sons and their brethren the Levites.”

The renewed fervor of the returned exiles manifested itself in three activities:

1. Reinstating all of the temple sacrifices.

These were begun shortly after their arrival (Ezra 7:9). In the meantime they no doubt arranged for living accommodations and pasturage for their sizeable flocks (Ezra 2:66,67). They probably did not settle in Jerusalem itself as the city was in ruins, but in surrounding areas where they may well have encountered strong resistance from the current inhabitants of the land.

2. Making necessary preparations for the rebuilding of the temple itself.

The Jews obtained the raw materials by a barter system, trading foodstuffs (as well as money) to the same nations from which these products had been obtained for the first temple of Solomon. Zidon, Tyre, and Lebanon had the rich cedar forests that were lacking in Judea. Evidently the contributions of the people were supplemental by the grant of money given them for this purpose by the Persian king, Cyrus.

These groups of workers are given the task of rebuilding the temple:

- a. Jeshua and his sons--this does not appear to be Joshua the high priest mentioned in the previous verse but another Levite with the same name mentioned in Ezra 2:40.
 - b. Kadmiel and his sons--a group of seventy-four, also mentioned in Ezra 2:40.
 - c. The sons of Judah--again showing the leadership divided between the two tribes, the kingly tribe of Judah and the priestly tribe of Levi.
 - d. The sons of Henadad--A family whose descendants also played an active role in the work of Nehemiah in the next century of rebuilding the city (Nehemiah 3:18,24).
 - e. Other Levitical families--Thereby producing a work force of somewhat over a hundred laborers in all
3. Reestablishing the Levitical order to oversee the offering of the sacrifices

Although the original law had established the service of the Levites as being from the age of thirty (Numbers 4), it was decreased in the time of David to twenty (1 Chronicles 23:24). This younger age was probably necessary then because of the increased workload foreseen for the temple arrangements, and was probably considered wise in the return from Babylon because of the relatively smaller number of Levites available from which to draw the temple ministry.

In addition to the work of ministering in the temple there was a choir of some two hundred singers to vocalize their praise to God (Ezra 2:65). Two other subdivisions of temple workers are mentioned in Ezra 2:70--porters and Nethinim. The role of a porter (literally, gatekeeper) is poorly defined and is associated both by Edersheim (*The Temple, Its Ministry and Service*, p. 62)

and Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 7,4) with that of guard. This would be an important service in the hostile environment of Jerusalem in the days of the rebuilding of the temple.

The Nethinim are even more vague. Literally, the term was taken to mean “given ones.” Edersheim (*ibid*, p. 63) states that they were probably “originally strangers and captives, as in all likelihood the Gibeonites had been the first ‘Nethinim’ (Joshua 9:23,27).” They were eventually incorporated into the genealogies of Israel (1 Chronicles 9:2). There were 392 Nethinim from forty-four families who made the journey from Babylon to Jerusalem (Ezra 2:43-58). These were apparently Gentiles who had sufficient faith in the God of Israel to return and resume their responsibilities in temple service.

Celebrating the Rebuilt Temple--Ezra 3:10-13

And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel. And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy: So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.

The great joy of the people in seeing the relaying of the foundation for a new temple on the very site where the magnificent temple of Solomon once stood evoked a festive celebration. They followed the pattern of King David in welcoming the ark to Jerusalem and perhaps used many of his psalms to honor the occasion (1 Chronicles 15:16).

The singing was responsive with one group answering another. The phrase “by course” in verse 11 is better rendered “one to another” in the *American Standard Version*. Thus the alternating stanzas were deeply impressed the gathered crowd with the import of this historic occasion.

The theme of their song was the mercy of Jehovah who, after severely chastising them for their national pride and sins by selling them into captivity, had now mercifully closed that chapter of their history.

All, however, were not equally elated.¹ The younger, looking forward to a brighter future, shouted loud with anticipatory joy for the opportunity to make a fresh start. The older, looking backward, compared the bleak surroundings and humble copy as only a shadow of the glory of by-gone days.

There is a lesson here for all true Christians. Many see the stark comparisons of modern materialistic religion with the fervor and joy of the zeal and vision of the early church. Still others compare it with the bold start of the Great Reformation and bemoan the muted efforts at reform in our day. Bible Students tend to compare the heady days of the founding of their movement with the over-filled auditoriums, large amounts of distributed literature, the glory of the *Photo-Drama* showings, and a rapidly growing world-wide movement with a system fragmented with divisions and showing but dim results in the vastly changed environment of the past 125 years.

In contrast, others see a future through the rose-colored glasses of optimism and raise their voices loud in shouts of praise for the Lord's mercies in permitting further service in his vineyard even at this late date.

So mixed were the emotions that the sound of the one could not be distinguished from the sound of the other¹. Mingled, however, they form a reaction that is heard afar off--yea, around the world. The question remains for each to ask and individually answer: Will I weep over the lost glories of the former days or will I rejoice in untold privileges still ahead?

1. An interesting demographic might be noted here. Apparently this great celebration happened in the second year of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1; 3:1). This followed the captivity in Babylon which many Bible Students calculate as seventy years. It must be presumed that the Levites who saw the first house in its glory were of sufficient age at that time to appreciate the extent of that glory, probably at least ten years of age. This would make them 82 at the laying of the new foundations. Their numbers appear to be roughly equal to the young rejoicers, for the sound of the one could not be distinguished from the sound of the other. Considering the five hundred mile distance of their trip across a vast desert expanse, it seems to strain the credibility of the account to imagine thousands of such aged ones making the journey. On the other hand, if the time actually spent in Babylon was fifty-one years, as most chronologists have it, the age of the older ones would be sixty-three and up. While lacking any authority as proof, it presents a fact that must be taken into consideration in determining whether the seventy years of Jeremiah refer to desolation of Israel or to the duration of power to be exercised by the Babylonian empire.

Ezra and Nehemiah

People with a Purpose

And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the LORD your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law.—Nehemiah 8:9

James Parkinson

Foremost among the last great men of Israel's return are Ezra and Nehemiah. They led thousands back to the land and reformed them. To do so, each had to overcome many human obstacles.

The rebuilding of the Temple (the Second Temple, Zerubbabel's Temple) had been started early in Cyrus' reign, then restarted B.C. 520 August 29, and completed 515 March 12 (about 12 days before the equinox) in the sixth year of Darius I of Persia. They began observing the annual Passover at the Temple four weeks after the equinox. {Footnote: Apparently in Medo-Persian times the first day of the first month was reckoned as the new moon on, or next after, the Spring Equinox, which then was typically on March 24 (Julian calendar). But in Roman times (1st century A.D.) it could be either the new moon nearest, or next after, as the Sanhedrin decided that year.} But over the next half century it would appear that the worship of the LORD had become only half-hearted, ritual had largely been substituted for God's Law given through Moses.

The foreigners around Jerusalem appealed time and again to the Persian kings to slow up or stop the construction of the temple and the city. They wrote accusations to Xerxes (Ahashverosh) early in his reign, but, after the rise of Queen Esther in year seven, such overt opposition became unwise. His successor, Artaxerxes (Artachshastha), in his seventh year, sent Ezra, the priest and scribe, to Jerusalem with his commission over the Law of God. Thirteen years later he sent Nehemiah with his commission to rebuild the wall and gates, and to build his own house. Thus was revived the worship of the LORD from the heart.

Ezra

Ezra was a priest, in direct descent from such faithful high priests as Hilkiah in the days of Josiah king of Judah, Zadok in the days of David king of all Israel, and Eleazar and Aaron in the days of Moses. He was also a scribe, wise in the Law of Moses. As such, he combined the two works prized most by the later Sadducees (Zadokites, the priesthood for temple worship) and Pharisees (doctors of the Law).

Ezra asked King Artaxerxes to send him to Jerusalem, with Levites and other Israelites among the captives, to teach Israel the statutes and ordinances of the Law of the LORD. Written in Aramaic, these are the essentials of the king's decree: "Artaxerxes, king of kings, unto Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heavens, perfect and so forth. I make a decree, that all they of the people of Israel, and their priests and the Levites, in my realm, that are minded of their own free

will to go to Jerusalem, go with thee. Forasmuch as thou art sent of the king and his seven counselors, to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of thy God which is in thy hand, and to carry the silver and gold, which the king and his counselors have freely offered unto the God of Israel, whose habitation is in Jerusalem ... Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heavens, let it be done exactly for the house of the God of heavens; for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons? Also we certify you, that touching any of the priests and Levites, the singers, porters, Nethinim, or servants of this house of God, it shall not be lawful to impose tribute, custom, or toll upon them. And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God that is in thy hand, appoint magistrates and judges, who may judge all the people that are beyond the River, all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye him that knoweth them not. And whosoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed upon him with all diligence, whether it be unto death, or to banishment [*Aramaic*: rooting out], or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment” [Ezra 7:12-16, ARV]. Abundant funding was provided by the king for the sacrifices and for maintenance of the temple.

About 1,500 Israelites began the journey from Babylon, and along the way another 258 joined them. When the returnees arrived at Jerusalem, they offered a bullock and a goat for each of the twelve tribes of Israel (perhaps suggestive of the Atonement Day sacrifices in Leviticus 16), eight rams for each tribe, and seventy-seven lambs total (perhaps suggestive of the seven-day consecration of the priesthood in Leviticus 8).

Some four months later the princes of Israel came to Ezra to tell him the people, the priests, and the Levites had taken foreign wives, contrary to the Law (Ezra 9:1-2; Exodus 34:12-16). Moreover, some of the princes and their deputies were the worst offenders. As Ezra prayed, and confessed the iniquity of Israel to God, the faithful gathered to him at the temple. Shecaniah, a man who had brought three hundred others with him out of Elam (the lowlands of western Iran), urged that the Israelites should divorce their foreign wives and send them away with their children (born or unborn). Ezra then required the priests, Levites, and all Israel divorce the foreign wives and send them away. With only four dissenters, seventeen priests, six Levites, four singers and gate-keepers, and about eighty-eight other Israelites put away their foreign wives. Nevertheless, as it was early in the winter rainy season, the process was allowed to take three months, concluding Nisan 1 (in April). The dissenters were to leave Israel and leave their property behind.

To the modern mind it may seem harsh to require those who had married foreign women to either leave the community of Israel or divorce the foreign wives. On the other hand, would any of us want his banker to marry a daughter of the underworld? Should the prime minister or the president of a country marry the daughter of a foreign intelligence service? Would a Jewish man marry a Nazi advocate, a member of the Palestinian organization Hamas, or any other group attempting to annihilate Jews from the face of the earth?

It might be argued that both Rahab from Jericho and Ruth from Moab had been foreign wives, and all the kings of Judah had descended from them. True, but each voluntarily left her own culture and adopted the culture of the faithful in Israel (Matthew 1:5; Ruth 4:13-22).

On the other hand, Jacob's brother Esau took daughters of the Hittites for wives, "and they were a grief of mind unto Isaac and to Rebekah." David married the daughter of a foreign king, and their son Absalom took away David's throne and tried to take away his life. Solomon married many foreign women, and "his wives turned away his heart after other gods." Ahab married Jezebel, daughter of the king of Sidon, which led to famine in Israel and to the destruction of all their children (Genesis 26:34-35; 2 Samuel 3:3; 1 Kings 11:1-13, 16:32).

There is a lesson for Christians today. As the apostle Paul writes, The widow "is free to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord." That is good advice for widows and everyone else as well (1 Corinthians 7:39; 2 Corinthians 6:14).

Nehemiah

Nehemiah also had been among the captivity of Judah, but he had risen to prominence in the government of Persia, as cupbearer to king Artaxerxes I. While Nehemiah did not hold political or military office, he was in a position of highest personal trust. {Footnote: The two most trusted positions in the royal household were necessarily the baker who prepared the food, and the butler, or cup-bearer, who served the food. Thus, when Pharaoh Ammenemes III of Egypt got a brief ptomaine poisoning, both butler and baker were jailed Genesis 40:1-3.}

When some men came from Judah and reported the poverty and affliction there, and that the city of Jerusalem was broken down—a slum—Nehemiah's heart was saddened. He mourned and then prayed to the LORD. He first confessed the sins of the sons of Israel, and then recounted God's promise to scatter Israel when they disobeyed, but then to regather Israel when they repented: "If ye trespass, I will scatter you abroad among the peoples: but if ye return unto me, and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts were in the uttermost part of the heavens, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen, to cause my name to dwell there. Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand. O Jehovah {Footnote: Sopherim *changed to*, O Lord,} , I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who delight to fear thy name; and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man" (Nehemiah 1:8-11).

No more than four months later Artaxerxes the king noticed that Nehemiah was uncharacteristically sad and said, "This is nothing else but sorrow of heart." Nehemiah replied, Let the king live out a full life, but the city of my family's graves lies in waste. So the king {Footnote: Where Nehemiah 2:6 says, "the queen also sitting by him," it could possibly imply Esther, the queen mother.} sent with him letters to the governors to allow him to rebuild Jerusalem's walls, and at least one house, at government expense.

Sanballat was then governor of Samaria,¹ Thus, Sanballat the Horonite was likely not quite middle-aged in the time of Nehemiah. If he was from Horonaim in Moab (rather than Beth-Horon in Ephraim), then likely he was a Moabite, and like Tobiah the Ammonite, ineligible to enter the temple. [Deuteronomy 23:3-5; Nehemiah 13:1].}and Tobiah the Ammonite was his assistant. Any assistance given to Jerusalem would be seen as a threat to their

domination of the region. But here was Nehemiah, with authorizations from the king himself and captains of his army. A direct attack would be virtual suicide. So once the wall of Jerusalem began to be rebuilt, they ridiculed it and suggested they were rebelling against the king. But Nehemiah told them they had no rights and privileges in Jerusalem.

When the wall was already half finished, Sanballat and Tobiah put together an alliance with Arabians, Ammonites, and Philistines, to attack, slay, and destroy. Nehemiah countered by arming half the available manpower, while the other half continued building the wall. So Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian {Footnote: Sargon II of Assyria, in his seventh year (seven years after the fall of Samaria and the Northern Kingdom of Israel), says he deported Arab survivors of his battles “and settled *them* in Samaria.” ANE, Vol. I, p. 196. Geshem may have been a chief of the descendants of those deportees.} shelved the military option, and repeatedly urged Nehemiah to confer with them in the plain toward Joppa expecting they could assassinate him. Four times he replied, “Don’t bother me; I’m busy.” The fifth time Sanballat sent an open letter accusing the Jews of rebelling and preparing to name Nehemiah their king. Nehemiah sent a return message, saying, “You made it up yourself.” Sanballat and Tobiah then hired Shemaiah, a Jew, to appear fearful and urge Nehemiah to barricade himself inside the temple from Sanballat. Nehemiah saw through that too. Tobiah sent letters to put him in fear; he ignored them. Because “the people had a mind to work,” the wall was completed in just fifty-two days. The next week the 42,360 of Judah were settled in their homes.

But there were internal problems to contend with. The harvest had been sparse that year so grain prices would have been high. Large families went into debt, mortgaging their farms, and even selling their children into bondage to the wealthier Jews. Nehemiah called them all together to tell the wealthy that he himself had previously bought back the Jewish slaves from the Gentiles but had not held them in bondage to himself.² Then the wealthy, faced with the multitude, agreed to release the children from bondage, give back the farms, and refund the 1% interest they had charged.

Tobiah and his son had each married Jewish women so some of the Jews were on Tobiah’s side. They even acted as spies for Tobiah against Nehemiah. After Nehemiah returned to Persia, the high priest allied himself with Tobiah the Ammonite, took away the treasure room of the Levites, and converted it into spacious living quarters for Tobiah. When Nehemiah returned, he angrily threw out Tobiah’s furniture, restored the room for the Levites’ tithe, recalled the Levites from their refuges, and appointed another priest, a scribe, and two Levites over the treasuries.

Twenty days after the wall was completed, the eight-day feast of tabernacles (Sukkoth, booths) was kept for the first time since Joshua died, a thousand years before. Two days afterward the sons of Israel were fasting and confessing their sins, the Levites read aloud the Law of the LORD for three hours, and then they recounted for another three hours the LORD’s protection from the time he called Abram out of Ur in Chaldea, to the coming into the Promised Land, and then the disobedience of Israel in the land for which they had been dispersed and impoverished. Thereupon they all made a covenant to be faithful, and eighty-four priests, Levites, and princes set their seal to it.

Again there is a lesson for Christians today: When one is discouraged by circumstances, consider what is right and pleasing to the Lord. When Nehemiah heard of the difficulties of others, he put his life on the line to ask the king for permission to do what is right. There was opposition from without and opposition from within. Compromise was made to seem the easiest way to handle problems. But right is right; by diligently pursuing what was right, Nehemiah avoided mental problems and got the job done. It can work for Christians today.

1. James B. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East* [ANE], Vol. I, p. 279-281, gives an Aramaic-language letter of the Jews in Elephantine, written in the 17th year of Darius II, month 8, day 20 (BC 407 Nov. 25), referring to a letter written “to Delaiah and Shelemiah, the sons of Sanballat the governor of Samaria.

2. In his twelve years as governor, Nehemiah took no taxes from the people for himself (Nehemiah 5:14-18).

Fleeing Mystic Babylon

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.--Jeremiah 50:8

Carl Hagensick

Babylon was not only a literal city and empire, but also a symbol of oppressive captivity. Thus it was not unusual for first century Jews to refer to Rome as Babylon. It is in this sense that we see Babylon referred to as emblematic of a great power oppressing true Christians in Revelation: “And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH” (Revelation 17:15).

Just as many literal Israelites fled literal Babylon when the decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1) granted them the freedom to do so, Jeremiah predicts that many Christians (symbolic Israelites) leave the oppressive system that persecuted them when the greater-than-Cyrus (the Messiah, Isaiah 45:1) gives them the same opportunity. Just as it was only a minority of Jews who left literal Babylon, so it only a minority of Christians will heed the call to flee mystic Babylon.

“Come Out of Her”

It is right after the strong condemnation of “Babylon the Great” in Revelation 17 that we read these words: “After these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies. And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.”

Two voices are heard in the these pronouncements: the first is that of a bright-shining angel, with a description matching that of Christ at his second advent, with a simple judgmental statement, “Babylon is fallen, is fallen”; the second is merely described as “a voice from heaven” calling a warning to “my people” to come out lest they partake of her sins and receive the consequential plagues. These words echo a similar denunciation and warning in Revelation 14:8-12.

The reason for the condemnation of Babylon is because she “is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean bird.” These terms indicate that the system called “Babylon” has become a haven for disreputable and unchristian elements.

Nearly all expositors attribute the term Babylon to a rejected and worldly church system, with most Protestant writers being more specific in applying it to the papal power. However, Revelation 17:5 gives a broader application, referring the term not only to the rider of the beast but also indicating that she is a “mother of harlots,” implying a guilty complicity not only of Papacy, but of the Protestant sects that emerged from her.

The lowering of Christian standards and the wide-scale use of such attractions as bingo parties, bazaars, and athletic events to broaden the appeal of Christianity have certainly resulted in a sizable influx of church members for other than spiritual reasons. In many cases the church has become a social club and in its wildest excesses has harbored outright scam artists cloaked in the garb of clergy.

A second condemnation relates to her committing fornication with the kings of the earth, a thinly veiled metaphor for the formation of unions and the use of accompanying political and military power to put down dissent.

Jeremiah Prophesies Doom

In a soulful lament, the prophet Jeremiah decries the foretold crisis in Christendom: “How do ye say, We are wise, and the law of the LORD is with us? Lo, certainly in vain made he it; the pen of the scribes is in vain. The wise men are ashamed, they are dismayed and taken: lo, they have rejected the word of the LORD; and what wisdom is in them? Therefore will I give their wives unto others, and their fields to them that shall inherit them: for every one from the least even unto the greatest is given to covetousness, from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely. For they have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace. Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore shall they fall among them that fall: in the time of their visitation they shall be cast down, saith the LORD. I will surely consume them, saith the LORD: there shall be no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree, and the leaf shall fade; and the things that I have given them shall pass away from them. Why do we sit still? assemble yourselves, and let us enter into the defenced cities, and let us be silent there: for the LORD our God hath put us to silence, and given us water of gall to drink, because we have sinned against the LORD. We looked for peace, but no good came; and for a time of health, and behold trouble!”

The general charge here appears to be unawareness. The attempt to heal the ills of Christendom amounted to little more than a new patch on an old garment. The healing attempt was too little, merely the saying of “Peace, peace!” The lack of true spiritual fruitage became evident and the Lord said he would withdraw his favor from them.

The sincere Christian laity was disturbed but, rather than taking a stand for the principles of righteousness, they responded with the plaintive cry, “Why do we sit still? assemble yourselves, and let us enter into the defenced cities, and let us be silent there: for the LORD our God hath put us to silence, and given us water of gall to drink.” Far better would it have been to “come out of her” instead of hunkering down and accepting the pathetic status quo.

It is just such an attitude that the Revelator calls “partaking of her sins.” Such an attitude while remaining in the “defenced cities” of Babylon, fails to remove them from the impending danger of the resultant plagues.

Whither Shall We Go

The Revelation call to “come out” does not give direction as to where to go. Certainly it is not the thought to merely depart and form another sect. That has been done countless times since the Great Reformation with the resulting new church soon copying the errors of its predecessor.

Perhaps the answer is best given in Isaiah: “Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. For, behold, the LORD cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain” (Isaiah 26:20,21).

The departure is not into another denomination but into a closer personal bond with God, a bond of personal prayer and fellowship. Such a tie does not preclude fellowship with other like-minded sincere Christians, but it does indicate a relationship where beliefs are not dictated in creedal fashion but arrived at independently through personal conviction. In Isaiah, as in Revelation, the prophet indicates that this self-imposed exile is only for a short time, until the Lord has finished punishing the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity. Not only will the sins be punished but all attempts to cover up will be removed for the earth “shall no more cover her slain.”

The Destroying Plagues

Just as a series of plagues in ancient Egypt paved the way for the Israelites to realize their destiny in the promised land of Canaan, so a series of “seven last plagues” removes the effete religious systems of our day to prepare the ground for the “promised land” of Messiah’s kingdom.

This series of plagues is described in detail in Revelation 16. Taken as a whole they represent the fullness of “the wrath of God” (Revelation 15:7). While the sum total of these plagues may be what is described in Revelation 18:8 as the plagues of “death, mourning, and famine,” it is more likely that these describe a still different set of troubles yet in store for antitypical Babylon.

Revelation 18

The contents of this chapter appear to fall into three sections:

1. Verses 1 through 8 describe the pronouncement of judgment on Babylon and the reasons for it.
2. Verses 9 through 20 describe the reaction of those who trafficked with her to her impending calamitous overthrow.
3. Verses 21 through 24 describe the final collapse of these systems called “Babylon.”

In the first section, her boastfulness is seen when she proudly proclaims, “I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow.” Some see in this proclamation a hint that there will be a future union between church and state. Other texts do seem to indicate such an action, particularly Revelation 16:13 where, during the sixth plague, the beast, dragon, and false prophet speak with one united voice. This union is apparently dissolved in the seventh plague (Revelation 16:19).

However our text in the 18th chapter does not seem to refer to this incident. Note that it is Babylon (Papacy) itself that states the claim to be a queen. The Papal system never claimed to be married to the kings of the earth, denying a fact which is manifestly evident. Instead they have always claimed to be a virgin church, married only to Christ. It appears to be their continued insistence on this claimed relationship which they here maintain, self-confident that such a claim will protect them from the “sorrow” of the destructive plagues to which they are sentenced.

In the second section of the chapter three classes bemoan the impending doom of Babylon: 1) the kings of the earth; 2) the merchants; and 3) the shipmasters. Each has profited historically from their relationship with the great religions of the world. It has been the so-called Christian nations that have pushed the trade barriers to the farthest corners of the earth and promoted the cause of imperialism, forcing the poorer nations to become the colonies of their far-flung empires.

In the last section of the chapter, the final collapse of Babylon is prefigured as a millstone that is raised up on high only to be hurled into the sea. Its fall is complete and final for it “shall be no more at all.” In this ultimate destruction comes the final expose of their wickedness in persecuting the true saints as “in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth.”

Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin

Literal Babylon came to its end suddenly as the besieging Median forces under Darius dug a channel to divert the waters of the Euphrates, opening up a dry channel by which to enter the walled and heavily fortified city even as the Babylonian king Belshazzar celebrated a great feast in his palace. The commentator John Gill connects this feast with the annual Sachaenean feast in honor of the Babylonian god Shach (or Sheshach, see Jeremiah 25:26). Daniel predicted this conquest as he interpreted four words that mysteriously appeared on the palace wall: Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin. “This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians” (Daniel 5:26-28). Each word bore its own separate meaning in the announcement of the overthrow of Babylon.

1. **MENE:** Implying a specific due time for the final punishment of that mighty empire.
2. **TEKEL:** Showing that their deeds had been weighed in the balance scales of justice and did not match up to their responsibilities.
3. **PERES (UPHARSIN):** The mode of carrying out the sentence was a conquest by the united empire of the Medes and Persians.

Many Bible Students see a deeper and cryptic meaning to these words as well, indicating the time lapse between the rise of literal Babylon and mystic Babylon. Each of the three unique words was also a unit of weight in the Chaldean system.

1. A Mene (often translated “pound”) was equivalent to 1,000 gerahs, the basic unit of weight.
2. A Tekel (or shekel) was worth 20 gerahs.
3. Peres (meaning a division or half) was used in the way we use the term “half dollar” and referred to a half maneh (or mene), thus equaling 500 gerahs.

Put together, two manehs, one shekel, and one half-maneh totaled 2,520 gerahs, the same number as the days in seven prophetic years, a time period associated the Gentile dominion over Jerusalem. This stretches from the beginning of the Babylonian conquest of Israel under Nebuchadnezzar in 607 B.C. to 1914 when World War I undermined the power base of church-state unions by exposing the claim of the “divine right of kings” as false and gradually replacing reigning autocracies with more democratic forms of government.

As He-Goats Before the Flock

Those who are admonished to flee Babylon are described as the “he-goats before the flock.” Thus the exodus of sincere Christians from the corruption of mainline Christianity is only the forerunner of all being freed from the oppressions and spiritual misrepresentations of that system called “Babylon, the Great.”

The call continues to echo throughout the world: “Come out of her, my people!”

News and Views

Pastoral Bible Institute News

Religious

Talk of trials, burned witches and forbidden books echoed in the Vatican on Tuesday as Pope John Paul asked forgiveness for the Inquisition, in which the Church tortured and killed people branded as heretics. The pope made his request in a letter read out at a news conference on a new book on the Inquisition. He repeated a phrase from a 2000 document in which he first asked pardon "for errors committed in the service of truth through use of methods that had nothing to do with the Gospel." That was shorthand for torture, summary trials, forced conversions and burnings at the stake. -Pope Gregory IX created the Inquisition in 1233 to curb heresy, but Church officials soon began to count on civil authorities to fine, imprison, torture and kill heretics. It reached a peak in the 16th century to counter the Reformation. One of the best-known victims was the astronomer Galileo, condemned for claiming the earth revolved around the sun. He was rehabilitated under Pope John Paul in 1992.

--Reuters, 6/17/2004

Militants from a predominantly Christian tribe killed at least 500 people in two attacks on a Muslim town in central Nigeria. Red Cross workers who interviewed witnesses and families of victims, and inspected a mass burial site "estimate 500 to 600 dead," said Umar Abdu Mairiga, head of the Nigerian Red Cross team visiting the mostly Muslim town of Yelwa after the assaults by the Tarok tribe. Thousands of people fled the fighting, and at least 158 people were wounded. Religious, ethnic and political enmities—often intertwined—have fueled outbreaks of communal bloodshed resulting in more than 10,000 dead since President Olusegun Obasanjo was first elected in 1999, ending 15 years of repressive military rule. In February, Muslim militants in Yelwa were blamed for killing nearly 50 people, many of them Christians who took refuge in a church.

--Associated Press, 5/6/2004

- 74% of Americans believe that Satan exists. Among evangelicals, the number increases to 93%.
- 36% believe that the Book of Revelation contains "true prophecy"; 47% say it's metaphorical.
- 17% believe that the end of the world will occur in their lifetime.

--Newsweek, 5/24/2004

Social

43,220 people were killed on U.S. highways in 2003. That represented the highest number of deaths since 1990. Motor vehicle crashes are the eighth leading cause of death for Americans. They are the top cause of death from ages 4 through 33, and for toddlers aged 2, according to a recent National Highway Traffic Safety Administration analysis. Motorcycle fatalities increased last year by 11% to 3,592, as more states abandoned mandatory helmet laws. Nearly half of the motorcyclists killed were 40 or older.

--Los Angeles Times, 4/29/2004

The drought gripping the West could be the biggest in 500 years, with effects in the Colorado River basin considerably worse than during the Dust Bowl years, scientists at the U.S. Geological Survey said Thursday. The Colorado River has been in a drought for 10 years, reducing an important source of water for millions of people across the West, including Southern California. Scientists use tree-ring reconstructions of Colorado River flows to estimate what conditions were like before record-keeping began in 1895.

--Los Angeles Times, 6/19/2004

Polio has swept from Nigeria into ten other African countries that had been declared polio-free, threatening the largest outbreak seen in years. The epicenter of the polio outbreak is Kano state in northern Nigeria, a Muslim area that suspended polio vaccinations last year after religious leaders warned that they caused female infertility, officials from the World Health Organization said. Nigeria now accounts for 77% of all polio cases. The polio virus mainly affects children younger than five. Most will be paralyzed for life. Few will be able to walk. In many of the countries where polio has resurfaced, no more than 30% of children are vaccinated against the disease. Tests by Nigerian health authorities several months ago proved the vaccinations to be safe.

--Los Angeles Times, 6/23/2004

The death toll from floods and mudslides on the island of Hispaniola jumped to more than 860 Wednesday as emergency workers searched for survivors and buried victims. The death toll has been high because the border area [between Haiti and the Dominican Republic] is largely deforested, allowing flash floods carrying mud and debris to easily sweep away flimsy homes and crude shacks of wood and tin. [Rescue teams said] the death toll could go much higher.

--Los Angeles Times, 5/27/2004

Scientists at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) have discovered a protein that extends life by as much as 50 percent. The protein is released in the body during times of famine. The finding may explain why severe restriction of calories leads to longer lives, a phenomenon shown repeatedly in mice, fruit flies and other organisms. The MIT experiments were on mice; researchers believe humans have the same survival reflex. The scientists say their goal is to find an anti-obesity drug that mimics the molecular effect of famine without the dieting. Ageing is not considered a disease, and required human trials could span one hundred years or more, making such a drug commercially unfeasible. Extending life expectancy in the industrialized world by 50 per cent would mean most of us could expect to live until 120, and some could make it to 180, according to experts.

--*Nature*, 6/3/2004

Political

The United States has started to lose its worldwide dominance in critical areas of science and innovation, according to federal and private experts who point to strong evidence like prizes awarded to Americans and the number of papers in major professional journals. Foreign advances in basic science now often rival or even exceed America's, apparently with little public awareness of the trend or its implications for jobs, industry, national security or the vigor of the nation's intellectual and cultural life. "The rest of the world is catching up," said John E. Jankowski, a senior analyst at the National Science Foundation, the federal agency that tracks science trends. "Science excellence is no longer the domain of just the U.S." Even analysts worried by the trend concede that an expansion of the world's brain trust, with new approaches, could invigorate the fight against disease, develop new sources of energy and wrestle with knotty environmental problems.

--*New York Times*, 5/3/2004

As many as 1 million people may die in the western Sudanese region of Darfur if sufficient international aid can't be sent there, U.S. Agency for International Development Administrator Andrew Natsios said. The U.N. said Darfur is the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. Thousands of civilians have been killed and thousands more driven from their homes. The U.S. has urged the Sudanese government to clamp down on what it has described as a government-supported militia targeting black Sudanese in the area. Eric Reeves, who has written more than 600 articles on Sudan and testified before the U.S. Congress, said the dead are victims of a genocidal campaign by the Sudanese government that he said armed the so-called Arab *jenjaweed* militia to destroy entire populations of Africans. Natsios said that a famine is unavoidable because no crops have been planted because of people fleeing their lands.

--Bloomberg News, 6/3/2004

Verbal and violent anti-Semitism in the Netherlands is probably greater today than it has been during any other time in the last two centuries, with the exception of the Nazi occupation. Excessive Dutch tolerance has become an incentive for crime. Developments in anti-Semitism and anti-Israelism are good indicators of what is happening in Dutch society at large. Due to the relatively high crime-rate among the Dutch Moroccan community, and the international Arab anti-Semitic hate propaganda, Jews are highest on the list of targets for the racists' behavior. Easily recognizable, Jews often try to hide their identity in public.

--Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, Daily Alert, 6/25/2004

Financial

The World Trade Organization (WTO) [has] favored Brazil in a complaint that the U.S. cotton subsidy program violates global trading rules by distorting world prices and blocking developing nations' goods from reaching market. It was the first case by the WTO to examine the effect of export subsidies on agricultural products. The U.S. last year gave producers of rice, wheat, cotton, and other commodities more than \$19 billion in aid. The White House vowed to appeal the WTO's decision and said it considered the subsidies to be "fully consistent" with international trading rules.

--Los Angeles Times, 4/28/2004

[China] is the world's biggest consumer of copper, tin, zinc, platinum, steel and iron ore; second biggest of aluminum and lead; third largest of nickel ... It is now the world's second-largest oil consumer [after the United States], and accounted for 35 percent of the global rise in oil demand in 2003.

--Asian Development Bank's annual economic report, Newsweek 5/31/2004

A new study finds that one of every 125 Americans is a millionaire—reflecting a growth rate not seen since the late 1990s, at the peak of the stock-market bubble. The 2004 World Wealth Report, compiled by brokerage firm Merrill Lynch & Co. and consultancy Capgemini Group, paints a picture of financial resurgence among the world's wealthy. The U.S. and Canada together added more new millionaires in 2003 than Europe, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East combined. The report highlights the extent to which wealth remains concentrated among the few. The wealthiest 1% in the U.S. control more than a third of the nation's wealth—the starkest such concentration among industrialized countries.

--Wall Street Journal, 6/15/2004

Israel

The Israeli Supreme Court decided that municipalities must allow the sale of pork if a majority of residents demand it. Secular rights activists hailed the ruling but Orthodox Jews warned that it would undermine the nation's Jewish identity. Pork consumption is forbidden under Jewish law. Under a 1956 Israeli law, it is up to municipalities to decide whether to allow pork sales. The court decision came in a case brought against three municipalities that did not allow the sales.

--Los Angeles Times, 6/16/2004

The world's smallest computer - about a trillionth the size of a drop of water - may also be the world's tiniest medical kit. Made entirely of biological molecules, this computer was programmed by Israel's Weizmann Institute researchers to identify changes in the body's balance of molecules indicating the presence of certain cancers, to diagnose the type of cancer, and to react by producing a drug molecule to fight the cancer cells. The Weizmann Institute of Science team that developed the computer published these results last month in Nature magazine. In one series of test-tube experiments, the team programmed the computer to identify RNA molecules that indicate the presence of prostate cancer and, following a correct diagnosis, to release the short DNA strands designed to kill cancer cells. Similarly, they were able to identify, in a test tube, the signs of one form of lung cancer. One day in the future, they hope to create a "doctor in a cell", which will be able to operate inside a living body, spot disease and apply the necessary treatment before external symptoms even appear. "It is clear that the road to realizing our vision is a long one," said Prof. Ehud Shapiro, head of the team of scientists. "It may take decades before such a system operating inside the human body becomes reality. Nevertheless, only two years ago we predicted that it would take another ten years to reach the point we have reached today."

--Arutz 7, 5/5/2004

Kidney disease affects as many as one in 12 people and causes millions of deaths each year. But its diagnosis, based mainly on blood and urine tests, is not always accurate. Standard hospital and clinic magnetic resonance imaging scanners, which are used to view many organs, don't always present the whole picture for kidneys because they image water molecules. But in waterlogged kidneys, the technology may not distinguish between different functional parts. Now, Professor Hadassa Degani of the Weizmann Institute's biological regulation department and her team have found a way to see into kidneys using MRI that scans sodium ions rather than water. "If we were able to see so much in a tiny rat kidney, think of how much more we can see in a human kidney," says Degani. "It's a wonder the method had not been applied before."

--The Jerusalem Post, 5/9/2004

Today, the State of Israel took a step of great importance for its future. The government of Israel approved the disengagement plan I presented. We sent a clear message to the people of Israel, our Palestinian neighbors, and the entire world. Israel is taking its future into its own hands. The disengagement process has begun. Today, the government decided that it is Israel's intention to relocate all Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip and four settlements in Samaria by the end of 2005. Most Israelis understand the great importance of today's government resolution. It is a resolution that ensures the future of Israel. It is a resolution that is good for Israel's security, its international standing, its economy, and the demography of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel. Today's government resolution gives hope to every citizen of Israel. During the past three and a half years, the terror organizations have tried to break the spirit of the people of Israel. They did not succeed. The Jewish people cannot be broken; we will never break.

--Speech by Ariel Sharon as reported by Reuters and Haaretz Service, 6/6/2004

U.S. President Bush has, once again, suspended the relocation of the American embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Israel's capital, Jerusalem. Asserting that U.S. national security will be harmed if he implements the U.S. law requiring the move, Bush signed yet another six-month security waiver. Congress overwhelmingly approved the Jerusalem Embassy Relocation Act in 1995, mandating that the embassy be moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem by May 1999 and that the U.S. recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital. Former U.S. President Bill Clinton, who promised in both of his presidential campaigns to move the embassy, signed successive six-month security waivers, thus passing on the "hot potato" to his successor.

--Arutz Sheva, 6/18/2004

The Jewish Agency reports that *aliyah* [Jewish immigration to Israel] from France more than doubled in 2002 compared with the year before, from 1,000 to over 2,030, and increased slightly in 2003, to 2,083. In Great Britain, by contrast, where the Jewish population is almost half that in France, the number of olim [immigrants] last year was only 405 - up from 277 the year before.

Michael Jankelowitz of the Jewish Agency reports that last year's most dramatic increase in aliyah occurred in Venezuela, home to 16,000 Jews. Only 37 made aliyah in 2002, but this number tripled to 109 last year. From the United States and Canada, 2,385 Jews came home to Israel in 2003 - up from 1,664 in 2002, but still only a tiny fraction of the total Jewish population.

--Arutz Sheva, 6/20/2004

A pool that served as a main water reservoir for Jerusalem residents 2,000 years ago has been uncovered, the Antiquities Authority announced on June 9.

The Pool of Siloam was uncovered by chance at the southern end of the City of David - in what today is Silwan - while the city was carrying out infrastructure work for a new sewage pipe. Archaeologist Eli Shukrun said that two millennia ago, Jewish residents would use the pool to gather water for their homes, as a meeting place, and also possibly as a mikveh (ritual immersion pool). After lying untouched for 2,000 years, archaeologists first uncovered one step, and then several more, leading down to the pool, whose water came from the nearby Gihon spring. "This find is of major importance to the archaeological world," Antiquities Authority director Shuka Dorfman said on June 9 at a short ceremony at the site, where excavations are ongoing. For the time being, the site will not be open to the public.

--The Jerusalem Post, 6/10/1004

Book Review

Desire of The Everlasting Hills. *The World Before and After Jesus.* Thomas Cahill. Anchor Books, New York, 1999. 353 pp.

Thomas Cahill is a well-known author who began a series of perspectives on history which he calls, "The Hinges of History." He profiled both the Irish and the Jews in previous treatises, and in this third volume of his works (he says four additional volumes are planned), he deals with the historical figure of Jesus. His chronicles are aimed at imparting the positive elements of history rather than the catastrophic elements. As he describes it, "History is also the narratives of grace, the recountings of those blessed and inexplicable moments when someone did something for someone else, saved a life, bestowed a gift, gave something beyond what was required by circumstance."

In this profile of Jesus, he gives the reader a remarkable look into the secular world before and after Jesus, relating how Jesus made a difference in the unfolding of history, and radically altered the course of Western society. Of particular interest to Bible Students will be the commentary around social background of the development of the early church. One passage will indicate the value this serves in Bible study:

"The overwhelming majority of Jesus' original followers—and all the witnesses to his resurrection—were Jews, as devout about their religion as Jesus had been. In their encounters with Paul's gentile "Jews" they often found themselves shocked at the new converts' blank ignorance of Jewish law and practice. How could these strange new people, admittedly believers in the risen Jesus, be admitted to the fold of Judaism? They were unclean and knew nothing of the need for ritual bathings and washings; they ate anything; they did not keep the Sabbath; their men were uncircumcised."

Because Cahill does not write from a fundamentalist's point of view, his commentary is valuable (although one must sort out his higher criticism) to those wishing to read an unbiased view of the accounts of the Roman, Jewish and Greek worlds at the time of Jesus and Paul. The book will help the reader to understand how the philosophy of the Greeks infiltrated the church at such an early stage. However, it may also challenge a reader who believes Paul taught the rejection of the Law and Judaism.

--*Len Griehs*

Poems and Short Features

Babylon Is Fallen

Hail the day so long expected,
Hail the year of full release.
Zion's walls are now erected,
And her watchmen publish peace.
Through our Shiloh's wide dominion,
Hear the trumpet loudly roar;

All her merchants stand with wonder,
What is this that comes to pass?
Murm'ring like the distant thunder,
Crying "O, alas, alas."
Swell the sound ye kings and nobles,
Priest and people rich and poor;

Blow the trumpet in Mount Zion,
Christ has come the second time.
To rule with a rod of iron,
All who now as foes combine.
Babel's garments we've rejected,
And all our fellowship is o'er.

In the Dawning, Hymn 6

“Cease Ye from Man”

"If any man serve Me, let him follow Me." -- John 12:26

IT IS time for the establishment of the true kingdom--it is just at hand. It is time for the gathering of the elect out of every quarter, every district of this figurative Babylon in which the Lord's people are captives to these devices of Satan; it is time for a reassertion of the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free; it is time that the Lord's people should recognize him as their only King and Director; it is time for them to hear the words, "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?" (Isaiah 2:22) It is time for the Lord's people to realize that the Lord is entirely competent to conduct his own work in the way most pleasing to himself, and most advantageous to those who are truly his; it is time for them to look to the Lord to see what agents, what channels of truth, what ministries of service in spiritual Israel he has provided or is providing.

When we come to realize the situation, we find that all this matter of recognizing popes, cardinals, bishops, doctors of divinity, etc., is contrary to the divine arrangement--in direct antagonism to the same; but that, nevertheless, it has not hindered and will not be permitted to hinder, the accomplishment of the Lord's work and the gathering of the true Israelites, the elect, the precious, the Lord's jewels, out of nominal Israel. This work of the Lord is going gradually on, regardless of what the people in general may do. -
R3217:3

Songs in the Night, August 1

Writing

Book of life to us is open,
While we live therein we're writing;
Every day a new page opens,
Every day our actions fill it
With things good or things indifferent.

God, too, in his book keeps record,
In his Book of Life he's entered
Names which worthy, may abide there;
But those names which prove unworthy
Shall be blotted from its pages.

"**Mene, mene,**" numbered, numbered,
God is writing, as the days go;
In the balance we are weighed,
Weighed our thots and words and motives
Weighed the effort, weighed the action.

On time's wall a hand is writing
Hand invisible is writing.
Will the words acclaim us faithful,
Or will the word be, "**Tekel,**"
That is written on the wall?

Martin C. Mitchell, *Poems of the Way*, page 139