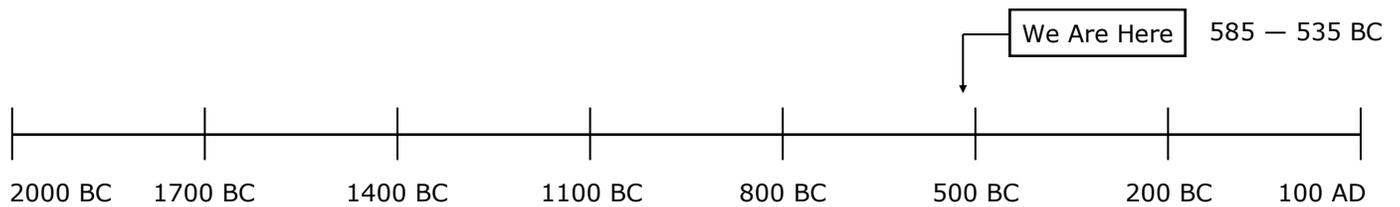


The King of Kings



Helpful Resources

Babylonian/Persian Rulers (p.73), Overview of Bible History (p.37), Map of Persian Empire (p.115)

Making Sense of It All

- The Big Picture

The much anticipated return of the Jews has finally arrived. The Babylonians declined swiftly after the madness and death of Nebuchadnezzar (*Daniel 4*). It was only a few years later that God brought the end of this powerful empire, during the reign of its foolish co-rulers Nabonidus and his son Belshazzar (*Daniel 5*). God handed over the Babylonians to the next power, the Medo-Persians (539), when King Cyrus conquered Babylon. Remember Nebuchadnezzar's statue dream from *Daniel 2*? Here is the fulfillment of the arms and chest of silver. King Cyrus, and his vice-regent Darius, made some major changes to the empire; one of the most important changes came when Cyrus, under the conviction of God, released the Jews to return to their homeland. After 70 years in captivity, just as God had foretold, the Jews were allowed to go home. Behind the leadership of Zerubbabel, the Governor, and Jeshua the High Priest, every Jew who was willing and able could return to Judah. King Cyrus even released all of the remaining Temple articles, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken. The main objective of the return, by order of Cyrus, was to rebuild the Temple, which the people began as soon as they arrived. However, enemies near Jerusalem, namely Samaritans, got in the way.

- Pictures of Christ

When the Jews returned, their first order of business was to rebuild the Temple. However, realizing that it would take some time, the Jews, ready to renew their daily sacrifices and annual festivals, built the altar first. Herein lies a great deal of symbolism pertaining to Christ:

1. **Temple Reconstruction:** For the Jews, there was nothing weighing on their minds more heavily than restoring their relationship with God and renewing their commitment to Him; they had many sins of which to repent and God's sanctuary was of utmost importance.
2. **Altar Was Top Priority:** The beginning of that restoration process was removal of sin at the altar. The altar is a type of the cross, where Christ's blood was spilled for redemption. How symbolic to desire renewal and start with a sacrifice portraying their future Messiah.
3. **Feast of Shelters:** The imagery runs deep, as the first festival that the people celebrate in their new era is the Feast of Shelters, which reminded them of what their forefathers experienced in Egypt as freed slaves. Here the Jews were set free again.
4. **Jeshua the High Priest:** Jeshua is the Hebrew name for Jesus; how appropriate it is that the first sin sacrifice was made by this priest.

- Personal Application

What is often overlooked here is the amazing work of God to bring about this return, especially when it comes to His overruling the kings in charge.

1. **King Nebuchadnezzar** (*Daniel 4*): Though Neb viewed himself as the top dog, he soon found out that he was not. In his pride, God reduced Neb to an animal for seven years and swiftly ushered in the decline of his great empire. "All the inhabitants of earth are accounted as nothing, but God does according to His will... and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him 'What have you done' " (*Daniel 4:35*).
2. **King Belshazzar** (*Daniel 5*): In his foolishness of sacrilege and in trusting the security of his "invincible" city, God judged this king and ended his life. Belshazzar's empire and city were given to another more worthy than he. "The Most High God rules the kingdoms of the world and appoints anyone He desires to rule over them... You have not honored the God who gives you the breath of life and controls your destiny" (*Daniel 5:21-23*).
3. **King Darius** (*Daniel 6*): Although deceived by his officials, Darius made a foolish law that all should worship him. Thus, Daniel was thrown into the den. God overruled in the situation, saved Daniel, and judged the officials. "Your God is the living God; He will endure forever. His kingdom will never be destroyed; His rule will never end" (*Dan. 6:26*).
4. **King Cyrus** (*Ezra 1*): After conquering Babylon, Cyrus was convinced by Daniel and others (says Josephus the historian) that God had called him to a special purpose — to release the Jews and to rebuild their sacred Temple. "The Lord stirred the heart of Cyrus to make this proclamation, 'The Lord of heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has appointed me to build Him a Temple at Jerusalem...'" (*Ezra 1:1, 2*).

Clearly no king or country is exempt from being held accountable by God. He is the Sovereign of all and does what He likes with the nations (*Proverbs 21:1*).

- Prophetic Passages

1. **Ezekiel's Temple** (*Ezek. 40-43*): Ezekiel is given the greatest revelation of the mysterious Millennial Reign of Christ and the Temple of God on earth during that time.
2. **The Four Beasts** (*Daniel 7*): Similar to the statue dream of Neb in *Daniel 2*, Daniel sees a depiction of the four great empires of ancient history and a glimpse of the end times.
3. **The Ram and the Goat** (*Daniel 8*): Daniel received insight from God concerning the epic battle between Alexander the Great and the Persian Empire (330 BC); Persia fell.
4. **End Times** (*Daniel 9*): Daniel is given some strange numbers from God that foreshadowed major events to come: the death of Christ, destruction of Jerusalem, and the Great Tribulation. Daniel is also allowed to see the end times and the Anti-Christ.

The Bottom Line

God is in *control*, not man; His *sovereignty* should both *challenge* and *comfort* us.

Questions to Consider

1. God is just and merciful. How does the return of the Jews demonstrate both aspects?
2. How should the knowledge of God's sovereignty both challenge and comfort us today?