

King Cyrus

Isaiah 44-45

We will continue our study through the Six Kings of Daniel. Thus far we have studied three kings: Darius, Nebuchadnezzar, and Belshazzar. Tonight I would like to consider King Cyrus, the ruler of Persia.

Cyrus is mentioned three times in the book of Daniel.

Daniel 1:21, “And Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus.”

Daniel 6:28, “So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.”

Daniel 10:1, “In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a thing was revealed unto Daniel, whose name was called Belteshazzar; and the thing was true, but the time appointed was long: and he understood the thing, and had understanding of the vision.”

It is said that Cyrus, the founder of the Persian Empire, once had captured a prince and his family.

When they came before him, the monarch asked the prisoner, "What will you give me if I release you?" "The half of my wealth," was his reply.

"And if I release your children?" "Everything I possess."

"And if I release your wife?" "Your Majesty, I will give myself." Cyrus was so moved by his devotion that he freed them all.

According to historians Cyrus was born around 590 B.C. and died in battle in 530 B.C. His tomb can be visited today in Iran.

The Persian Empire was the most powerful state in the world until its conquest two centuries later by Alexander the Great.

Cyrus is mentioned some twenty-three times in the Old Testament. Isaiah refers to Cyrus as Jehovah's "shepherd," the Lord's "anointed," who was providentially appointed to facilitate the divine plan.

God would lead this monarch to "subdue nations" and "open doors" (an allusion to the Jews' release from Babylonian captivity).

He would make “rough places smooth,” i.e., accommodate the Hebrews’ return to their Palestinian homeland.

It was one of the most extraordinary acts in international history. When the Persians overthrew the Babylonian empire (539 B.C.), Cyrus, the conqueror, issued a proclamation releasing the Jews from their seventy-year period of captivity.

The biblical record of that edict reads as follows Ezra 1:1-4, “Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, 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.”

Cyrus would ultimately be responsible for the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the reconstruction of the temple.

Amazingly, the king would accomplish these noble tasks even though he did not “know” Jehovah (Isaiah 45:4-5).

Although Cyrus was a pagan in sentiment and practice, yet, as an unconscious tool in the hands of the Lord, he would contribute mightily to the Jewish cause, and so, indirectly, to the coming of God’s greater Anointed, Jesus of Nazareth.

There are two remarkable roles that the Lord called Cyrus to fulfill as King of Persia. They are recorded for us in Isaiah chapters 44 and 45.

1. King Cyrus: God's Shepherd

We read in Isaiah 44:28, “That saith of Cyrus, ***He is my shepherd***, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.”

Cyrus is described as God's Shepherd. God set up King Cyrus to be the shepherd of his people, to rescue them from wolves or tyrants, to gather them together, to rule them gently, and to provide comfortably for them.

Shepherd was an epithet which Cyrus took to himself; and what he gave to all good kings.

This Cyrus decreed that the foundation of the temple be laid. Not that it should be built.

The fact is, only the foundation was laid in the days of Cyrus, the Ammonites having prevented the building of the temple. It wasn't resumed until the second year of Darius, one of Cyrus's successors. There is often a precision in the expressions of the prophets.

Nearly 150 years before Cyrus was born, the prophet Isaiah foretold his birth, his name, and the tasks that the Creator God had predetermined for him to accomplish.

The Bible records that certain people are foreordained to be born and carry out specific tasks for God during their lifetime and a few of these individuals are even named before their birth. Cyrus the Great was one of these individuals whom God had predestined to play a pivotal roll in his redemptive plan for humanity.

King Cyrus was an extremely important person, because God destroyed the Babylonian empire through him, and brought a close to a seventy-year punishment of the Jews that God imposed on them for their rebellion against him.

Also through King Cyrus, God set into motion his seventy-week prophecy that fixed the year for the Messiah's death and resurrection, and reveals the sequence of events and dates for the Messiah's return which will bring to an end human rule of the earth, and usher in the government of God to rule over the entire earth.

We read in John 10:14-16, “I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.”

Is Jesus Christ your shepherd? Do you go to Christ because you are his sheep and you know the Shepherd's voice?

King Cyrus was God's shepherd.

2. King Cyrus: God's Anointed

Isaiah 45:1, “Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut.”

The Hebrew word is *mashiah*, which has come down to us as "messiah" and translated as *christos* in Greek.

Because we now use this term exclusively for Jesus Christ, the Messiah, many have failed to realize the breadth of its meaning.

Mashiah simply means "anointed" or "anointed one." The Old Testament writers use it and its verb form, *mashah*, to describe kings (David, Saul, even Gentile kings like Hazael— II Samuel 1:14; 12:7; I Kings 19:15); priests, including the high priest (Leviticus 4:3, 5); and prophets (I Kings 19:16; Isaiah 61:1).

Normally, these people were anointed with oil in a ritual as a sign of being set apart for the office that they were about to fulfill.

Thus, at its most basic, *mashiah* indicates a person God authorizes and sets apart for His service.

The type of service he renders can vary. Obviously, kings, priests and prophets fill very different roles, though some "anointed ones" have fulfilled more than one. David, for example, was both king and prophet, while Samuel and Jeremiah were priests and prophets. Jesus Christ is the only Anointed One to fulfill all three roles, as prophet, priest, and king.

One aspect of these roles begins to stand out as God's revelation unfolds throughout the Bible: deliverance.

We can see this most clearly in the text Jesus recites to inaugurate His ministry, Isaiah 61:1-3:
“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.” (see Luke 4:16-21)

Jesus explicitly confirms in Luke 4:21 that He fulfilled these verses, at least up to the first part of verse 2, for indeed He is the ultimate Messiah. He will fulfill the remainder of these deliverances upon His return as King of kings and Lord of lords. Even His name, Joshua or Jesus, means "savior" or "deliverer," and God frequently calls things and people what they are and/or do.

In short, then, *mashiah* has three primary facets:

1. It describes a person whom God sets apart for His service.
2. Such a person may fill one or more roles in His service.
3. His primary function is to cause deliverance.

We will see that, strange as it may seem, Cyrus, King of Persia, qualifies as a messiah! King Cyrus is a great type of Jesus Christ.

Why did God anoint a man like Cyrus? We find the answer within the Cyrus prophecy in Isaiah 45:3-7, "And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel.

For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me. I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.”

God raised Cyrus up to do His bidding to prove to him and all the world who is the true God! God went before Cyrus (Isaiah 45 verse 2), paving the way for his victories and policies so that His will and His plan would move forward. We should be able to look back at history and see how God worked to bring all the necessary elements into place for His purpose to be fulfilled.

After God used Nebuchadnezzar to punish His people, He raised Cyrus to deliver them from their captivity in Babylon and return them to their land. For the real Christ to be born in Bethlehem as the prophecy states, Jews had to be living in Judea.

He also inspired Cyrus to institute his conciliatory policy toward foreign religions so that a Temple could be built to which His Son could come. And among other points, Jerusalem had to be rebuilt so Jesus could die outside the city for our sins.

No other "god" can do these things! Only the Most High God, the Almighty Sovereign of the universe can work out events over such long periods of time. He can take sinful men who have never even desired a relationship with Him and cause them to do His will and bring about His purpose.

God is in control. Light, darkness, peace or calamity—none of these things happen without His permission. "I, the LORD, do all these things," He says.

What sort of reaction should this produce in those of us who understand? The next few verses provide the answer:

Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the LORD have created it. Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth.

Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What
makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands?
Woe unto him that saith unto his father, What
begettest thou? or to the woman, What hast thou
brought forth?(verses 8-10)

Since God has such control, we should respond by
giving him the obedience and cooperation that He
deserves as our Creator, God and Father! It is
pointless to resist or rebel! Why incur His wrath by
striving with Him? God will ultimately be
victorious—why not join the winning side and reap
the benefits?

Of all people, because we see the signs of the end
time all around us, this lesson should stir us to zeal
and overcoming. As momentous as the days of Cyrus
were, they are nothing to be compared with the
awesome acts God will soon visit upon this earth.

The real Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, will return to
conquer, to punish, to restore and to reconcile all
nations to Himself. Then the deeds of an amazing
human king, Cyrus of Persia, will pale beside the
glories of the wonderful Kingdom of God.

In closing, King Cyrus of Persia was called by God to fulfill two remarkable roles: To Be God's Shepherd and God's Anointed. King Cyrus decreed that the Jews return to Jerusalem and start the arduous task of rebuilding the temple. These incredible events were setting the stage for the coming of Jesus Christ who would save His people from their sins. Let us praise Our Heavenly Father and Our Great Redeemer for their grace and love toward us! Let us pray.