

# Return from Captivity and the Cyrus Cylinder

## Psalm 126

### GOD'S STORY AND OUR STORY IN HISTORY

A. Brought back from captivity (v.1). The people of God have a history of captivity and return (Genesis 3:19; Exodus 12; Psalms 51-60). Do you? Will you?

B. Now and not yet.

Psalm 126:1

<sup>1</sup>When the LORD **brought back** the captive ones of Zion, We were like those who dream.

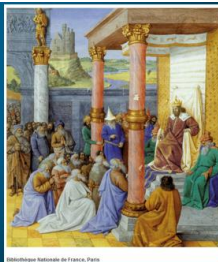
Psalm 126:4

<sup>4</sup>**Restore** our captivity, O LORD, As the streams in the South.

### THE RESTORATION OF GOD'S PEOPLE IN THE TIME OF CYRUS

A. Like Adam and Eve, the Israelites were kicked out of the Promised Land because of their sin (see 2 Chronicles 36).

B. Psalm 126 is celebrating Cyrus' decree and Israel's return from captivity.



The Persian king Cyrus the Great, after his conquest of Babylon in 539 B.C.E., tells the assembled Hebrew exiles that they may return home and rebuild their destroyed Temple, in this illumination (c. 1770–1775) created by the painter Jean Fouquet for a French edition of Flavius Josephus's *Antiquities of the Jews*.

<http://goo.gl/ihr1OD>

1. Isaiah prophesied Israel's return, even calling Cyrus by name more than 100 years before he was born (Isaiah 44:28-45:7)!

2. Ezekiel prophesied Israel's restoration in his vision of the Valley of Dry Bones (Ezekiel 37; cf. Amos 9:13-15; Zech.3:20).

“Son of man, can these bones live?” And I answered, “O Lord GOD, You know.”

## **GOD'S REVELATION IS ROOTED IN HISTORY**

“[G]ospel means “good news,” tidings, information about something that has happened. In other words, it means history. A gospel independent of history is simply a contradiction in terms” (J. Gresham Machen, “History and Faith”, Princeton, NJ : *The Princeton Theological Review*, 13.3 [July 1915], 337-338).

“Biblical faith is based upon history... Faith is dependent on historical facts” (I.H. Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*, [Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 1970], 37,46)

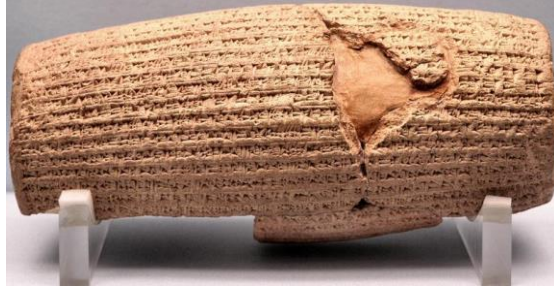
The Christian stake in history is immense. Every aspect of lived Christianity—worship, sacraments, daily godliness, private devotion, religiously inspired benevolence, preaching—and every major theme of Christian theology—the nature of God in relation to the world, the meaning of Christ, the character of salvation, the fate of the universe—directly or indirectly involves questions about how the present relates to the past (Mark Noll, “History.” In *Dictionary for the Theological Interpretation of the Bible*. Edited by Kevin J. Vanhoozer [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005], 295).

- A. One of the difficulties in understanding the Bible is its historical context.
- B. God's revelation is rooted in history and one of the greatest events in history was Cyrus' decree!

## **CYRUS' DECREE AND THE CYRUS CYLINDER (Ezra 1:1-4)**

- A. For centuries, the only record we had of the Jewish return from exile and the decree of Cyrus came from the Hebrew Scriptures.
- B. In 1879 the Cyrus cylinder was discovered by a British Museum exhibition digging in Babylon!

“Over the years the Bible has been attacked by critics more than any other work of literature. But the Bible has an uncanny way of vindicating itself. Its superiority to attack, its capacity to withstand criticism, its amazing facility to be proved right after all, are all staggering by any standard of scholarship.” (Bible and Spade)



“[T]his object is one of the great declarations of a human aspiration. It stands with the American constitution. It certainly says far more about real freedoms than Magna Carta.” (Neil MacGregor, Art historian and museum director)

C. Why the decree of Cyrus and the Cyrus cylinder is important for all of history and our restoration from the curse, sin, and death through Jesus.

## **SUMMARY AND APPLICATION**

### **FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

*List several returns from captivity celebrated in the Bible.*

*How is history like a rowboat?*

*Why is history important to the Christian faith? Why is the decree of Cyrus one of the most important events in Christian history?*

### **FOR FURTHER READING/STUDY**

Neil MacGregor, “2600 Years of History in One Object”; <http://goo.gl/QMkjGA>

J. Gresham Machen, History and Faith, Princeton, NJ : *The Princeton Theological Review*, 13.3 [July 1915].