

STUDY PACK 17

PERSIA

“The _____ makes understandable the stability and prosperity of the Persian Empire.”
~ Rousas J. Rushdoony, *World History Notes*, p.33 ~

I. THE BACKGROUND OF PERSIA

Persia was formed from two primary groups of people. The Medes (an Aryan or Iranian people) and the Elamites (a Mesopotamian people) inhabited roughly the same territory. They often worked together. Their first attempt at an empire came under a leader named Cyrus.

II. CYRUS THE GREAT

A. The prophecy.

The coming of Cyrus is prophesied in Isa. 44:28 – 45:1-4.

“From the Scripture we see that Cyrus was foreordained, _____, to do two things. First, to besiege and take Babylon, and secondly, to issue an Edict, two years later, when the term (70 years) of the Babylonian captivity had expired (536 B.C.), for the return of the Jews to Jerusalem.”
~ Clarence Larkin, *The Book of Daniel*, p. 936 ~

Cyrus was one of the three great influential emperors of Ancient History along with Nebuchadnezzar and Alexander the Great.

B. Satan’s attempt to prevent the fulfillment of the prophecy.

“Herodotus, the Greek historian of the mid-fourth century B.C., best describes the legend of Cyrus. According to him, Astyages was Cyrus’ maternal grandfather, who dreamt that his daughter Mandane produced so much water that it overran his city and the whole of Asia. When the holy men (*magi*) heard of the king’s dream, they warned him of its consequences.

As a result, her father gave Mandane in marriage to a Persian called Cambyses who, although of noble descent, was considered by Astyages to be “much lower than a Mede of middle estate”. Mandane and Cambyses were not married more than a year when Astyages once again had a dream; this time he saw a vine growing from inside Mandane’s womb, which overshadowed the whole of Asia. The *magi* immediately saw a bad omen and told the king that Mandane’s son would usurp his throne. The king sent for his pregnant daughter and kept her under tight guard until the child was born. Royal instructions were given to Harpagus, a Median nobleman and confidant of the king, _____. But Harpagus decided not to kill the baby himself.

Instead, he called for a royal herdsman and ordered him to carry out the king’s command, adding that he would be severely punished if the child was allowed to live. However, the

herdsman's own wife had given birth to a still-born child during her husband's absence, and she convinced him to keep the royal baby and bring it up as their own. They then presented Harpagus with the corpse of their still-born child, claiming that it was the prince.

Cyrus soon developed into an outstanding young boy, overshadowing his friends and showing royal qualities of leadership. One day, during a game with other children, Cyrus was chosen to play king. Promptly assuming this role, he punished the son of a distinguished Mede who refused to take orders from him. The father of the badly beaten boy complained to King Astyages, who in turn called for Cyrus in order to punish him. When asked why he behaved in such a savage manner, Cyrus defended his action by explaining that, because he was playing the role of king, he had every reason to punish someone who did not obey his command. Astyages knew immediately that these were not the words of a herdsman's son and realized that the boy was his own grandson, the son of Mandane. Later the story was confirmed by the herdsman, albeit with great reluctance. Astyages then punished Harpagus by serving him the cooked remains of his own son's body at a royal dinner. On the advice of the *magi*, the king allowed Cyrus to return to Persia to his real parents.

Harpagus vowed to avenge his son's death and encouraged Cyrus to seize his grandfather's throne. Herodotus described how Harpagus wrote his plan on a piece of paper and inserted it into the belly of a slain hare, which had not yet been skinned. The skin was sewn up and the hare given to a trusted servant who, posing as a hunter, traveled to Persia and presented it to Cyrus, telling him to cut it open. After reading Harpagus' letter, Cyrus began to play with the idea of seizing power from Astyages. As part of a careful plan, he persuaded a number of the Persian tribes to side with him to throw off the yoke of Astyages and the Medes. Cyrus succeeded in overthrowing his grandfather and became the ruler of the Medes and Persians..."

This account is taken from *Persian Myths* by Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis.

C. Cyrus as a just ruler.

The following material is adapted from the Cyrus the Great web site posted on Farsi Net.

When the conqueror Cyrus the Great rode into Babylon, _____
_____.

Yes, they'd have to bend to his rule. But Cyrus (580-530? B.C.) made sure that wouldn't be difficult. In contrast to other rulers of his day, he was just. In fact, his style of government was a critical factor in his becoming the greatest ruler of his time.

Cyrus' Persian Empire, which extended from India to the Mediterranean Sea, was _____
_____ until its conquest two centuries later by Alexander the Great.

Cyrus' first military conquest was of Media in 550 B.C. One of his first acts was to do away with the draconian tradition that would have had him raze the city and murder its citizens enmasse.

Cyrus appointed _____ and then ruled the kingdom in a kind of dual monarchy, with both Medes and Persians holding high offices. The satrapy, as this system of government became known, put a native Mede in power as a semiautonomous ruler, or satrap.

Cyrus instituted certain checks, though. For example, several of the satrap's underlings reported directly to Cyrus.

“Nevertheless, the close relationship between Persians and Medes was never forgotten. Medes were honored equally with Persians; they were employed in high office and were chosen to lead Persian armies,” wrote A.T. Olmstead in his *History of the Persian Empire*.

From Media, Cyrus went on to conquer the western land of Lydia and several Greek states on the Aegean Sea. He then turned east, taking the ancient kingdom of Drangiana, Arachosia, Margiana and Bactria. He converted most into satrapies and put natives in command.

He also showed great respect for conquered peoples' _____. At that time, every tribe or kingdom had its own gods and rites.

While it was customary for conquerors to deface the idols and religious statues of those they defeated, Cyrus forbade that practice. When it did occur, he quickly remedied it.

“Large numbers of foreign captive divinities gave further opportunity for royal benevolence.” Olmstead wrote. That earned him the respect and homage of the races over whom he ruled.

“Cyrus' biggest conquest was Babylonia, a wildly rich and powerful kingdom in the fertile crescent between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. It was, however, in decline. Babylonian king Nabu-naid was unpopular with many segments of his population. He had alienated the high priests.

Cyrus took Babylon, the greatest city of the ancient world, in 539 B.C. He did so to the cheers of its citizens, who welcomed him as ruler because of word of his just treatment.

He lived up to that reputation, freeing more than 40,000 enslaved Jews and allowing them to return to Palestine. He is mentioned 22 times in the Bible for these and similar deeds.

Cyrus always took pains to convey that he was not a foreign king and conqueror, but a _____ and, therefore, a _____.

For example, after conquering Babylon, he immediately addressed its citizens in their own language and added “King of Babylon” to the top of his long list of titles. It was an unheard of gesture of respect.

“In the eyes of his Babylonian subjects, Cyrus was never an alien king,” Olmstead wrote. “The proclamation of Cyrus to the Babylonians, issued in their own language, was a model of persuasive propaganda.”

He also left in place _____ and allowed _____.

Cyrus was a great learner. He observed the customs and traditions of the cultures he conquered and made sure the best elements were put to use for all of Persia's benefit.

Cyrus invented, or appropriated and improved upon, the idea of the postal system, according to the Greek historian Xenophon. Figuring out how far a horse could travel in one day, Cyrus built a series of posting stations, each one day's ride apart, across his empire. The system ensured the efficient flow of information between him and his satraps.

III. PERSIA AND THE RULE OF LAW

The Persian Empire emphasized the rule of law. Even captive peoples were regulated by _____. Their rule was _____ by many tribes and states.

IV. THE RETURN OF THE JEWS

- A. According to Jewish tradition (Josephus), _____ showed Cyrus the prophecies concerning him in Isaiah.
- B. Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to their homeland, see Ezra 1:1-4. He returned the _____ to Jerusalem, Ezra 1:7-11.

V. PERSIAN KINGS IN THE BIBLE

SECULAR HISTORY NAME	DATES	BIBLE NAME
Cyrus	539-530 B.C.	Cyrus – Isa. 44-45
Cambyses	530-521 B.C.	Ahasuerus – Ezra 4:6
Pseudo Smerdis	521 B.C.	Artaxerxes – Ezra 4:7
Darius the Great	521-486 B.C.	Darius – Ezra 5,6
Xerxes	486-465 B.C.	Ahasuerus – Esther
Artaxerxes	464-423 B.C.	Artaxerxes-Nehemiah

VI. THE GREEK WARS

The expansion of Persia's empire was halted by a _____.