

The Judgment of Babylon - 538BC

The city of Babylon was one of the wonders of the ancient world and reached the zenith of its glory in the days of Nebuchadnezzar. Nimrod was its founder and when he began to build the Tower of Babel God confused the languages and scattered the people. Babylon was the centre from which idolatry spread throughout the world. Babylonian gods were known by various names among different people but they were the same gods. When God's people, Israel, turned to the gods of Babylon, God allowed Nebuchadnezzar to take them captive to Babylon for 70 years where they were mocked by the Babylonians as indicated in Psalm 137:3 where we read: "There they that carried us away captive required of us a song;



and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion". The Psalm ends with the following:

"O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones" (Ps.137:8-9).

Isaiah foretold the total desolation of Babylon:

"And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. **IT SHALL NEVER BE INHABITED, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation:** neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there. But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there" (Isa.13:19-21).

Some teach that Babylon must be rebuilt and destroyed again in the Last Days but the Bible is very clear that Babylon will **never be rebuilt**. Jeremiah wrote in his prophecy of the destruction of Babylon and indicated that it would be **the Medes** who would destroy Babylon. He wrote: "Make bright the arrows; gather the shields: **the LORD hath raised up the spirit of the kings of the Medes:** for his device is against Babylon, to destroy it; because it is the vengeance of the LORD, the vengeance of his temple...And **I will make drunk her princes, and her wise men, her captains, and her rulers, and her mighty men: and they shall sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake, saith the King, whose name is**

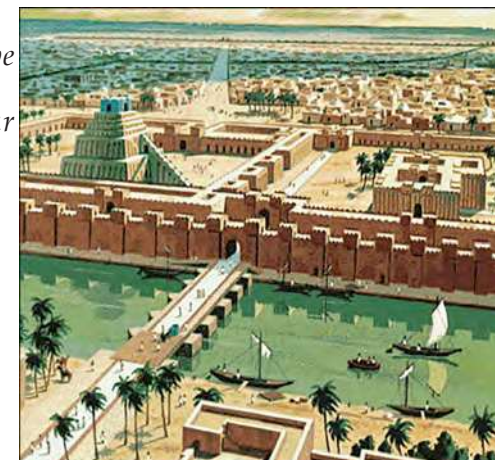
the LORD of hosts. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; The broad walls of Babylon shall be utterly broken, and her high gates shall be burned with fire; and the people shall labour in vain, and the folk in the fire, and they shall be weary" (Jer. 51:10-11, 56-58).

The city was suddenly captured when Darius the Mede entered via the river gates which had been left open while the rulers engaged in a drunken feast exactly as prophesied. Furthermore, when Seraiah, one of the princes in Israel, accompanied King Zedekiah on a visit to Babylon in the 4th year of his reign, Jeremiah gave him a scroll with his prophecy of Babylon's destruction and asked him to read it on arrival at Babylon. After reading the scroll, Seraiah was to bind a stone to it and cast it into the Euphrates River and say: "Thus shall Babylon sink, **AND SHALL NOT RISE FROM THE EVIL THAT I WILL BRING UPON HER**" (Jer.51:64).

Alexander the Great purposed to rebuild Babylon in 332BC and he died before he could begin; Saddam Hussein planned to rebuild Babylon and he was hanged; the palace which he had commenced was never completed and is derelict. The site is to be redeveloped as an archeological treasure.

The prophecy of the sudden destruction by fire of "Mystery Babylon" (Rev. chs.17 & 18) at the end of the Tribulation refers to Papal Rome for she sits on "seven hills", is guilty of "the blood of the martyrs of Jesus" and is associated with Antichrist who is a **Roman prince**. When she burns it will be visible from the sea whereas Babylon is hundreds of kilometers from the ocean. Rome now stretches to the coastline.

Neither is it Mecca as some teach, for it lies in a valley 80 km from the sea.



Saddam Hussein's derelict palace

After the Babylonian Captivity

Jeremiah prophesied that the Jews would be held captive in Babylon for 70 years (Jer.25:11-12; 29:10) after which they would return to the land. *“Behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith the LORD, and Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will bring them against this land... And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon **seventy years**. And it shall come to pass, **when seventy years are accomplished**, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the LORD, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations”* (Jer.25:9-12).

About 700BC Isaiah prophesied that Cyrus, as the first king of the Persian Empire, would release the captive Jews and allow them to return to the land and rebuild **the Temple (Isa.44:28; 45:1-5)**. Cyrus’ decree was given in 536BC which was 70 years after the first Babylonian invasion in 606BC.

Zerubbabel led the Jews back to Jerusalem from Babylon to rebuild the Temple in 536BC but work on the Temple was hindered by the people of the land and construction was not completed until 516BC in the reign of Darius the Great; 70 years after its destruction in 586BC. While the Temple was rebuilt, the city of Jerusalem remained in ruins until Nehemiah returned in the month Nisan, in the 20th year of Artaxerxes, as described in Nehemiah chapter 2.

This second decree by Artaxerxes is very important because it is the **start date for the seventy “weeks” prophecy** recorded in Daniel chapter 9 verses 24 to 27 and describes God’s plan for Israel from 445BC to when the nation will be blessed in the millennial Kingdom. Artaxerxes began his reign in 465BC and the 20th year was therefore 445BC which fixes the start date for the “seventy weeks” prophecy.

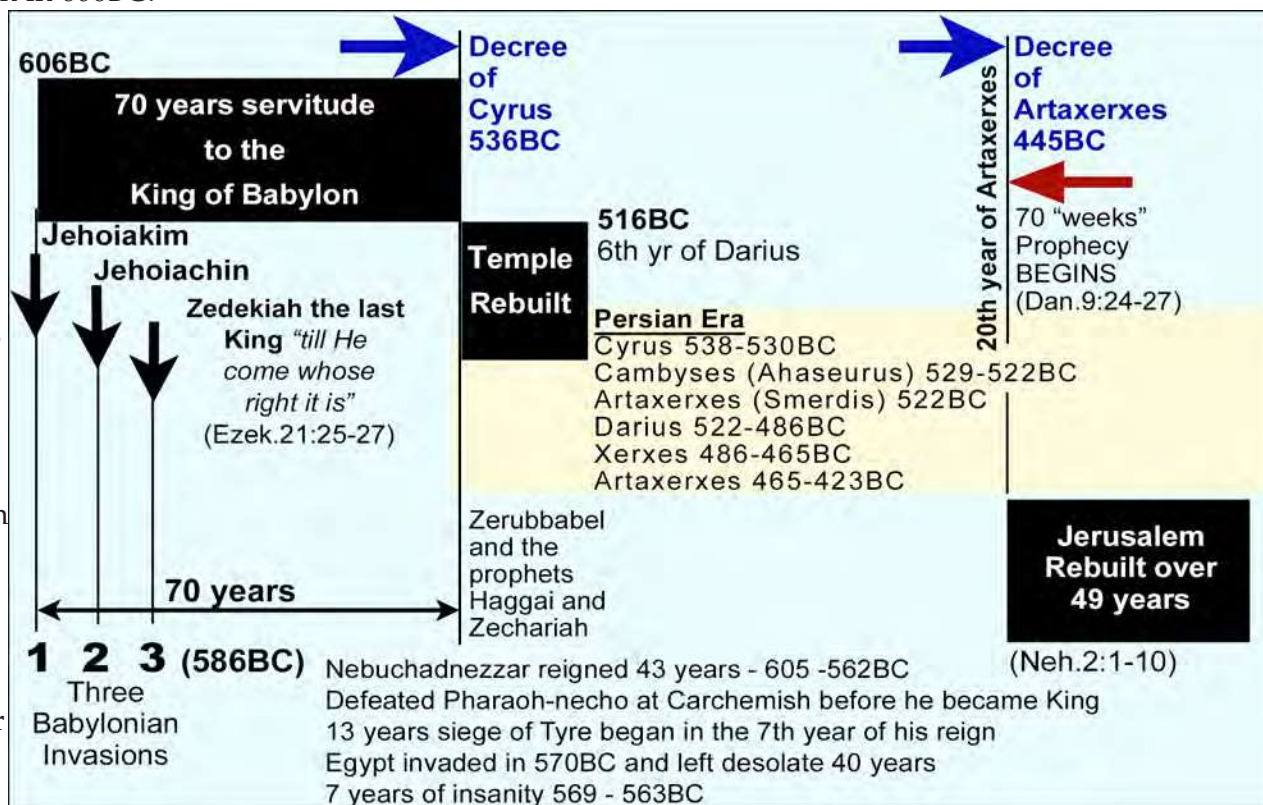
When Daniel realized the 70 years foretold by Jeremiah was soon to be completed, he sought the Lord to know God’s future plans for His people and the “**holy city**”, **Jerusalem**.

The decree of Cyrus allowed the Jews to build a “house” for the God of Israel but the decree of Artaxerxes allowed them to rebuild the “city” of Jerusalem. When Nehemiah arrived

at Jerusalem the Samaritans frustrated the builders so within 50 days they erected the wall sufficiently to give protection. They then proceeded to build inside the wall.

The start-date for the 70 “weeks” prophecy has been confused with the decree of Cyrus (536BC) and the return of Ezra in the 7th year of Artaxerxes (458BC). However, the prophecy clearly states that the seventy “weeks” (sevens) starts “*from the going forth of the commandment to **restore and build Jerusalem***” (Dan.9:25).

Neither Zerubbabel nor Ezra **rebuilt Jerusalem** but Nehemiah did and the second decree therefore begins Daniel’s prophecy. From the 20th year of Artaxerxes to Palm Sunday is $69 \times 7 = 483$ prophetic years. There is a long gap after the 69th “week” until a Roman prince makes a covenant with Israel in the last days for the final seven years.



The Persian Empire - Its Rise, Fall, and Future

Isaiah prophesied (700BC) the destruction of Babylon by the Medes and Persians in 538BC and even named the King of Persia, **Cyrus**, as God's instrument to bring this about (Isa.44:28; 45:1-4). Babylon had been used of God to chasten Israel for 70 years but the idolatrous Babylonians had mocked the God of Israel (Ps.137:1-4) and gone beyond what God had allowed (Zech.1:15) and so God raised up Cyrus to execute judgment on Babylon.

Herodotus (450BC) the Greek historian, recorded in the first of his nine books, the history of the kings of the Medes beginning with the first king, Deioces, who revolted against Assyria about 705BC and whose grandson, Cyaxares, joined with Nabopolassar, Nebuchanezzar's father, to conquer Nineveh in 612BC. Cyaxares' son, Astyages, married Alyattes the daughter of the king of Lydia but they had no sons. Their daughter Mandane married a Persian prince, Cambyses, and Cyrus was born to them. Astyages had a dream which he interpreted to mean that Mandane's child would take Asia away from him and so he ordered Cyrus be killed soon after he was born.

Harpagus, Astyages' General, could not kill Cyrus and gave him to the king's herdsman, Mitradates, whose wife had had a still-born baby which was buried in the place of Cyrus. At age 10, Cyrus was identified by Astyages who recognized the family likeness and Harpagus confessed that he had not killed Cyrus. Astyages then secretly killed the General's 13-year old son, cooked part of his body, and gave it to Harpagus to eat at a banquet. When he had eaten it, Astyages asked if he enjoyed it. The boy's head was then produced in a basket.

Cyrus was sent to his parents in Persia but, when he was grown, Harpagus sent a message to him that if he would raise an army and revolt, the Median army would surrender to him. Cyrus invaded Media, Astyages was killed, and Cyrus became king of the Medo-Persian Kingdom in fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy, being both Persian and Median.



Cyrus was favourable to the Jews and in fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy let the captive Jews return to the land (Isa.45:13) to rebuild the Temple in 536BC.

During the Babylonian era Elam (Persia) had come under Babylonian control as Jeremiah foretold that it would (Jer.49:35):

"Behold, I will break the bow of Elam...and I will cause Elam to be dismayed before their enemies (Babylon)" (Jer.49:35-37).

However, with the overthrow of Babylon by the Medes and Persians in 538BC God said He would set His throne in Elam (Jer.49:38) (Persia).

"And I will set my throne in Elam, and will destroy from thence the king and the princes (of Babylon), saith the LORD" (Jer.49:38).

The Persian Empire favoured the Jews. **Daniel** was Prime Minister under Cyrus, **Zerubbabel** was a body guard to Darius according to Jewish tradition, and Darius confirmed the decree of Cyrus (520BC) allowing the Jews to complete the Temple reconstruction. **Esther** was Queen to Xerxes

and **Mordecai** was Prime minister. Xerxes allowed the Jews to destroy all who would do them harm and Artaxerxes in 445BC made **Nehemiah** Governor in Judea and gave a decree that Jerusalem be rebuilt. **In the last days**, Iran (Persia) will be blessed: *"But it shall come to pass in the latter days, that I will bring again the captivity of Elam, saith the LORD"* (Jer.49:37). Other scriptures speak of Islamic nations turning to the Lord in the Tribulation. For example, Egypt and Assyria (Iraq) (Isaiah 19:18-25).

The Medo-Persian Empire is described as a bear in Daniel 7 that *"raised up itself on one side,*

and it had three ribs in the mouth of it between the teeth of it: and they said thus unto it, Arise, devour much flesh" (Dan.7:5). Persia dominated over Media and the three ribs represented Persia, Babylonia, and Media which were the core nations of the Persian Empire.