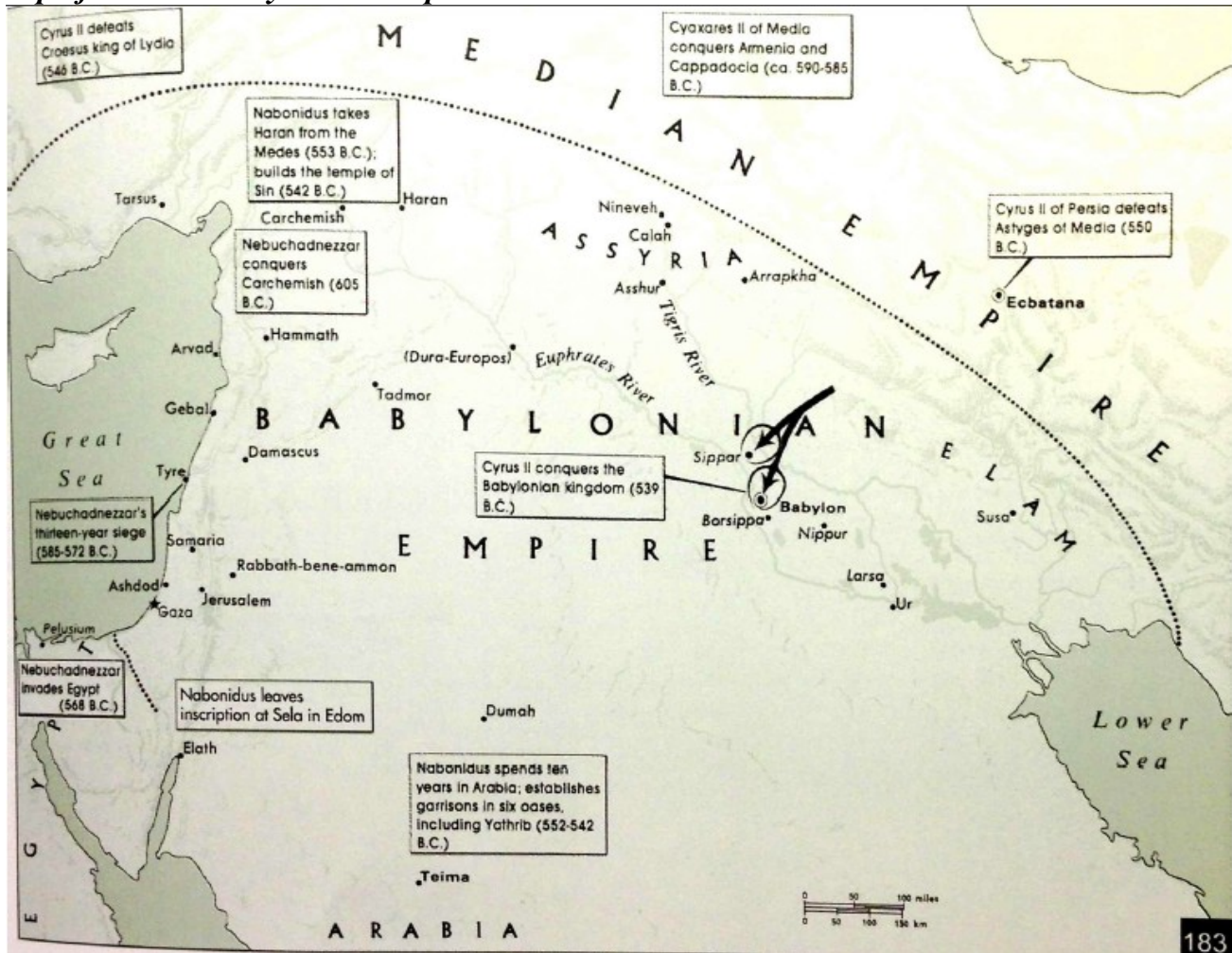


# God in the Persian Empire: Historical & Archaeological Perspectives on Ezra

הקב"ה בתוך ממלכת הפרסית: עיון היסטורי-ארכאולוגי בספר עזרא

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*Map of the Neo-Babylonian Empire*



## *Timeline of Events*

Event	Date
Overthrow of Yehoyakhin & First Wave of Judean Exile	597 BCE
Destruction of First Temple	586 BCE
Nabonidus Comes to Power in Neo-Babylonian Empire	556 BCE
Cyrus I ("The Great") Conquers Neo-Babylonian Empire	539 BCE
First Wave of <i>Shivat Zion</i> (led by Sheshbatsar, Zerubbabel and the priest, Yeshu'a)	538 BCE
Construction of Second Temple Completed (reign of Darius I "The Great")	515 BCE

## Yirmiyah 24

Yirmiyah's Prophecy of the Figs (Jer 24) – *Date:* Sometime between 597 – 586 BCE

<p>הֲרָאֵנִי יְקֹנֵק וְהִנֵּה שְׁנֵי דִידָאֵי תְאֵנִים מוֹעֲדִים לִפְנֵי הַיְכָל יְקֹנֵק אַחֲרָיִךְ הַגְּלוּת נְבוּכַדְרֶצְצַר מֶלֶךְ־בָּבֶל אֶת־יְכִנְיָהוּ בֶן־יְהוֹיָקִים מֶלֶךְ־יְהוּדָה וְאֶת־שָׂרֵי יְהוּדָה וְאֶת־הַחֲרָשׁ וְאֶת־הַמְּסַגְּרִים מִירוּשָׁלַם וַיְבִאֵם בָּבֶל</p>	<p>The LORD showed me, and, behold, two baskets of figs were set before the temple of the LORD, after that Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon had carried away captive Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, and the princes of Judah, with the carpenters and smiths, from Jerusalem, and had brought them to Babylon <b>(24:1)</b></p>
<p>כֹּה־אָמַר יְקֹנֵק אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כַּחֲתָאֵנִים הַטֹּבוֹת הַאֵלֶּה כֵּן־אֲכִיד אֶת־גְּלוּת יְהוּדָה אֲשֶׁר שְׁלַחְתִּי מִן־הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה אֶרֶץ כְּשׂוֹדִים לַטּוֹבָה</p>	<p>Thus said the LORD, the God of Israel; Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good <b>(24:5)</b></p>
<p>וְכַחֲתָאֵנִים הָרָעוֹת אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תֹאכְלֶנָּה מֵרַע כִּי־כֹה אָמַר יְקֹנֵק כֵּן אֶרְצֶנָּה אֶת־צִדְקִיָּהוּ מֶלֶךְ־יְהוּדָה וְאֶת־שָׂרָיו וְאֶת שְׂאֵרֵי יְרוּשָׁלַם הַנִּשְׁאָרִים בְּאֶרֶץ הַמִּצְרַיִם וְהַיֹּשְׁבִים בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם</p>	<p>And as the evil figs, which cannot be eaten, they are so evil; surely thus said the LORD, So will I give Zedekiah the king of Judah, and his princes, and the residue of Jerusalem, that remain in this land, and them that dwell in the land of Egypt <b>(24:8)</b></p>

## Cyrus Cylinder (discovered 1879)

<p><b>1) Description of Nabonidus</b></p> <p>in the sacred centers. By his own plan, he did away with<sup>3</sup> the worship of Marduk, the king of the gods; he continually did evil against his (Marduk's) city.</p>	<p><b>2) Return of gods to their cities</b></p> <p>region of Gutium, I returned the (images of) the gods to the sacred centers [on the other side of] the Tigris whose sanctuaries had been abandoned for a long time, and I let them dwell in eternal abodes. I gathered all their inhabitants and returned (to them) their dwellings. In addition, at the command</p> <p><b>3) Marduk appoints Cyrus</b></p> <p>(upon them). He surveyed and looked throughout all the lands, searching for a righteous king whom he would support. He called out his name:<sup>6</sup> Cyrus, king of Anshan;<sup>4</sup> he pronounced his name to be king over all (the world). He (Marduk) made the land of Gutium and all the Umman-manda<sup>5</sup> bow in submission at his feet. And he (Cyrus) shepherded</p>
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**Ezra 6 – Cyrus Declaration (Aramaic Version)**

<p>ביתא יתבנא אתר די־דבתין דבתין ואשויהי מסובלין רומה אמין שתין פתיה אמין שתין</p>	<p>Let the temple be rebuilt as a place to present sacrifices, and let its foundations be laid. It is to be sixty cubits high and sixty cubits wide</p>
<p>נדבכין די־אבו גלל תלתא וגדבר די־אע חדת וגפקתא מן־ בית מלכא תתיהב</p>	<p>With three courses of large stones and one of timbers. The costs are to be paid by the royal treasury.</p>
<p>ואף מאני בית־אלהא די־דהבה וכספא די־גבוכדנצר הנפק מן־היכלא די־בירושלם והיבל לבבל יהתיבון ויהר להיכלא די־בירושלם לאתרה ותחת בבית אלהא</p>	<p>Also, the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, are to be returned to their places in the temple in Jerusalem; they are to be deposited in the house of God. <b>(6:3-5)</b></p>

**Yeshayah 41**

<p>Yeshayah's Prophecy Concerning Cyrus &amp; the Return to Zion – <i>Date: After 539 BCE</i></p>	
<p>התרישו אלי איים ולאמים יתליפו כת יגשו אז דברו יחדו למשפט נקרבה</p> <p>מי העיר ממזרח צדק יקראהו לרגלו יתן לפניו גוים ומלכים ירדו יתן כעפר חרבו קנש נדף קשתו</p> <p>ירדפם יעבור שלום ארח ברגליו לא יבוא</p>	<p>Be silent before me, you islands! Let the nations renew their strength! Let them come forward and speak; let us meet together at the place of judgment.</p> <p>“Who has stirred up one from the east, calling him in righteousness to his service? He hands nations over to him and subdues kings before him. He turns them to dust with his sword, to windblown chaff with his bow.</p> <p>He pursues them and moves on unscathed, by a path his feet have not traveled before. <b>(41:1-3)</b></p>
<p>מי־פעל ועשה קרא הדדות מראש אני יקנן ראשון ואת־אתרנים אני־הוא</p>	<p>Who has done this and carried it through, calling forth the generations from the beginning? I, the Lord—with the first of them and with the last—I am he.” <b>(41:4)</b></p>
<p>ראו איים וניראו קצות הארץ יחדו קרבו ונאתיון איש את־רעהו יעזרו ולאחיו יאמר חזק</p> <p>ינתק חרש את־צורף מתליק פטיש את־הולם פעם אמר לדבק טוב הוא ונתקוהו במסמרים לא ימוט</p>	<p>The islands have seen it and fear; the ends of the earth tremble. They approach and come forward.</p> <p>They help each other and say to their companions, “Be strong!”</p> <p>The metalworker encourages the goldsmith, and the one who smooths with the hammer spurs on the one who strikes the anvil. One says of the welding, “It is good.” The other nails down the idol so it will not topple. <b>(41:5-7)</b></p>
<p>אתה ישראל עבדי יעקב אשר בחרתיך טרע אברהם אהבי</p> <p>אשר הוצקתיך מקצות הארץ ומאצילית קראתיך ואמר לך עבדי אתה בחרתיך ולא מאסתיך</p> <p>אל־תירא כי עמך־אני אל־תשתע כי־אני אלהיך אמצתיך אף־עזרתיך אף־תמכתיך בימין צדקי</p>	<p>“But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend,</p> <p>I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, ‘You are my servant’; I have chosen you and have not rejected you.</p> <p>So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my...right hand. <b>(41:8-10)</b></p>

### Assyrian & Neo-Babylonian Prophecies (la ta-pa-lah)

Ahat-Abiša	Now <i>fear not</i> , my king! The Kingdom is yours, yours is the power!
Urkittu-Šarrat	<i>Have no fear!</i> Well sheltered is Esarhaddon, king of Assyria
Sinqiša-Amur	<i>Have no fear</i> Esarhaddon! I will place you between my arm and my forearm.
Prophecy for Assurbanibal	<i>Fear not</i> , Assurbanibal!...I will look after you

### Ezra 1 – Cyrus Declaration (Hebrew Version)

<p>כֹּה אָמַר כּוֹרֵשׁ מֶלֶךְ פָּרֶס כָּל מַמְלָכוֹת הָאָרֶץ נָתַן לִי יְקֹנֵק אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהוּא פָקֵד עָלַי לְבָנוֹת לֹ בַיִת בִּירוּשָׁלַם אֲשֶׁר בִּיהוּדָה</p> <p>כֹּה אָמַר כּוֹרֵשׁ מֶלֶךְ פָּרֶס כָּל מַמְלָכוֹת הָאָרֶץ נָתַן לִי יְקֹנֵק אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהוּא פָקֵד עָלַי לְבָנוֹת לֹ בַיִת בִּירוּשָׁלַם אֲשֶׁר בִּיהוּדָה</p> <p>וְכָל־הַנְּשָׂאֵר מִכָּל־הַמְּקוֹמוֹת אֲשֶׁר הוּא גֵר־שָׁם יִנְשְׂאוּהוּ אַנְשֵׁי מְקוֹמוֹ בְּכֶסֶף וּבְנֹהַב וּבְרִכּוּשׁ וּבְבַהֲמָה עִם־הַנְּדָבָה לְבַיִת הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר בִּירוּשָׁלַם</p>	<p>This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: ‘The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah.</p> <p>Any of his people among you may go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem, and may their God be with them.</p> <p>And in any locality where survivors may now be living, the people are to provide them with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem.’ <b>(1:3-5)</b></p>
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### Earlier Biblical Imagery in Ezra 1, 3

<p>וַיִּסְדּוּ הַבְּנִיִּים אֶת־הַיֵּכָל יְקֹנֵק וַיַּעֲמִידוּ הַכֹּהֲנִים מִלְּבָשִׁים בַּחֲצֹצְרוֹת וְהַלְוִיִּם בְּנֵי־אָסָף בַּמְּצַלְתִּים לְהַלֵּל אֶת־יְקֹנֵק עַל־יְדֵי הַזֵּיד מֶלֶךְ־יִשְׂרָאֵל</p>	<p>When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests in their vestments and <i>with trumpets</i>, and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with cymbals, took their places to praise the Lord, <i>as prescribed by David king of Israel.</i> <b>(3:10)</b></p>
<p>וְהַמֶּלֶךְ כּוֹרֵשׁ הוֹצִיא אֶת־כְּלֵי בַיִת יְקֹנֵק אֲשֶׁר הוֹצִיא נְבוּכַדְנֶצַּר מִירוּשָׁלַם וַיִּתֵּנָם בְּבַיִת אֱלֹהֵיו</p>	<p>Moreover, King Cyrus brought out <i>the articles belonging to the temple of the Lord</i>, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and had placed in the temple of his god <b>(1:7)</b></p>
<p>וַיַּעֲשׂוּ אֶת־חַג הַסֻּכּוֹת כַּכְּתוּב וְעָלְתָּ יוֹם בְּיוֹם בְּמִסְפַּר כְּמִשְׁפֵּט דְּבַר־יוֹם בְּיוֹמוֹ</p>	<p>Then in accordance with what is written, they celebrated <i>the Holiday of Sukkot</i> with the required number of burnt offerings prescribed for each day. <b>(3:4)</b></p>