

What About God's Chosen People?

Part VII



By Philip E. Busby

Question #21 - *“Is it true that the Jews are God's chosen people? I have a Christian friend who says the Jews were not God's chosen people.”*

We ended our last segment by talking about how the time of the captivity of Judah in Babylon, when Jerusalem and the temple lay in ruin, really birthed Judaism as a religion, maybe not on such an official level, but in the fact Jews had to figure out what following God's Law without the temple would mean. We started a conversation about two major points concerning this issue, the first of which is the fact there were those of the northern kingdom carried away to different places many years before the southern kingdom of Judah was carried away to Babylon. These people faced the same problem of being without the temple. However, unlike those from the South who had the Law right up to their captivity, the northern kingdom had, for many years, already been corrupted by false religious practices designed by their own kings, which were meant to replace the true Laws of God. What this brought us to is the fact those carried to Babylon came from a far less disadvantaged position in knowing and maintaining the Law than those from the North.

In talking about how those from the northern kingdom did not have the Law so readily available to them, due to the fact there were not printing presses and

the like, we should also consider the fact, even as Judah fell, this was true, and just how many copies of the Law went with them is impossible to know. However, in considering what an overall disadvantage this was in maintaining not just the Jews as God's chosen nation, but the Laws themselves, again we should remember God intended the remnant He literally left on the land during the Babylonian captivity to stay - on the land! If they had, their biggest jobs during the absence of the temple and its ceremony could have been twofold. First, they could have taken up the job of ensuring a pure Hebrew writing of the Law was maintained. Second, they could have kept track of the yearly cycle the feasts were framed in, which was dependent on the harvest cycle of the land of Israel itself. Even a third advantage is seen in this, which is the availability of food and preparation for the weather conditions. Those of the next generations born outside Israel would not be use to the climate in Israel upon returning from the much different climate in Babylon. Instructions from those who had maintained a presence in the land would have been of great value!

While all of this shows us God had a better plan for preserving His nation than was taken advantage of, none of it means those coming back from the captivity were not actually of God's chosen nation. All this brings us to that second overall point I talked about making when discussing the beginning of Judaism as a religion coming at this time, and that point is the fact many will make the argument the Law the Jews hold is corrupted by the pagan practices of Babylon, if not all out based on them. In discussing this point, I would first like to say there is growing archaeological evidence that the kingdom of David and Solomon existed. There is also plenty of evidence Israel, as a nation, existed, and they had a set of laws which were different from those generally used in other lands. However, again I turn to the simple point, many people show us the Jews are God's chosen nation by the very fact that, to this day, they hate the Jewish people because of what they represent!

This hatred is based on the Jews religious beliefs and practices being uncommon. Everyone is, of course, entitled to their own opinion; but it is simply illogical to argue even a majority of the Laws the Jews hold were actually derived from Babylonian practices! If this had been true, the Jews would be revered by the world as the world still reveres the empires. Maybe even as one of its last greatest surviving, thriving, living history cultures! Some historians have referred to the string of empires that started with the Assyrians and ended with Rome as a “Golden Cord” of empires, which was broken when Rome fell. Just as Revelation prophesied, the world continues to go about in wonder of what these empires represent, not hate them. (Rev. 13, 17)

By looking at the best historically recorded empires out of these, we can see not only does the world today love what they represented but how similar they really are, because all false religion is built on the same basic humanistic practices, and they were able to borrow from and build on top of each other. This truth is in sharp contrast to the Laws of God which the Jews hold, and that's why they are hated by so many in this world. In looking at this golden cord of empires, we see how easily they religiously integrated one to the other, even one after the other, clearly borrowing from the one(s) before them. Nowhere is this clearer than with the Romans and Greeks. While the Romans came in with their own set of religious practices, they greatly revered what the Greeks had accomplished in organizing their religion. The Romans likely borrowed from the Greeks even before the Romans came to be the world power. This then is why we historically see Roman religion is so similar to Greek that you can set up a pantheon of, at least, all the major gods of both empires, with the Greek god of something on one hand, and the Roman god of that same thing on the other. The parallels are uncanny to say the least, and we could go into an entire study of this between the two peoples. In truth, with a little more effort, this can also be done going back through the entire golden cord. Just because the earlier empires' gods were not as neatly sown together as Greek mythology lays theirs out, doesn't mean there aren't direct parallels!

One of the oddest but probably most telling facts on this subject of emulation and similarity one with the other, is the fact the Greeks really rose to be an empire because a man named Alexander, who we now call "The Great," and his family were angered by the Medes and Persians empire for their incursions and attempt to expand their influence across Asia Minor and into the West, which until then had not been greatly harassed by the previous empires of the world. The West was considered more of a wild frontier, if you will. However, as the Greeks "developed," they took great offense at an eastern empire thinking it could simply move in and tell them who the king of the world was. Alexander's anger took the reigns of an army that left a trail of blood from Greece to Egypt and on to Mesopotamia, where he gained control of the entire empire of the Medes and Persians, thus founding the Greek empire. At the same time, when Alexander got to the capital city of Babylon, it is said he was greatly impressed with its grandeur. All anger aside, he did not return to his beloved home of Greece, and even ended up dying in Babylon.

When looking at how the Medes and Persians came to power, we see the truth of their quick takeover in

the book of Daniel. History records the Babylonians ignored all the warning signs - they were about to fall. However, the simple truth is, in one night Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians attack. Again, we see they did not totally transfer the seat of power from Babylon, and began to run the empire much as if nothing had changed. The Medes being satisfied with what the empire already culturally and religiously consisted of, did not even commit the normal acts of killing and transferring people away from their homes in order to shake things up and solidify their power. This is why men like Daniel easily went from serving in the Babylonian court to simply interacting with the Medes and Persians. They did not come in with great violence, but revered Babylon, its people, many of its laws, and even multiple religions among the empire, which had been suppressed. This truth plays a factor in why it was this empire that freed the Jews, even ordered the return of those willing to go back and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. At the same time, we see in the story of this period, those who hated the Jews reminded the king of Jerusalem's history, and the Jews were the culture that ended up being inhibited from accomplishing the task of reestablishing their way of life, even in their ancestral land! (Ezra 4)

During the golden cord, the only time there was true transfer from the grandeur of Babylon was at the start and at the end. Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrians, but that being true, we should remember Nineveh was simply one of the cities pointed out in Genesis as being built by Nimrod, whose kingdom was founded in Babel. (Gen. 10:8-12) The transfer from Assyrian to Babylonian empire was not without its bloodshed, but at the same time very political at its core. It was as if the transfer was more of a political shift between two of the places the beginning of empirical ideas started, which was with the Tower of Babel! The power shifting away from Babylon at the end of the cord is mainly due to the fact, when Alexander the Great died, his empire was divided into four parts, three of which survived as separate enough entities to fight greatly with each other for many decades. For a time, this took the emphasis off there even being a seat of power for the "empire," and Babylon lost some of its greatness in that regard. When the dust settled in the end of all this, the Greeks found themselves out of power and the Romans then ruled from their own version of Babylon, the city of Rome.

The fact Babylon as a city remained for so long as the symbol of great power and empire is why in the Revelation to John, Rome is not used in the illustrations, but Babylon. This in spite of the fact Rome was, by the time of John's vision, the imperial capital. Today, we may

look at Rome rather than Babylon as this symbol from the past, but that's because, as a city, Babylon was eventually lost in the sands of time. However, the ancient grandeur of things such as its hanging gardens and general beauty is talked about nonetheless, based just on what the history books proclaim about it!

Another interesting fact, when considering how much the world loves what the golden cord of empires represented, is at the fall of Rome. Again, an empire had pushed too far and angered people who decided fighting back was a good idea for them, especially since these people wanted more land for their growing families. This is why we talk about the barbarians of the North in many historical accounts, which ironically were maintained and written by descendants of these "barbarians." As these barbarians were eventually responsible for taking down the last great empire of the golden cord, they ransacked Rome itself and the empire in general, but they eventually found what they took great pleasure in pillaging was, in fact, very interesting to them! It was so interesting they eventually attempted to restart the empire and all it was. The problem ended up being, there was too much infighting among them to settle on just who should be the king of the world. Thus, instead, we ended up with several nation states who fought for centuries with each other, not one of them ever being able to gain the true upper hand.

This led to much of what some are very upset about today, as these nation states eventually spread their wings not so much over each other, but in an attempt to build empires by colonization and conquest of other parts of the world. Continuing to fight among themselves, they ended up in our modern era starting what history describes as two "World Wars." The first of which was characterized as the war to end all wars, but turned out to be only the beginning of a much longer bloodier conflict, which simply had a lapse in-between. The true fires of the second half of this great conflict was sparked mostly because a man named Hitler decided the question of reunifying the Roman empire, and power in general over the world, needed to be settled; and he believed he was the man to be that king of the world! The fact Hitler also made a centerpiece of his efforts the greatest attempt to ever be pursued in destroying the Jewish people, brings us full circle back to my point about how the Jewish ways and Laws were not derived from pagan practices of Babylon or they would not be hated so much by this world!

The truth is, Israel began in Egypt, and had it not been for their efforts there, Egypt would not be all that it had been. If God had not taken the opportunity to

devastate Egypt (and transfer most of its remaining wealth to the Israelite slaves who had built much of its grandeur at that time), due to Pharaoh's refusal to simply let God's people go, Egypt surely would have rose as the first world empire following the Tower of Babel, instead of Assyria. In this action, we see God using His nation to do much as He did by confounding man's language at the tower. God staved off man's attempt to establish a one world government. Israel also left Egypt, not as lowly slaves but with advanced skills by working for, with, and in this advancement driven society. Israel learned and helped develop advancements in, building, writing, and a whole array of things. So too, at the time of the Babylonian empire, God once again gave His people the opportunity to pickup on and develop the most advanced achievements in these kinds of areas, but claiming the interaction God's people had as responsible for their Laws and ways is no more true than it was coming out of Egypt!

When it comes to seeing some of what certain people would describe as Babylonian influence in the Jew's, what you're actually seeing is, again, the things they gained as well as helped develop while in Babylon. It helps to keep in mind that Daniel was high in both the Babylonian as well as the Medes and Persians empires because he showed himself, as Joseph had in Egypt, to be the wisest of the wise across the entire known world, and he was not the only Jew known for this. Thus, one can not say the "influence," which is talked about when looking at the Jews post-Babylon, is purely Babylonian. If one studies history well, you find God's chosen people are where many advancements came and still come from. Today as we look at the nation of Israel, we see a clear example of how much a world leader the Jews are in technology of all kinds. Being gathered back to their land, in spite of the external pressure desiring to destroy them, they are becoming the greatest example since the days of Solomon of being the center of world achievements in medicine, agriculture, defense, and technology in general. Yet many in the world still desire to wipe them from the map, because the ways of God they still represent is a threat to what man wants to do, which is have a world without God!

This shows us a true golden cord through history! The Egyptians, for all the advanced society they were before many other societies in the world, are simply that - known for their past. The great Assyrians and Babylonians are mostly only known from writings and what we've dug up out of the dirt that time has covered since their achievements were left behind long ago. The Medes and Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans have

passed from empires to nations among many nations. The barbarians who destroyed the great Roman empire were never able to put it back together again. For all our reverence of these past cultures, their time has come and gone, but for all the hatred of God's chosen nation, they not only have survived the tumult of history, but thrive like no others in a world truly going downhill as we speak!

No, there is simply no way to make a legitimate argument based on the facts at hand, that what the Jews are or became after the Babylonian captivity is some corrupt branch of something picked up or made up during the captivity in Babylon, and not the true people God told Abraham He would bless those who blessed them and curse those who cursed them! (Gen. 12:1-3) The truth is, the people who had become known as those of Judah, and as such - "Jews," returning from Babylon, represent the genuine article of being God's chosen nation and the holders of the same oracles of God that they had before going there! This is why the story of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah line up with all I just pointed out. The time period beginning with the Medes' takeover of the Babylonian empire does start some of the most complex parts of history for God's nation, but being at the chronological end of the Hebrew Bible - which many of us know as the Old Testament - brings us right up to, and overlaps with, history men have kept very well for themselves. Thus, this history is available to us today through other sources, and one does not need to believe God's Word to accept it.

With that, if what we know as the Bible, specifically the Old Testament, was simply put together by those in or from Babylon as a way to give the Jewish people the appearance of a history that did not actually exist, it was done by someone(s) who masterfully knew historical facts and who could wind it all together into a very believable tale, that while many may say, "You can't prove it's true!" there's enough historical evidence to at least know without doubt it's, at the very least, possible! One must then ask the better question of, why? Why would a people who were not the Israelites want to take up the mantle of such a persecuted people? If the Law was all made-up, why did they make something up that would cause them to be such a persecuted people? Last but not least, if they did not intend and/or know it would bring this kind of response, why did they not drop it when it became apparent it would make them a persecuted people? Asking these questions certainly should prove to any reasonable observer of the story, it would be nothing short of insane for any of this to have been made-up, especially during, and for the continued holding of, through the parts of history that come next!

King Cyrus of the Medes would send a group of Jews back to the land to begin the process of rebuilding the specific city which holds the key importance to God's plan, when it comes to there being a particular spot on the planet where God's work would be accomplished. The temple of God would eventually be rebuilt and Jerusalem as well, but under great pressure from those who tried to convince the government this city was known only as one which represented rebellion against human government! It is true, Jerusalem was known as a city that did not fall easily, but this because it did not fall unless God allowed it. This truth just shows forth the things of God against a world that tries to reject Him. Again, we see God working through His chosen nation to continually maintain the knowledge of God on this earth, and prepare for the day God knew it would be right to send The Messiah to and through this nation to accomplish the work of His first coming, and again at The Messiah's Second Coming. The truth is, God had a plan for His chosen nation that could not and would not be derailed by anything. For this reason, the nation was established; and for this reason, they will be maintained. This, in spite of the fact they, as a people, came to be known by the name which designates only one tribe. The point is, the people remain distinct, and this would continue even after the events following their return.

The return shows us God was truly able to continue to use His nation for what He had prophesied them to fulfill. In this portion of history there would not be a group who escaped from captivity and fought their way back to the land to attempt to rebuild Jerusalem and its temple. Now that would be a story told by someone creating a history! No, the story would be that God had used His people so greatly to affect the world empires they had eventually been brought into captivity by, that there would come a king of one of these empires who desired to see the nation and temple reestablished on the earth.

To be clear on the time line, we must go back and understand some of the events we talked about, happening during the "captivity," actually overlap with the time of the first Jews making a return to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. Events such as the story of Esther, came during this overlap. That being true, Cyrus, the king of the empire of the Medes and Persians, did not just give permission for a handful of Jews to return to their land, he sent out a call, "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.” Ezra 1:2-3 Cyrus, fulfilling the words of Isaiah some 175 years before, decided, possibly on the basis someone such as Daniel had pointed out the prophecy to him, he was to send those of God's nation back to reestablish the temple. (Isa. 44:21- 45:4) The call was for whomever there was among God's nation to go. While the door to return to Jerusalem did not remain freely open to all Jews from then on, it was certainly opened wide at this time!

In spite of this open door, we see not everyone chose to go back, or possibly even knew such an opportunity was open. That being said, we must be careful not to judge, because while there were no doubt many who did not go because they did not want to leave the luxuries of the empire to make a long trip back to a devastated homeland where life would be hard and the work very laborious, there were those such as Daniel whom it must have been in God's will to stay, continuing to be that demonstrative people next door, as we talked about before. We must also give credit to the fact many who were part of those originally carried into captivity by Babylon were dead or very old by this time! Many would simply have never made the journey, especially without God's miraculous intervention. To be clear, this is not to say there were not those of the original captives who did make it, only, again, that it is not for us to judge.

The point to our question in this series is that we see how those who came to be known as Jews, both those on the land and those still dispersed, truly are of the bloodline of God's chosen nation. Because the Jews had figured out how to continue to be Jewish, in other words - hold on to the ways God had instructed them even while lacking the ceremony of the temple, there were those ready and willing to return and see the temple rebuilt, for “Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem. And all they that were about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, beside all that was willingly offered.” Ezra 1:5-6 Cyrus would also dig into the storehouse of the kings of Babylon and return to these Jews the vessels that had been originally carried away from the temple in Jerusalem, some of which the use of, not long before this, had brought the handwriting on the wall for the last king of the Babylonians! (Dan. 5)

Cyrus appointed as governor of Judah, a man

named Zerubbabel, who according to I Chronicles chapter 3 and confirmed by Haggai 1:1 was a direct descendant of Jehoiachin (Jeconiah) the king of Judah, who attempted a surrender to Babylon after rebelling against it, and ended up being carried away, along with much of Jerusalem. Zerubbabel would lead the first assembly of Jews numbering 42,360, besides servants, to Jerusalem in one large group. While this group would primarily identify with the tribes of Judah and Benjamin who had, as tribes, made up the southern kingdom, there were other tribes still involved, not the least to mention were those of Levi. This means priests also returned. The priesthood would be specifically reestablished by Jeshua, along with those of his family; and being of the house of Aaron, Jeshua was appropriately the man to serve as High Priest. All this shows the king sent a good assembly of the Jews to the land of Israel, with not just his blessing to rebuild the temple, but the order to do so along with much of what was needed to see it accomplished.

These would come and begin setting up their lives in the cities of Judah where they had originally been, all of which needed much refurbishing. However, in the seventh month of the year of their return, they would gather to Jerusalem, which was still very much nothing but a pile of rubble. The first act they would take up was not the laying of the temple's foundation, but Jeshua as High Priest, along with his family, and Zerubbabel of the house of David, along with his family, would set up the altar in the place where it belonged. This was quite possibly on the very spot of the altar King David had built after buying the threshingfloor of Araunah, (II Sam. 24:18-25) and their father Abraham had built to offer Isaac as God commanded in Genesis 22. No doubt it was, at the very least, near the spot King Solomon had placed the altar when building the temple which the Babylonians had destroyed. They would do this in order to begin again the offerings and sacrifices prescribed in the Law of Moses, in spite of their fear of the surrounding people, who they knew would be against their reestablishing a presence in the land, specifically the city of Jerusalem, and the temple itself!

Until next time, may we each continually choose to be the people God wants us to be!

