

# First year of Cyrus: 537-536

“Fasti Hellenici” Vol. II, Henry Fynes Clinton, Oxford University Press, 1841 [Pages 366-368]

[Brackets = my comments and underlines are my emphases]

## XVII

### KINGS OF PERSIA.

When it is said in the Introduction<sup>a</sup> that the reign of *CYRUS* coincides with that point of time at which sacred history first touches upon profane, the reader will of course understand that this is intended in a chronological sense. There are doubtless many occasional facts in early profane history, in which the obscure and uncertain traditions preserved to us by the Greeks derive light and confirmation from the authentic narrative of Scripture. But the reign of *Cyrus* at Babylon is the point at which the chain of sacred chronology is taken up and continued by profane history. In the fourth year of *Jehoiakim* king of Judah we arrive at the epoch at which sacred history is met by profane testimony. The fourth year of *Jehoiakim*, in which the captivity commenced<sup>b</sup> [I do not agree with this footnote as there was not a captivity that year and *Jeremiah* was foretelling the 70 years. See “*Beauties*” Vol.11, Num.2, pages 4-5.], was the seventieth year before the first of *Cyrus* at Babylon. At the termination, then, of the captivity, in the first year of *Cyrus*, Scripture chronology is measured with profane. By determining the position of this date we determine all the preceding epochs; the revolt of the ten tribes; the election of *Saul*; the division of the lands of Canaan; from whence we ascend to the birth of *Abraham* and the patriarchal genealogies.

The adjustment of this period of seventy years to the reigns of the Babylonian kings is perplexed and embarrassed with many difficulties, and has been made the subject of much controversy and dispute...These Babylonian reigns are thus delivered in the Astronomical Canon.

	Y.	N.E.	B.C.
1. Nabucalassarus (Nebuchadnezzar) .....	43.	144.	604.
2. Ilvarodamus (Evil Merodach) .....	2.	187.	561.
3. Nericassolassarus .....	4.	189.	559.
4. Nabonadius .....	<u>17.</u>	193.	555.
	66.		
Cyrus .....	9.	210.	538.

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<sup>a</sup> Page i: The government of *Pisistratus* at Athens was a remarkable epoch, distinguished by many peculiar characters. In a chronological view, it is marked as being the first date in Grecian history from which an unbroken series of dates can be deduced in regular succession. It coincides with the reign of *Cyrus* and the rise of the Persian empire; and consequently coincides with that point of time at which sacred history first touches upon profane.

<sup>b</sup> The commencement of the captivity is clearly marked: *Jerem.XXV.1-11*. The first of *Nebuchadnezzar* is therefore “coincident with the end of the third, and the beginning of the fourth year of *Jehoiakim*.” *W. Lowth* on *Jerem.XXV.1*. The *first* year, then, of the captivity (which was the twenty-third from the thirteenth of *Josiah*: *Jerem.XXV.3*) was conumery with the fourth year of *Jehoiakim*. The *last* year of the captivity was the first of *Cyrus* at Babylon: *Ezra V.13*. *In the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, the same king Cyrus made a decree, &c.*



first rank. It is Cyaxares who is called in Scripture Darius the Mede; and we shall find, that under his reign, which lasted but two years, Daniel had several revelations. It appears that Cyrus, when he returned from Persia, carried Cyaxares with him to Babylon...

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Perhaps in the same interval also were those famous pieces of gold coined, which are call Daries, from the name of Darius the Mede, which for their fineness and beauty were for several ages preferred to all other money throughout the whole East.

*The beginning of the United Empire of the Persians and Medes.*

*The famous Edict of Cyrus. His death.*

Here, properly speaking begins the empire of the Persians and the Medes united under one and the same authority. This empire, from Cyrus, the first king and founder of it, to Darius Codomannus, who was vanquished by Alexander the Great, lasted for upwards of 200 years...

Ant. J.C.536–CYRUS. Cyaxares dying at the end of two years, and Cambyses likewise ending his days in Persia, Cyrus returned to Babylon, and took upon him the government of the empire.

The years of Cyrus's reign are computed differently. Some make it thirty years, beginning from his first setting out from Persia, at the head of an army, to succour his uncle Cyaxares; others make it to be but seven years, because they date it only from the time, when, by the death of Cyaxares and Cambyses he became sole monarch of the whole empire.

In the first of these seven years Cyrus published the famous edict whereby the Jews were permitted to return to Jerusalem. There is no question but this edict was obtained by the care and solicitations of Daniel, who possessed great influence at court. That he might the more effectually induce the king to grant him this request, he showed him undoubtedly the prophecies of Isaiah, wherein above 200 years before his birth, he was marked out by name as a prince appointed by God to be a great conqueror, and to reduce a multitude of nations under his dominion...

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Seven years being spent in this state of tranquility, Cyrus returned into Persia, for the seventh time after his accession to the whole monarchy; and this shows that he used to go regularly into Persia once a year. Cambyses had been now dead for some time, and Cyrus himself was grown old, being at this time about seventy years of age; thirty of which had elapsed since his being first made general of the Persian forces, nine from the taking of Babylon, and seven from his beginning to reign alone after the death of Cyaxares.

[Now we turn to Hales to find the source documents for these two years between 538 and 536.]

**“Hales’s Chronology” Vol. I, London 1830**

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In like manner the [Ptolomy] Canon dates the accession of *Cyrus*, not from the capture of *Babylon* itself, B.C.536, but from his decisive victory over the rebellious king of *Babylon*, who is called *Nabonadius*, about two years before, B.C.538, when he defeated him in a pitched battle, and drove the *Babylonians* into the city, which he afterwards besieged, and, at length, took by a stratagem, noticed both by *Herodotus* and *Xenophon*, of turning the waters of the *Euphrates* into a lake, or canal, above the town, and sending parties of troops to enter the channel of the river, above and below the town, as soon as it became fordable; by which means the city was taken “*at each end*” by surprise, Jer. li.31, during the drunken festival of the *Sakea*, Jer.li.41.

And, indeed, that the siege of Babylon could not have lasted much less that two years, may fairly be collected from the accounts of *Herodotus* and *Xenophon*. [Documenting the length of the siege may not be important. But the testimony of *Xenophon* is crucial in identifying the term of *Cyrus*' sovereignty.]

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That *Cyrus* did not survive the capture of *Babylon* above seven years, may also be collected from *Xenophon*. This historian, the basis of whose *Cyropaedia* is true, though the work be embellished with some fictitious ornaments, and who served in *Asia* under *Cyrus* the younger, and therefore had an opportunity of learning many particulars of the life of *Cyrus* the Great, unknown to the Greeks, relates, that



The duration of this captivity for seventy years, to the *Jews* and all the surrounding nations, was foretold by the prophet *Jeremiah*, xxv.11, xxix.10, 2 Chron.xxxvi.21-23. It expired B.C.536, the year that *Cyrus* took *Babylon* \*\*, and issued a decree for the return of such of the *Jews* as chose, throughout his dominions, to their own land, Ezra i.1-3, which was effected “in the seventh month of the first year of *Cyrus* king of *Babylon*,” Ezra iii.1, v.13; and this corresponds with the account of *Josephus*, “in the first year of *Cyrus*, which was the seventieth (ὁ ἑβδομήκοντος) from the day of the removal of our people from their native land to *Babylon*,” &c. Ant. XI.1,1. For from B.C.605, to B.C.536, was 69 years complete, or 70 years current. –This, it is hoped, will be found a satisfactory adjustment of the chronology of this most intricate and disputed period of the captivity; in which all the varying reports of sacred and profane history are reconciled, and brought to harmonize with each other.

[Again, it is not necessary to confirm the siege lasted two years or if the two years were occupied by his uncle Cyaxares (Darius) until his death. In either case Cyrus assumed the sovereignty and began to make yearly visits to Persia only two years after laying siege to Babylon. These are clearly numbered as seven by Xenophon ending in 529. Therefore the first circuit as sovereign was in 536. From the Jewish standpoint, this was considered the first year of Cyrus.]

[Finally Galloway uses these same evidence to record the transition years beginning i 539.]

### **“The Chain of Ages” William Brown Galloway, 1881**

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B.C.539: DARIUS CYAXARES, THE MEDE, THE SON OF THE AHASUERUS, assumes the sovereignty of Babylon, “being about threescore and two years old,” or beginning his sixty-second year, a mark of time important in relation to his mother, Queen Esther. The character of this prince, as it is depicted by Xenophon, was by no means equal to the situation. Given to excessive indulgence in wine, capricious, jealous, cruel and arbitrary, passionate even to fury on slight provocations,<sup>1</sup> he did not possess the capacity, or the self-command necessary for governing a vast empire; and the splendour of luxuriousness of Babylon were not calculated to improve him. The virtues and generalship of his nephew Cyrus had placed him there, not his own merits or exploits. He emulated the style of the Nebuchadnezzars, and it is probable that on his solemn deification, he assumed that customary title of the kings of Babylon, since he appears to be confounded by Berosus, all in one with the last Nabonnedus. He reigned at Babylon two years. The narrative of Xenophon accords with the fact that he had his palace and imperial court (ο\_εὐδ\_εἶ\_ῦν\_ἄ) at Babylon, after the capture of the city by Cyrus; who had, at an earlier period, on his succession to the throne of Persia, received in marriage his cousin Amytis, the daughter of Darius, the Mede.<sup>2</sup>

Darius sets over the kingdom 120 princes, and over these three presidents, of whom Daniel is first, that the princes might give accounts to them. This high position of the prophet provoking the jealousy of the princes and other presidents, they consulted for his destruction, and with that view employing impious flatteries, they persuaded Darius to assume to himself divine honours, and to pass an insane decree forbidding supplications to be made to any other god or man for thirty days, under penalty of being cast into the den of lions. It may have been the approved form of monarchical apotheosis... The incident in all its parts is strikingly illustrative of the character of the king, as well as the mercy and power of God in delivering His servant. (Dan. vi.)

B.C.539: In the first year of Darius, Daniel understanding from the prophecies of Jeremiah that God would accomplish seventy years in the desolation of Jerusalem, sets his heart, by prayer and supplications, with fasting, to seek of God the restoration of the Jews, and is answered, by the message of an angel. From

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\*\* *Ptolomy's* canon dates the first year of *Cyrus*, B.C.538, two years earlier; reckoning from the decisive defeat of *Nabonadius*, and commencement of the siege, which lasted two years, as proved, Vol.I.p.168,169.

<sup>1</sup> *Cyropaedia* lib. iv.

<sup>2</sup> *Cyropaedia* lib. vii. Obviously this marriage could not have taken place after the taking of Babylon, if Cambyses was its offspring.

this, a measure of time is given.

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B.C.538: In the second year of Darius, who, having been duly deified at Babylon (Dan. vi. 7), was now known to the Babylonians as the reigning Nabonedus, it is probable that his tyranny, dissipation, and incompetence both rendered his reign intolerable, and occasioned causes of quarrel with Cyrus. The latter marched against him. Babylon was not now so defensible as formerly, because Cyrus at his first occupation of it had broken down a portion of the city wall. Darius led out the army, gave battle to Cyrus in the open field, was defeated, and instead of retreating into Babylon, fled to Borsippa, lower down the Euphrates. There he was immediately besieged, but surrendered. He was spared, but sent away from Babylonia, and appointed to reside in Carmania, where he remained till his death. I do not doubt that he is the person of whom, under the name of Nabonnedus, these circumstances are related by Berosus,<sup>7</sup> though confused by him and my Megasthenes,<sup>8</sup> with the reign of Nabonadius or Belshazzar. Arrian<sup>9</sup> also alludes to Cyrus, as having wrested the dominion from the Medes by force.

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B.C.537 CYRUS THE GREAT, KING OF PERSIA, now sole and supreme over the whole empire.

The duration of the reign of Cyrus is differently reckoned. If counted from his accession to the throne as second in imperial rank, with the title of “Cy-Rosh,” it was of twenty-nine or thirty years; but if estimated from his now coming to the sole supreme imperial power, it was only about seven years. The canon of Ptolemy makes it nine years; but these are inclusive of the two years of Darius, whom he leaves out entirely, and reckons the reign of Cyrus from his capture of Babylon. Xenophon mentions that he used to spend the seven winter months at Babylon, the three spring months at Ecbatane, and that in this rotation he came to the Persians for the seventh time during his reign. This is in accordance with the duration of his reign in succession to Darius having been seven years. But the various writers, losing sight of this double commencement of his reign, have been let into confusion and contradictions.<sup>1</sup>

B.C.537 In the first year of his reign in succession to Darius, Cyrus, king of Persia, makes a proclamation throughout all his dominions and also puts it into writing, for the return of the children of Israel to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the temple. The written decree was found engrossed in the records of the kingdom, in the palace at Ecbatane; and it was therefore probably issued in July or August, as that was the time of year which Cyrus ordinarily spent in that northern capital (Ezra i.1; vi.2–5. Xen. Cyrop.). It was without doubt that the influence of Daniel, which was great under both Darius and Cyrus, contributed much to the obtaining of this decree, and was exerted for that purpose in conformity with his own prayer to God (Dan. ix.). The decree was not limited to members of the tribe of Judah; it was published also throughout Media, and was acted on by some out of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh (1 Chron.ix.3).<sup>2</sup>

In the seventh month (October), the children of Israel gather themselves together to Jerusalem. The altar for burn offering is built by JOSHUA, the son of Josedek, and ZURUBBABEL, the son of Shealtiel; and the morning and evening sacrifice resumed. The Feast of Trumpets is kept on the first day of the month (Ezra iii.6. Levit.xxiii.24, Num.xix.1); and on the fourteenth day of the month the Feast of Tabernacles is kept (Ezra iii.1–4. Levit.xxiii.34).

## [Conclusion:]

[1.] Daniel 6,9,11 all refer to the events from the first year of Darius’ reign. Xenophon notes Darius’ reign and counts Cyrus reign over Babylon as 7 years. Ptolemy omits Darius and marks Cyrus reign as 9 years. It is reasonable that Darius reigned 2 years followed by Cyrus. Why should we omit a 2 year reign preceding the counting of Cyrus’ first year?

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<sup>7</sup> Apud. Josephus cont. Apion, lib. i.

<sup>8</sup> Ap. Eusebius Praep. Evang. ix. 41.

<sup>9</sup> De Expeditione Alex. ii. 6, v. 4.

<sup>1</sup> See more fully on this subject in the Appendix to “Isaiah’s Testimony for Jesus,” p.431.

<sup>2</sup> Compare also the decree of Artaxerxes, Ezra vii.13.

[2.] After the fall of Babylon, it was necessary for Darius to establish his court and set up his princes. Daniel 6 marks Darius issuing a kingdom wide decree concerning approved worship. This precipitated Daniel's incarceration with the lions. Afterward Darius rescinded the decree and promoted Daniel. Subsequently (Dan 11:1-2) Daniel prophesies the successors to Darius. There is then some time necessary for Cyrus to depose and replace the authority of Darius. Something more than a few months is surely required for all these events.

[3.] Cyrus is said to issue the decree for the liberation and return of the Jews in his first year. (2 Chron. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1). It is inconceivable that the decree and restrictions issued by Darius would be concurrent in the same year as the liberating decree of Cyrus. We conclude that the Scripture reference to the first year of Cyrus is his first year of sole regency subsequent to a two year rule of Darius.

[4.] If the first year of Cyrus is counted from the Spring of 538, this would leave only 6 months to Darius. This is hardly sufficient for the above events and to whom Daniel accords the title "King Darius" and "the first year of Darius the Mede" and whom the princes and presidents acclaim "King Darius, live for ever." (Dan. 6:6) To our mind, while Babylon fell at the hands of Cyrus in the Fall B.C. 539, there were then parts of two years of feeble rule by Darius, reaching to 537, before Cyrus assumed the sole regency and issued his famous decree in the Fall of B.C. 537. The remaining quarter of the year followed by the full year of B.C. 536 until the Fall of A.D. 1914 encompasses a full 2,520 years.