Three Wonderful non-Jewish Kings

Marc Gitler 7/17/24

I What Was



Cyrus Cylinder

The Cyrus cylinder: clay cylinder; a Babylonian account of the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus in 539 BC, of his restoration to various temples of statues removed by Nabonidus, the previous king of Babylon, and of his own work at Babylon. The cylindrical form is typical of royal inscriptions of the Late Babylonian period, and the text shows that the cylinder was written to be buried in the foundations of the city wall of Babylon. It was deposited there after the capture of the city by Cyrus in 539 BC, and presumably written on his orders.

[12] he searched everywhere and then he took a righteous king, his favorite, by the hand, he called out his name: Cyrus, king of Anšan; he pronounced his name to be king all over the world. [15] He ordered him to go to his city Babylon. He set him on the road to Babylon and like a companion and a friend, he went at his side.

[17] He made him enter his city Babylon without fighting or battle; he saved Babylon from hardship. He delivered Nabonidus, the king who did not revere him, into his hands. [18] All the people of Babylon, all the land of Sumer and Akkad, princes and governors, bowed to him and kissed his feet. They rejoiced at his kingship and their faces shone. [19] Lord by whose aid the dead were revived and who had all been redeemed from hardship and difficulty, they greeted him with gladness and praised his name.

[20] I am Cyrus, king of the world, great king, mighty king, king of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad, king of the four quarters,[31] Agade, Ešnunna, Zamban, Me-Turnu, Der, as far as the region of Gutium, the sacred centers on the other side of the Tigris, whose sanctuaries had been abandoned for a long time,**[32] I returned the images of the gods, who had resided there,**[note] **to their places and I let them dwell in eternal abodes. I gathered all their inhabitants and returned to them their dwellings.**[33] In addition, at the command of Marduk, the great lord, I settled in their habitations, in pleasing abodes, the gods of Sumer and Akkad, whom Nabonidus, to the anger of the lord of the gods, had brought into Babylon.

דניאל א׳

בִּשְׁנַת שָׁלוֹשׁ לְמַלְכוּת יְהוֹיָקִים מֶלֶךְ־יְהוּדָה בָּא נְבוּכַדְנֶאצַּר מֶלֶךְ־בָּבֶל יְרוּשָׁלַם וַיָּצַר עָלֶיהָ׃
וַיִּתֵּן אֲדֹנָי בְּיָדוֹ אֶת־יְהוֹיָקִים מֶלֶךְ־יְהוּדָה וּמִקְצָת כְּלֵי בֵית־הָאֱלֹהִים וַיְבִיאֵם אֶרֶץ־שִׁנְעָר בֵּית אֱלֹהָיו וְאֶת־הַכֵּלִים הֵבִיא בֵּית אוֹצַר אֱלֹהָיו׃
וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְאַשְׁפְּנַז רַב סָרִיסָיו לְהָבִיא מִבְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּמִזֶּרַע הַמְּלוּכָה וּמִן־הַפַּרְתְּמִים׃
יְלָדִים אֲשֶׁר אֵין־בָּהֶם כָּל־מאוּם וְטוֹבֵי מַרְאֶה וּמַשְׂכִּלִים בְּכָל־חָכְמָה וְיֹדְעֵי דַעַת וּמְבִינֵי מַדָּע וַאֲשֶׁר כֹּחַ בָּהֶם לַעֲמֹד בְּהֵיכַל הַמֶּלֶךְ וּלְלַמְּדָם סֵפֶר וּלְשׁוֹן כַּשְׂדִּים׃
וַיְמַן לָהֶם הַמֶּלֶךְ דְּבַר־יוֹם בְּיוֹמוֹ מִפַּת־בַּג הַמֶּלֶךְ וּמִיֵּין מִשְׁתָּיו וְלִגַּדְּלָם שָׁנִים שָׁלוֹשׁ וּמִקְצָתָם יַעַמְדוּ לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ׃ וַיְהִי בָהֶם מִבְּנֵי יְהוּדָה דָּנִיֵּאל חֲנַנְיָה מִישָׁאֵל וַעֲזַרְיָה׃...
וַיְהִי דָּנִיֵּאל עַד־שְׁנַת אַחַת לְכוֹרֶשׁ הַמֶּלֶךְ׃

In the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim of Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to Jerusalem and laid siege to it. The Lord delivered King Jehoiakim of Judah into his power, together with some of the vessels of the House of God, and he brought them to the land of Shinar to the house of his god; he deposited the

vessels in the treasury of his god. Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, his chief officer, to bring some Israelites of royal descent and of the nobility—
youths without blemish, handsome, proficient in all wisdom, knowledgeable and intelligent, and capable of serving in the royal palace—and teach them the writings and the language of the Chaldeans. The king allotted daily rations to them from the king's food and from the wine he drank. They were to be educated for three years, at the end of which they[a] were to enter the king's service. Among them were the Judahites Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah…Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus.

עזרא א׳

וּבִשְׁנַת אַחַת לְכוֹרֶשׁ מֶלֶךְ פָּרַס לִכְלוֹת דְּבַר־יְהוָה מִפִּי יִרְמְיָה הֵעִיר יְהוָה אֶת־רוּחַ כֹּרֶשׁ
מֶלֶךְ־פָּרַס וַיַּעֲבֶר־קוֹל בְּכָל־מַלְכוּתּוֹ וְגַם־בְּמִכְתָּב לֵאמֹר: כֹּה אָמַר כֹּרֶשׁ מֶלֶךְ פָּרַס כָּל
מַמְלְכוֹת הָאָרֶץ נָתַן לִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמָיִם וְהוּא־פָקַד עָלַי לִבְנוֹת־לוֹ בַּיִת בִּירוּשָׁלַם אֲשֶׁר
בִּיהוּדָה:
מִי־בָכֶם מִכָּל־עַמּוֹ יְהִי אֱלֹהָיו עִמּוֹ וְיַּעַל לִירוּשָׁלַם אֲשֶׁר בִּיהוּדָה וְיִבֶן אֶת־בֵּית יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר בִּירוּשָׁלָם: וְכָל־הַנִּשְׁאָר מִכָּל־הַמְּקֹמוֹת אֲשֶׁר הוּא גָר־שָׁם
יְנַשְּׂאוּהוּ אַנְשֵׁי מְקֹמוֹ בְּכֶסֶף וּבְזָהָב וּבִרְכוּשׁ וּבִבְהֵמָה עִם־הַנְּדָבָה לְבֵית הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר
בִּירוּשָׁלִָם:

In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, when the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah was fulfilled, the LORD roused the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia to issue a proclamation throughout his realm by word of mouth and in writing as follows:
"Thus said King Cyrus of Persia: The LORD God of Heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and has charged me with building Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah.
Anyone of you of all His people—may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem that is in Judah and build the House of the LORD God of Israel, the God that is in Jerusalem;
and all who stay behind, wherever he may be living, let the people of his place assist him with silver, gold, goods, and livestock, besides the freewill offering to the House of God that is in Jerusalem."

ישעיהו מ״ד

הָאֹמֵר לְכוֹרֶשׁ רֹעִי וְכָל־חֶפְצִי יַשְׁלֵם וְלֵאמֹר לִירוּשָׁלַ͏ִם תִּבָּנֶה וְהֵיכָל תִּוָּסֵד: {פ}

Am the same who says of Cyrus, “He is My shepherd; He shall fulfill all My purposes!
He shall say of Jerusalem, ‘She shall be rebuilt,’And to the temple: ‘You shall be founded again.’”

II What Wasn’t

יומא ס״ט

יוֹם שֶׁבִּקְּשׁוּ כּוּתִּיִים אֶת בֵּית אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֵאֲלֶכְסַנְדְּרוֹס מוֹקְדוֹן לְהַחֲרִיבוֹ, וְנָתְנוּ לָהֶם. בָּאוּ וְהוֹדִיעוּ אֶת שִׁמְעוֹן הַצַּדִּיק. מָה עָשָׂה? לָבַשׁ בִּגְדֵי כְהוּנָּה, וְנִתְעַטֵּף בְּבִגְדֵי כְהוּנָּה, וּמְיַקִּירֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עִמּוֹ, וַאֲבוּקוֹת שֶׁל אוֹר בִּידֵיהֶן. וְכָל הַלַּיְלָה, הַלָּלוּ הוֹלְכִים מִצַּד זֶה, וְהַלָּלוּ הוֹלְכִים מִצַּד זֶה, עַד שֶׁעָלָה עַמּוּד הַשַּׁחַר.

What occurred on that date? It was on that **day that the Samaritans [*kutim*] requested the House of our Lord from Alexander the Macedonian in order to destroy it, and he gave it to them,** i.e., he gave them permission to destroy it. People **came and informed** the High Priest, **Shimon HaTzaddik,** of what had transpired. **What did he do? He donned the priestly vestments and wrapped himself in the priestly vestments. And the nobles of the Jewish People** were **with him,** with **torches of fire in their hands. And all that night, these,** the representatives of the Jewish people, **approached from this side, and those,** the armies of Alexander and the Samaritans, **approached from that side, until dawn,** when they finally saw one another.

כֵּיוָן שֶׁעָלָה עַמּוּד הַשַּׁחַר, אָמַר לָהֶם: מִי הַלָּלוּ? אָמְרוּ לוֹ: יְהוּדִים שֶׁמָּרְדוּ בְּךָ. כֵּיוָן שֶׁהִגִּיעַ לְאַנְטִיפַּטְרֵס זָרְחָה חַמָּה וּפָגְעוּ זֶה בָּזֶה. כֵּיוָן שֶׁרָאָה לְשִׁמְעוֹן הַצַּדִּיק, יָרַד מִמֶּרְכַּבְתּוֹ וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוָה לְפָנָיו. אָמְרוּ לוֹ: מֶלֶךְ גָּדוֹל כְּמוֹתְךָ יִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לִיהוּדִי זֶה?! אָמַר לָהֶם: דְּמוּת דְּיוֹקְנוֹ שֶׁל זֶה מְנַצַּחַת לְפָנַי בְּבֵית מִלְחַמְתִּי.

When dawn arrived, Alexander **said to** the Samaritans: **Who are these** people coming to meet us? **They said to him:** These are the **Jews who rebelled against you. When he reached Antipatris, the sun shone and** the two camps **met each other. When** Alexander **saw Shimon HaTzaddik, he descended from his chariot and bowed before him.** His escorts **said to him:** Should **an important king such as you bow to this Jew?** He **said to them:** I do so because **the image of this man’s face is victorious before me on my battlefields,** i.e., when I fight I see his image going before me as a sign of victory, and therefore I know that he has supreme sanctity.

אָמַר לָהֶם: לָמָּה בָּאתֶם? אָמְרוּ: אֶפְשָׁר בַּיִת שֶׁמִּתְפַּלְּלִים בּוֹ עָלֶיךָ וְעַל מַלְכוּתְךָ שֶׁלֹּא תֶּחֱרַב, יַתְעוּךָ גּוֹיִם לְהַחֲרִיבוֹ? אָמַר לָהֶם: מִי הַלָּלוּ? אָמְרוּ לוֹ: כּוּתִּיִים הַלָּלוּ, שֶׁעוֹמְדִים לְפָנֶיךָ. אָמַר לָהֶם: הֲרֵי הֵם מְסוּרִין בִּידֵיכֶם.

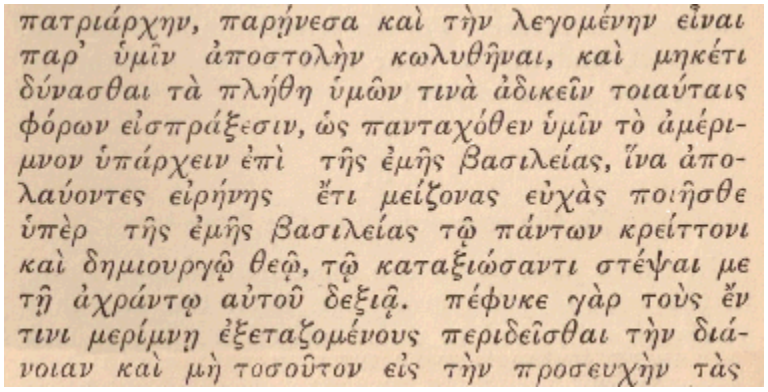
He said to the representatives of the Jewish people: **Why have you come? They said** to him: **Is it possible that** the Temple, the **house in which we pray for you and for your kingdom not to be destroyed, gentiles will** try to **mislead you into destroying it,** and we would remain silent and not tell you? **He said to them: Who are these** people who want to destroy it? The Jews **said to him:** They are **these Samaritans who stand before you. He said to them:** If so, **they are delivered into your hands** to deal with them as you please.

מִיָּד נָקְבוּם בְּעִקְבֵיהֶם וּתְלָאוּם בְּזַנְבֵי סוּסֵיהֶם, וְהָיוּ מְגָרְרִין אוֹתָן עַל הַקּוֹצִים וְעַל הַבַּרְקָנִים, עַד שֶׁהִגִּיעוּ לְהַר גְּרִיזִים. כֵּיוָן שֶׁהִגִּיעוּ לְהַר גְּרִיזִים — חָרְשׁוּהוּ, וּזְרָעוּהוּ כַּרְשִׁינִין, כְּדֶרֶךְ שֶׁבִּקְּשׁוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת לְבֵית אֱלֹהֵינוּ. וְאוֹתוֹ הַיּוֹם עָשָׂאוּהוּ יוֹם טוֹב.

Immediately, they stabbed the Samaritans **in their heels and hung them from their horses' tails and continued to drag them over the thorns and thistles until they reached Mount Gerizim. When they arrived at Mount Gerizim,** where the Samaritans had their temple, **they plowed it over and seeded** the area **with leeks,** a symbol of total destruction. This was **just as they had sought to do to the House of our Lord. And they made that day a festival** to celebrate the salvation of the Temple and the defeat of the Samaritans.

III What Might Have Been

Emperor Julian's Letter to the Jewish Patrairchate 362



πατριάρχην, παρῆνεσα καὶ τὴν λεγομένην εἶναι παρ' ὑμῖν ἀποστολὴν κωλυθῆναι, καὶ μηκέτι δύνασθαι τὰ πλήθη ὑμῶν τινὰ ἀδικεῖν τοιαύταις φόρων εἰσπράξεσιν, ὡς πανταχόθεν ὑμῖν τὸ ἀμέριμνον ὑπάρχειν ἐπὶ τῆς ἐμῆς βασιλείας, ἵνα ἀπολαύοντες εἰρήνης ἔτι μείζονας εὐχὰς ποιῆσθε ὑπὲρ τῆς ἐμῆς βασιλείας τῷ πάντων κρείττονι καὶ δημιουργῷ θεῷ, τῷ καταξιώσαντι στέψαι με τῇ ἀχράντῳ αὐτοῦ δεξιᾷ. πέφυκε γὰρ τοὺς ἔν τινι μερίμνῃ ἐξεταζομένους περιδεῖσθαι τὴν διάνοιαν καὶ μὴ τοσοῦτον εἰς τὴν προσευχὴν τὰς

To the community of the Jews.

In times past, by far the most burdensome thing in the yoke of your slavery has been the fact that you were subjected to unauthorised ordinances and had to contribute an untold amount of money to the accounts of the treasury. Of this I used to see many instances with my own eyes, and I have learned of more, by finding the records which are preserved against you. Moreover, when a

tax was about to be levied on you again I prevented it, and compelled the impiety of such obloquy to cease here; and I threw into the fire the records against you that were stored in my desks; so that it is no longer possible for anyone to aim at you such a reproach of impiety. My brother Constantius of honored memory was not so much responsible for these wrongs of yours as were the men who used to frequent his table, barbarians in mind, godless in soul. These I seized with my own hands and put them to death by thrusting them into the pit, that not even any memory of their destruction might still linger amongst us. And since I wish that you should prosper yet more, I have admonished my brother Iules, your most venerable patriarch, that the levy [*αποστολη*] which is said to exist among you should be prohibited, **and that no one is any longer to have the power to oppress the masses of your people by such exactions; so that everywhere, during my reign, you may have security of mind, and in the enjoyment of peace may offer more fervid prayers for my reign to the Most High God, the Creator, who has deigned to crown me with his own immaculate right hand. For it is natural that men who are distracted by any anxiety should be hampered in spirit, and should not have so much confidence in raising their hands to pray; but that those who are in all respects free from care should rejoice with their whole hearts and offer their suppliant prayers on behalf of my imperial office to Mighty God, even to him who is able to direct my reign to the noblest ends, according to my purpose. This you ought to do, in order that, when I have successfully concluded the war with Persia, I may rebuild by my own efforts the sacred city of Jerusalem, which for so many years you have longed to see inhabited, and may bring settlers there, and, together with you, may glorify the Most High God therein.**

THE ROMAN HISTORY

AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS (c. 330-400)

363 CE

1. To pass over minute details, these were the principal events of the year. But Julian, who in his third consulship had taken as his colleague Sallustius, the prefect of Gaul now entered on his fourth year, and by a novel arrangement took as his colleague a private individual; an act of which no one recollected an instance since that of Diocletian and Aristobulus.

2. And although, foreseeing in his anxious mind the various accidents that might happen, he urged on with great diligence all the endless preparations necessary for his expedition, yet distributing his diligence everywhere; and being eager to extend the recollection of his reign by the greatness of his exploits, he proposed to rebuild at a vast expense the once magnificent temple of Jerusalem, which after many deadly contests was with difficulty taken by Vespasian and Titus, who succeeded his father in the conduct of the siege. And he assigned the task to Alypius of Antioch, who had formerly been proprefect of Britain.

3. But though Alypius applied himself vigorously to the work, and though the governor of the province co-operated with him, fearful balls of fire burst forth with continual eruptions close to the foundations, burning several of the workmen and making the spot altogether inaccessible. And thus the very elements, as if by some fate, repelling the attempt, it was laid aside.

The Jewish spiritual heroes,

Gershom Bader. New York, N.Y. 1940

Since Emperor Alexander Severus, the friend of Rabbi Judah N'siah II, there was no emperor of the Romans who took as much interest in the Jews as Julian. In his youth he read the writings of the Bible, and learned to respect the wisdom of the Jews; and after he became the Emperor of the Romans, he declared publicly that he regretted all the evil that his predecessors had done to the Jews. And since he undertook to revive the ancient Greek idolatry, he thought a great deal about sacrifices. He therefore was much taken with the idea of rebuilding the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, where God would be served with sacrifices.

Many believe that Julian's kindness had no more than political motives. They think that since he intended to destroy the Persian control over Babylonia and he began warfare against king Sapor, he wished to win over the Jews, for he knew that the Jews of Babylonia had great influence in politics, and therefore he made the announcement that he wished to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem.

Julian did not content himself with a simple promise to build a Temple in Jerusalem, for in spite of having his hands full preparing the war against the Persians he set about the work of rebuilding the Temple in full earnest and appointed a special official, Alifius of Antioch, who had previously been the Roman governor of Britain. He instructed him also not to spare any money in building the Temple but to finish it quickly. At the same time he sent an imperial command to the governors of Syria and Palestine to support Alifius in his work and supply him with all necessaries.

All the materials were ready in Jerusalem. Great camps of workers were clearing away the ruins which had accumulated on the site of the Temple in the three centuries since its destruction. When they had cleared away the wreckage, the gases suddenly exploded and many workers were killed. This was regarded as a sign from Heaven that God did not wish the Jewish Temple to be rebuilt. Thus the history of Emperor Hadrian's times repeated itself, for Emperor Hadrian too wanted to have the Temple rebuilt and the work was interrupted by an explosion of gases while the debris was being removed. It was said then that the Almighty did not wish to allow His Temple to be rebuilt by the same people who had destroyed it.

It is noteworthy that the Jews were not enthusiastic about the project. In the Jewish books of the time it is not even mentioned. Only Christian chronicles relate that the Jews sent gold and silver

from all corners of the earth for the construction of their Temple. It is possible that previous experience of failure in revolutions against the Romans discouraged the Jews from any adventure with them, lest it fail and they have to pay dearly for its failure. In any case, before the Jews had a chance to study the matter it was too late, because Emperor Julian ruled no more than twenty months, and after twenty months of his rule he died in the war against the Persians in 363 C. E. at the age of thirty-two.