

What is the significance of the Cyrus Cylinder as it relates to the Bible, and prophecies recorded in the Bible?

“Yahweh says this: When the seventy years granted to Babylon are over, I shall intervene on your behalf and fulfill my favorable promise to you by bringing you back to this place . . . Yahweh declares: I shall bring you back to the place from which I exiled you”—Jeremiah 29:10,14 NJB

God had had his prophet Jeremiah, in chapters 25 and 29, to foretell that the Jews would be released from Babylonian captivity after 70 years, and be allowed to return to their homeland. Yahweh’s prophet Isaiah foretold 200 years in advance that God would use Cyrus to release the Jews from Babylonian captivity and enable them to rebuild Jerusalem and their Temple:

“Thus says Yahweh, your redeemer . . . to Cyrus, ‘My shepherd. He will perform my entire will by saying to Jerusalem, “You will be rebuilt,” and to the Temple, “You will be refunded.” Thus says Yahweh to his anointed one, to Cyrus whom, he says, I have grasped by his right hand, to make nations fall before him and to disarm kings, to open gateways before him so that their gates be closed no more . . . I shall smash the iron bars . . . Though you do not know me, I have armed you’”—Isaiah 44:24,28; 45:1-5 NJB

Cyrus’s decree for the Jews to return to their homeland was recorded in 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles and Ezra. The fulfillment of the prophecy is recorded in the book of Ezra. To Bible critics, the prediction and the fulfillment matched so perfectly, they declared it was too good to be true, since, up until 1879, there was no independent verification. The Cyrus Cylinder pictured below blew the critics away.



The Cyrus Cylinder

When work on the temple resumed in 520 BCE, the Persian governor Tattenai requested a search for the decree Cyrus had issued in 538 BCE authorizing the Jews rebuild their temple ([Ezra 5:6-6:1](#)) A memorandum related to the decree was discovered in the royal archive at Ecbatana, one of the three imperial capitals. This memo, the treasury record of a grant made by Cyrus for rebuilding the temple, is quoted in 6:3-5 in Aramaic, the official language of the Persian Empire.

“In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia—to fulfill the word of Yahweh spoken through Jeremiah—Yahweh roused the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia to issue a proclamation and to have it publicly displayed throughout his kingdom: ‘Cyrus king of Persia says this, “Yahweh, the God of Heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and has appointed me to build him a Temple in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among of all his people, may his God be with him! Let him go up”’—[2 Chronicles 36:22,23 NJB](#)

Cyrus’s decree, recorded in full [11:2-4](#), along with an abridged version in [2 Chronicles 36:23](#), both in Hebrew, was a proclamation to the Jewish people, allowing them to return to their homeland and rebuild their temple. Such generosity on the part of Cyrus stands in sharp contrast to usual practice in antiquity. Even so, it is clear from archaeological discoveries that this was indeed the official policy of Cyrus.

The Cyrus Cylinder, an inscription on a clay barrel discovered in Babylon in 1879, documents Cyrus's policy of religious tolerance and liberation. Like most inscriptions from ancient kings, the Cyrus Cylinder is boastful (Cyrus declared himself to be the great king of Babylon, Sumer, Akkad and of the four corners of the earth) and pagan (he proclaimed himself to be beloved of the gods Bel, Nebo and Marduk). On the other hand, Cyrus was determined to be a benevolent, rather than a heavy-handed, ruler: He pointed out that after his conquest of Babylon he did not allow his troops to terrorize the city. Cyrus's record fully substantiates this generous and tolerant stance. He returned stolen images to their sanctuaries and, in his own words, "gathered all their inhabitants and returned (to them) their dwellings."

"I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, 'My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.' From the east I summon a bird of prey; from a far-off land, a man to fulfill my purpose"—Isaiah 46:9-11 NIV

God's prophecies about Cyrus and the restoration of the Jews to their homeland were fulfilled. The Cyrus Cylinder is thus an independent secular record of the fulfillment of Bible prophecy.