



The 'Cyrus Legend'

Cyrus II—called "the Great"—was king of Persia from c. 558 to 529 B.C. He brought the whole of the Near East—including mighty Babylon—under his rule, from the Aegean Sea to the Indus River. Significant among his deeds was his granting of permission to the Jewish captives in Babylonia to return to their homeland.

That much is history. But what is not widely realized is that almost two centuries *before* Cyrus, the prophet Isaiah recorded (Isaiah 44:28) that a man named Cyrus would permit the exiled Jews to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple—which, in Isaiah's day, had not yet been destroyed! Isaiah also prophesied Cyrus' overthrow of Babylon (Isaiah 45:1-3).

Not only did God call Cyrus by name long before he was born, he saw to it that Satan the devil was prevented from putting the infant Cyrus to death and thwarting his plan. Greek sources—Herodotus, Xenophon and Ctesias—provide considerable information about Cyrus' early life. Notice the remarkable story surrounding Cyrus' birth and childhood, according to a version related by Herodotus in his *History* (1.107-130):

Astyages, king of the Medes, was overlord of the Persians.

Astyages gave his daughter Mandane in marriage to his vassal Cambyses, king of the Persians.

From the marriage of Mandane and Cambyses, Cyrus was born. Astyages, however, had a dream that the baby would grow up to overthrow him. So he ordered his adviser, Harpagus, to personally kill the infant. Harpagus, however, entrusted the execution to a herdsman named Mitrdates.

On finding that his wife had just given birth to a stillborn child, the herdsman substituted Cyrus, and reared him as his own son. When Cyrus was 10 years old, Astyages discovered the deception. In spite of the dream, the king was persuaded to let the boy live.

When he reached manhood, Cyrus ascended the Persian throne (c. 558 B.C.). In 553 he led a rebellion against his maternal grandfather. In 550 Astyages marched against Cyrus, but his army deserted him and surrendered to the Persians. Astyages—the last ruler of Media—was captured and dethroned, though he was permitted to live out his life in peace. Thus Cyrus became king of the Medes and Persians, firmly established on his throne and poised to fulfill his amazing prophetic destiny.