

# The Folio

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## CONTRASTING PORTRAYALS OF THE ACHAEMENID MONARCHY IN ISAIAH AND ZECHARIAH

*Excerpts from a paper given at UCLA's conference  
on Cyrus on October 28-29*

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Interpreters generally presume a positive view of King Cyrus of Persia and the Achaemenid Empire in the Hebrew Bible. The references to Cyrus in Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1, in which Second Isaiah identifies him as YHWH's Messiah and Temple builder, indicate that Cyrus was viewed very favorably in at least one of the major prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible.

But such a view does not tell the entire story. Other prophetic books found in the Book of the Twelve Prophets, e.g., Zechariah, point to a very different view of the Achaemenid monarchs as foreign rulers that must be overthrown so that the house of David might once again be restored as the true monarchy in Israel.

Such a view points to a debate in the Hebrew Bible concerning Cyrus and the Achaemenid monarchy. Whereas the book of Isaiah views Cyrus as YHWH's chosen monarch, the Book of the Twelve views the Achaemenid monarchs as obstacles to YHWH's plans for the future of the Jewish people.

Deutero-Isaiah (Isaiah 40-55) is especially concerned with the question of YHWH's integrity as G-d of Israel and of all creation. Questions concerning YHWH's role as G-d of Israel and all creation would have been prompted by Judah's defeat by Babylon and its god, Marduk, in the late-sixth century B.C.E. Insofar as Deutero-Isaiah identifies YHWH's purposes with the rise of Cyrus and the Achaemenid empire, Deutero-Isaiah attempts to show that YHWH's plans for worldwide sovereignty are now being realized with Cyrus's ascension to the throne of the Babylonian Empire in 539 B.C.E. and his subsequent decree to allow Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Jerusalem Temple.

The Book of the Twelve Prophets covers the same issues and periods as the book of Isaiah, but it frequently challenges Isaiah's viewpoints and proposes alternative understandings of divine purpose. An example emerges in Isaiah's presentation of the famed "swords into plowshares" passage in Isaiah 2:2-4, which presents an image of the nations and Israel streaming to Jerusalem to learn divine instruction and to make world peace. Isaiah's understanding is that both the nations and Israel must submit to YHWH's worldwide sovereignty to achieve such an ideal.

The Book of the Twelve offers another view in which the ideal vision of "swords turned into plowshares" emerges only after Israel and YHWH confront and defeat the nations that oppress Israel. To that end, Joel 4:9-21 calls for plowshares to be turned into swords so that the nations that oppress Jerusalem might be defeated. Micah 4-5 envisions the rise of a new Davidic King who will defeat the nations that oppress Jerusalem to achieve the ideal vision of peace. The citation of a rewritten form of the ideal swords into plowshares oracle in Zechariah

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# The Folio

*shedding light*

The Newsletter of  
The Ancient Biblical  
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8:20-23 precedes Zechariah 9-14, which portrays YHWH's battle against the nations, who will finally recognize YHWH as world-sovereign at Mt. Zion in Jerusalem.

The introduction to the book of Zechariah points to an intertextual relationship with the book of Isaiah. Zechariah 1:1 identifies the prophet as Zechariah ben Berechiah ben Iddo, and places him in the second year of King Darius of Persia when construction on the Second Temple commenced. The identification of the prophet as Zechariah ben Berechiah ben Iddo presents a problem, insofar as the references to the prophet in Ezra 5:1 and 6:14 refer to him as Zechariah bar Iddo. Many scholars presume that there is some textual corruption at this point that resulted in the loss of the reference to Berechiah. Others presume that reference to Zechariah's grandfather is an acceptable naming convention at the time.

But there is another explanation for Zechariah's name. Isaiah 8:1-4 makes reference to a certain Zechariah ben Yeberechiah who is a signed witness to the birth of Isaiah's symbolically named son, Maher Shalal Hash Baz, "the spoil speeds, the prey hastens," whose name points to impending judgment against Israel and Judah. The name Zechariah ben Yeberechiah is quite similar to Zechariah ben Berechiah ben Iddo. Indeed, Yeberechiah is a theophoric name based on the third masculine singular imperfect (future) verbal statement, "YHWH will bless," whereas Berechiah is a theophoric name based on the third masculine singular perfect (past) verbal statement, "YHWH has blessed."

When read intertextually, the two names relate to each other as indications of the impending and realized fulfillment of YHWH's prophecies, i.e., in Isaiah 8:1-4, Zechariah ben Yeberechiah signals the *impending* fulfillment of YHWH's word of judgment against Israel and Judah, whereas in Zechariah 1:1, Zechariah ben Berechiah ben Iddo signals the *realized* fulfillment of YHWH's word of judgment against Israel and Judah. Isaiah employs the name to signal future judgment; Zechariah uses the name to signal judgment that has already taken place.

Such a role is crucial for understanding the book of Zechariah. Zechariah announces that the time of punishment has been realized and that the time for the reconstruction of the Temple and the restoration of Jerusalem and Judah—and the consequences that will ensue—has begun. Zechariah 1-6 presents Zechariah's visions concerning the significance of the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem, viz., the reconstruction of the Jerusalem Temple signals YHWH's plans to restore divine sovereignty over the world.

Zechariah 7-8, commonly read as the conclusion to Zechariah 1-6 in diachronic readings of the book, functions as the introduction to Zechariah 9-14 in synchronic readings of the book as a whole. Zechariah 7-8 details YHWH's return to Jerusalem, culminating in the oracle of Zechariah 8:20-23, which reworks elements of the Isaian swords into plowshares passage in Isaiah 2:2-4 and the Isaian reference to Emmanuel, "G-d is with us," in Isaiah 7:14 to portray the many peoples and strong nations that will come to entreat YHWH Sebaoth at the newly reestablished Temple in Jerusalem.

The portrayal of YHWH's battle against the nations that oppress Jerusalem and Judah then follows in Zechariah 9-14. Most scholars correctly view Zechariah 9-14 as a block of later compositions that have been appended to Zechariah 1-8, but they fail to understand the function of these chapters. They are intentionally appended to illustrate YHWH's plans to liberate Jerusalem and Judah from foreign oppression and to establish divine sovereignty over the entire world. Zechariah 9-14 cryptically portrays the Achaemenid Persian Empire as the foreign oppressor that YHWH must overthrow.

Many past scholars argued that Zechariah 9-14 was the product of a Jewish apocalypticist of the Hellenistic period, based on two principle observations. The first was the view that the approach of the king portrayed in Zechariah 9 must refer to Alexander the Great. The second was the view that the reference to Jews fighting Greeks in Zechariah 9:13 must refer to Jewish resistance to Alexander's approach.

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# MANUSCRIPTS 101: 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>

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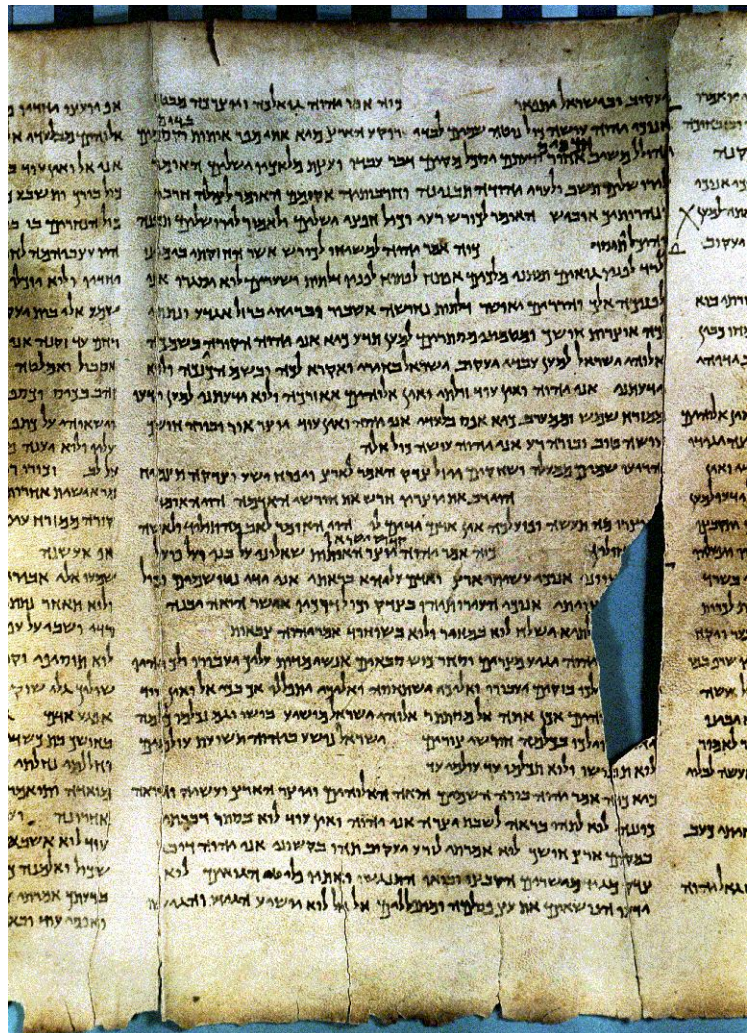
Arguably one of the most famous manuscripts from the Dead Sea, the Isaiah Scroll—also known as 1Q Is<sup>a</sup>—was among the first texts discovered in the caves surrounding Qumran. The prophetic book was written on seventeen sheets of sheepskin, tied together with linen thread. The text fills fifty-four columns that spread across the 24-foot-long manuscript. Its orthography points to a Hasmonean date (c. 125-100 B.C.E.), and the scribe who copied the Isaiah Scroll also likely penned the Community Rule (1QS).

In 1948, the manuscript made its way to the American Schools of Oriental Research, where John C. Trever was providentially working as a research fellow. He immediately recognized the significance of the document and took photographs. Later images pale in comparison because Trever captured the scroll prior to its inevitable deterioration and darkening. These invaluable films were generously donated to the Ancient Biblical Manuscript Center by John Trever himself after several years of teaching at Claremont School of Theology. The actual scroll is now housed within the Shrine of the Book in Jerusalem.

Seen here is John Trever’s picture of the thirty-eighth column of 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>. Six lines down, you will find the beginning of Isaiah 45. It reads, “Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped. . . . I will go before you and level the mountains, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron, I will give you the treasures of darkness and riches hidden in secret places, so that you may know that it is I, the LORD, the G-d of Israel, who call you by your name” (45:1-3, NRSV). Later, the divine even proclaims that Cyrus will build YHWH’s city and release the exiles to return home (45:13).

To learn more about Isaiah’s view of the Achaemenid monarchy, read our front-page article by Marvin Sweeney.

Image copyright John C. Trever and the ABMC. Digital image provided by Jim E. Trever.



*Continued from page 3*

Neither argument holds up. Zechariah 9 portrays the approach of the king from the land of Hadrach, Damascus, and Hamath, before proceeding down the Mediterranean coast, i.e., from Aram which is the route that one would take when travelling from Mesopotamia to Judah. But Alexander approached from Asia Minor before heading south toward Judah via the Mediterranean coast. The approach of the king is better understood as the approach of a Mesopotamian monarch, such as Darius on his march down the Mediterranean coast to put down revolt in Egypt in 517 B.C.E.

The portrayal of Jews fighting Greeks likewise does not apply to Alexander. Josephus (*Ant.* 11.329ff; cf. *b. Yoma* 69a) relates that when Alexander came to Jerusalem during the course of his campaign of conquest, he was welcomed into the city by the Jews. He then presented offerings to YHWH at the Jerusalem Temple and granted the Jews protection and privileges as loyal vassals. The depiction of Jews fighting Greeks in Zechariah 9:13 better portrays Jews who joined Darius's campaign against Greece later in his reign.

This brings us to the oracle concerning the three shepherds in Zechariah 11. Zechariah 11 presents a series of oracles that portray a process in which three shepherds who were expected to tend the sheep are hidden away so that YHWH might raise a new shepherd who will be destroyed when he does not tend the sheep. Interpreters have correctly understood that the passage employs the common metaphor of shepherds to portray the leadership of Judah and YHWH's plans to make changes.

Past interpreters have also generally understood that the leaders are themselves Judean, but we must observe that there is a distinction between the first three shepherds in vv. 4-14 who are hidden away, leaving the prophet to tend the people, and the next worthless shepherd of vv. 15-17 who feasts upon the sheep rather than tends to them and thereby earns punishment by the sword against his arm and right eye.

In the context of the early Persian period, the three shepherds who are hidden away in vv. 4-14 would refer to King Jehoiachin of Judah, who was exiled to Babylon in 597 B.C.E., his son Shealtiel, and his grandson, Zerubbabel. These figures were denied the Davidic throne in Jerusalem, first by the Babylonians and later by the Persians.

The worthless shepherd of vv. 15-17, who will devour the sheep and suffer punishment by the sword against his arm and right eye, then would be Darius. The language used to describe the worthless shepherd recalls the language used to describe Cyrus in Isaiah 44:28 where YHWH calls Cyrus, "my shepherd." Isaiah 41:2 portrays YHWH's victory from the east, i.e., Cyrus, as the one who makes the sword of his enemy like dust, and Isaiah 45:1 states that YHWH grasps Cyrus's right hand to tread down nations before him.

The identification of Darius as the worthless shepherd of Zechariah 11:15-17 then makes sense insofar as the following material in Zechariah 12-14 describes the process in which YHWH, accompanied by the House of David, defeats the nations that oppress Jerusalem and Judah. This is not the peaceful scenario of Isaiah 2:2-4; rather it represents the uprising against the oppressor anticipated by the Book of the Twelve.

Our comparison of the portrayal of Cyrus in the Book of Isaiah and Darius in the Book of Zechariah points to very different views of the Achaemenid dynasty in these prophetic books. The Book of Isaiah calls for submission to the Persian monarch, Cyrus, as YHWH's chosen Messiah and Temple builder at the conclusion of the Babylonian Exile when Cyrus authorized the return of Jews to Jerusalem in 539 to restore the Jerusalem Temple and Jewish life in the land of Judah. The Book of Zechariah differs from Isaiah insofar as it posits that YHWH was about to depose the Achaemenid monarchy and thereby open the way for the restoration of the Davidic monarchy and Judean political independence from Persian rule.



## PUBLICATIONS AND UPCOMING EVENTS



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### Publications

*Reading Ezekiel: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Reading the Old Testament; Macon, Ga.: Smyth and Helwys, 2013).

*Reading Prophetic Books: Form, Intertextuality, and Reception in Prophetic and Post-biblical Jewish Literature* (Forschungen zum Alten Testament; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013).

Hebrew Bible Editor. Resources for Biblical Study Monograph Series. Society of Biblical Literature, 2013-2015.

### Lectures, Courses, and Presentations

“Is the Conditional Covenant Really Conditional?” Panel on Jewish Biblical Theology. Sixteenth World Congress for Jewish Studies. Jerusalem, Israel. July 28-August 1, 2013.

“Contrasting Portrayals of the Achaemenid Monarchy in Isaiah and Zechariah.” Cyrus the Great: Life and Lore Conference. University of California Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA. October 28-29, 2013.

“What is Biblical Theology?” Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting. Baltimore, MD. November 24, 2013.

“Elijah: Prophet of Northern Israel and Herald of the Messiah.” Congregation Ner Tamid. Palos Verde, CA. February 16, 2014.

“The Patriarchs of Israel: Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph.” Mini-course, Har El Institute. Palm Desert, CA. March 5, 12, 19, 2014.

“The Twelve Prophets: Hosea and Malachi.” Shabbat with a Scholar. Har El Institute. Palm Desert, CA. April 11, 2014.

“The Hebrew Bible in Context.” Claremont School of Theology, Claremont, CA. Fall 2013.

“Reading Apocalyptic Literature.” Claremont School of Theology, Claremont, CA. Fall 2013.

“The World of the Bible.” Academy for Jewish Religion California. Los Angeles, CA. Fall 2013.

“Isaiah.” Academy for Jewish Religion California. Los Angeles, CA. Winter 2013.



*Jon Berquist*

*Visiting Professor of  
Hebrew Bible,  
Claremont School of  
Theology  
President,  
Disciples Seminary*



### Publications

Jon L. Berquist and Alice Hunt, eds., *Focusing Biblical Studies: The Crucial Nature of the Persian and Hellenistic Periods: Essays in Honor of Douglas A. Knight* (Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 544; New York and London: T & T Clark, 2012).

## Lectures, Courses, and Presentations

Respondent to Giovanni Bazzana, “The “Space” of Jesus and of His Followers: Scholarly Production of Space and Ideology.” Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, Baltimore, MD. November, 24, 2013.

“Postexilic Literature.” Claremont School of Theology, Claremont, CA. Fall 2013.



*James A. Sanders*

*Professor Emeritus,  
Claremont School of  
Theology/Claremont  
Graduate University*

## Publications

Description of the “Best Book Relating to the New Testament published in 2011-12: *Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World*,” by Frederick J. Murphy (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012). *Biblical Archaeology Review* 39.4 (2013): 40.

Co-author with David Marcus, “What’s Critical About a Critical Edition of the Bible?” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 39.6 (2013): 60-65.

## Lectures, Courses, and Presentations

“Introduction to the First Testament.” Episcopal Theological School at Claremont/Bloy House, Claremont, CA. Fall 2013.

*Shelley Long*

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for Scholarly  
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## Publications

“Who Determines Conversion? A Response to Gary Gilbert.” Pages 29-34 in *Claremont Studies in the Philosophy of Religion, Conference 2011* (Religion in Philosophy and Theology 70; edited by Ingolf U. Dalferth and Michael Ch. Rodgers. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013).

“Gareb,” “Gebim,” “Gedaliah Son of Pashhur,” “Gemariah Son of Hilkiyah,” “Gemariah Son of Shaphan,” and “Geruth-Chimham,” in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception* (edited by Dale C. Allison, et. al.; Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2013).

## Lectures, Courses, and Presentations

“Castrating Cushites and (Con)texts.” Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting. Baltimore, MD. November 25, 2013.

“Biblical Hebrew.” Claremont School of Theology, Claremont, CA. Fall 2013.

“Introduction to Biblical Literature: Exodus-Deuteronomy.” Azusa Pacific University, Azusa CA. Fall 2013.

## CST/CLU Welcomes Dr. Jon Berquist as Visiting Professor!

Claremont School of Theology has recently invited Jon Berquist to join the Hebrew Bible faculty. He comes to us from Disciples Seminary, located across the street from CST. He is the author or editor of twelve books, including *Judaism in Persia’s Shadow: A Social and Historical Approach* (1995) and *Controlling Corporeality: The Body and the Household in Ancient Israel* (2002).

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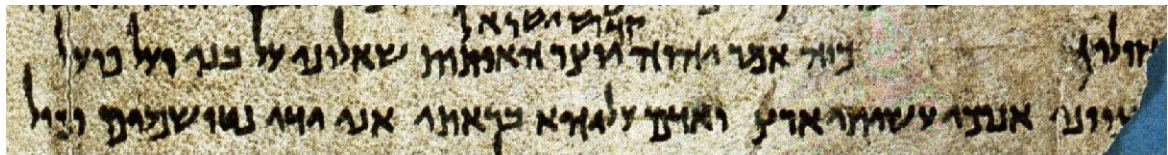
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Above is a close-up of Isaiah 45:11 from the Isaiah Scroll pictured on page 4. The verse reads, “Thus says the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and its Maker: Will you question me about my children, or command me concerning the work of my hands?” At the very top of the image, you can see that the scribe had to add the phrase, “the Holy One of Israel,” which he accidentally missed. Unfortunately, it wasn’t the first mistake he made in this column!

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