

## *Yx10 – Cultures & Their Stories*

From a broad viewpoint,<sup>1</sup> all people seem similar: we all pursue the survival (or better, the “thrival”) of ourselves, our families, and our values. Viewed more closely,<sup>2</sup> however, differences become apparent, in part because different people recognize different extents for their “extended families” and, more significantly, because different people choose different values.

For example, scientific humanists (or “Humanists”) recognize all humans as members of the same “human family” and choose trying to solve human problems more intelligently as one of our highest values. In contrast, most religious people consider (at most) fellow members of their religion to be “family” (e.g., fellow Hindus, fellow Jews, fellow Christians, fellow Muslims, etc.) and essentially all religious people choose, as their highest value, serving their god (or gods). In turn, though, the choice of serving their god(s) is, in most cases, a camouflaged way of serving themselves and their families (e.g., seeking “**blessing**” for themselves and their families, such as the nonsensical blessing of “**eternal life in paradise**”).

For most people, choices for the extent of their families and priorities for their values are strongly influenced by their cultures, especially *via* childhood indoctrination. It can therefore be stimulating, informative, and potentially useful to consider how different experiences led (and still lead) to the developments of different cultures.

### **TWO CONTRASTING CULTURES**

A contrasting case in point is the difference between the culture of the ancient Hebrews, as suggested by the first five books (*The Pentateuch* or *Torah*) of the Old Testament (OT), versus the culture of the ancient Greeks, as suggested by Homer’s two books (*The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*). I expect that, originally, differences in Hebrew and Greek cultures arose from different experiences of the people in their respective locations.

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<sup>1</sup> Which I tried to take at <http://zenofzero.net/docs/BoardMeeting.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Which I tried to do at [http://zenofzero.net/docs/V\\_Values\\_&Objectives.pdf](http://zenofzero.net/docs/V_Values_&Objectives.pdf).

## The Ancient Hebrews

Thus, on the one hand, the Hebrews couldn't have chosen a worse place to live. After wandering over from Mesopotamia, the Hebrews (a word possibly derived from Hebrew *'ibrî* meaning "one from the other side" or from Egyptian *habiru* meaning "wanderer") chose to live on land that was on the direct path between the major warring nations of the ancient Middle East (viz., Egypt *versus* "all comers", including the Hyksos, the Assyrians, and the Persians). It then seems consistent that, in general, the overrun Hebrews became fearful and introverted. That is, they seem to have adopted a "siege culture" (as revealed in the OT) that emphasized collectivism and obeying leaders.

Consistently, and inverting Hermes Trismegistus' famous "as above, so below" to the more appropriate "as below, so above" (e.g., man wasn't made in the image of God; God was made in the image of man!), the Hebrews assumed that their god was powerful and vengeful, leading them to adopt such a terrible concept as (from, e.g., *Job 28*, *Psalm 111*, and *Proverbs 9*, 10):

Fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.

Refuting such a horrible concept is Bertrand Russell's:

Fear is the main source of superstition, and one of the main sources of cruelty.  
To conquer fear is the beginning of wisdom.

Robert Ingersoll said it even more forcefully and poignantly:

Fear paralyzes the brain. Progress is born of courage. Fear believes – courage doubts. Fear falls upon the earth and prays – courage stands erect and thinks. Fear retreats – courage advances. Fear is barbarism – courage is civilization. Fear believes in witchcraft, in devils and in ghosts. Fear is religion – courage is science.

## The Ancient Greeks

The ancient Greeks, on the other hand (who probably wandered in from the northeast), settled in a variety of isolated river valleys in mountainous terrain (shielding them from land invasions) and with access to the sea (permitting explorations). Thereby, the Greeks became adventurers, sea traders, invaders, and settlers of other lands. It then seems consistent that they emphasized courage and individuality, that generally they were extroverts, that their gods were capricious (as was nature), and that they would adopt such wisdom (as given by the Seven Sages) as:

\* Go to other chapters *via*

Know thyself

Nothing too much

Know the right moment

Not even the gods fight against necessity.

## CULTURES DEFINED BY THEIR STORIES

In turn, in time, cultures commonly become defined in large measure by their stories, whether historical or fictional. For example, Homer's stories (almost certainly derived from centuries of oral tradition; estimated to have been first recorded in writing sometime around 800 BCE) about Achilles, Agamemnon, Odysseus (or in Latin, *Ulysses*), *et al.* to a large degree defined the culture of Ancient Greece. As Richard Hooker wrote:<sup>3</sup>

The [ancient] Greeks in general regard[ed] Homer's two epics as the highest cultural achievement of their people, the defining moment in Greek culture which set the basic Greek character in stone. Throughout antiquity, both in Greece and Rome, everything tended to be compared to these two works; events in history made sense when put in the light of the events narrated in these two works. As a result, then, these two epics [were] the focal point of Greek values and the Greek worldview despite all its evolution and permutations through the centuries following their composition.

There are two very important words repeatedly used throughout the Homeric epics: honor (*timé*) and virtue or greatness (*areté*). The latter term is perhaps the most reiterated cultural and moral value in ancient Greece and means something like achieving, morally and otherwise, your greatest potential as a human being. The reward for great honor and virtue is fame (*kleos*), which is what guarantees meaning and value to one's life. Dying without fame (*akleos*) is generally considered a disaster, and the warriors of the Homeric epics commit the most outrageous deeds to avoid dying in obscurity or infamy...

Such a suggestion doesn't diminish the importance to the ancient Greeks of, for example, their exposure to other cultures, their searches for meaning in life and explanations of natural phenomena, and their wisdom, but as I outline elsewhere,<sup>4</sup> one can trace their searches (for adventure, for meaning, and for wisdom) to the Homeric tales, which in turn enhanced the stature of

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<sup>3</sup> Copied from <http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~dee/MINOA/MINOA.HTM>.

<sup>4</sup> At <http://zenofzero.net/docs/Ix10Homer.pdf>.

humans (while diminishing the stature of the gods), leading to the wisdom expressed by Protagoras (485–421 BCE):

Man is the measure of all things.

Actually, cultures are to a large degree not just defined by their stories, but in some cases, even created from stories. For example, the Dark Ages in Europe were to a large degree created by the “otherworldly”, fictitious stories in the New Testament about Jesus. As another example, the current Dark Ages in the Islamic world are to a large degree caused by otherworldly, fictitious stories about Muhammad. In turn, both those otherworldly views can be traced back to Zarathustra’s wild fiction about a cosmic battle between good and evil and, further back, to speculations of prehistoric savages about gods, souls, and the oxymoronic concept of “life after death”.

In contrast, much of what’s good in the world can be traced to ideas from Homer, Aesop, Socrates, the Buddha, Confucius, Democritus, Epicurus, Galileo, Bacon, Spinoza, Hume, and other Humanists, too numerous to list.

### CREATION OF THE JEWISH CULTURE *via* THE *TORAH*

Unfortunately for the Hebrews, they didn’t have a Homer to entertain them with stories about honor and virtue, they didn’t have an Aesop to instruct them with stories that instilled wisdom, and they didn’t have a host of philosophers and scientific humanists to lead them to question and try to understand human interactions and natural phenomena. Instead, they had Ezra and Co-Conspirators (Ezra & C-C), who were apparently charged (by their Persian overlords) with ruling the Israelites. To accomplish that task, Ezra & C-C foisted a story book (or better, a “rule book”, i.e., the *Torah*, “the law”), onto the poor, unsuspecting Jewish people, a fictitious story that instructed the people how to serve and obey the priests (and their Persian overlords).

In earlier posts in this series, I summarized most of the stories in the OT’s first book, *Genesis*, about the Jewish patriarchs Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (aka Israel), Judah, and Joseph. In those stories (some of which may have had some historical bases, but even in such cases, the stories were essentially certainly massaged, manipulated, and mangled for priestly purposes), Ezra & C-C repeatedly conveyed to the unsuspecting Jewish people a despicable message of the form:

\* Go to other chapters *via*

You people aren't to decide what's right *versus* wrong; we clerics will do the deciding; you're to do what you're told. We clerics speak for the all-powerful, all-knowing Yahweh; people who mess with him don't live to tell about it. If you do what you're told, you'll be blessed; if you don't, you won't.

Unsurprisingly, the clerics didn't state the message so openly, but that's the message contained as the moral of most of their myths. Unsurprisingly, too, the horrible moral of all the myths in *Genesis* suppressed the individuality of the Jewish people, enslaving them to think as their clerics desired.

In this and the next few posts, I want to comment on some of the messages and morals that Ezra & C-C apparently tried to convey in their myths about Moses, which are found in the other books of the *Pentateuch*, i.e., in *Exodus*, *Leviticus*, *Numbers*, and *Deuteronomy*. Elsewhere,<sup>5</sup> I already posted six chapters outlining the hideous policies allegedly promoted by Moses (but in reality, promoted by Ezra & C-C). As I'll try to illustrate in these posts, Ezra & C-C used fictitious, horrible stories about Moses to drag the poor Jewish people still deeper into clerical depravity: not just enslavement of the thoughts of individuals but enslavement of the entire Jewish culture.

### THE STORIES ABOUT MOSES ARE LIES

At the outset I should acknowledge not only my limited knowledge of history but also the likelihood that the Hebrews did have some experience with someone trained by the Egyptian priesthood and whom they called "Moses". In a later post I plan to address questions about who Moses might have been. The likelihood that there was a "real Moses" (and maybe even more than one!) seems especially probable, since for much of the 2,000 years before Ezra & C-C, the "land of the Canaanites" was ruled by Egypt.

But just as there might have been "real Greeks" named Achilles, Agamemnon, Odysseus, etc., about whom Homer told fictitious stories, the stories told by Ezra & C-C about Moses are obviously fictitious, i.e., myths, i.e., "priestly fabrications", i.e., lies.

That the stories about Moses are fictitious can be seen from three prominent features:

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<sup>5</sup> See [http://zenofzero.net/docs/Qx01\\_Introduction.pdf](http://zenofzero.net/docs/Qx01_Introduction.pdf).

### 1. *Gods don't exist*

As I've addressed elsewhere,<sup>6</sup> the most reliable statement that humans can make (even much more reliable than the claim that we exist!) is that no god exists (or has ever existed). Therefore, any story about any god in any "holy book" (including the Bible, the Koran, and the Book of Mormon) is a false depiction of reality. Consequently, all the stories in the OT about Moses interacting with his god are at least hallucinations and far more likely to be "priestly fabrications", i.e., lies.

### 2. *There is no "supernatural"*

As I've also addressed elsewhere,<sup>7</sup> not a single miracle in the Biblical sense has ever been validated. In fact, even the concept of a miracle (in the Biblical sense, i.e., an event with a supernatural cause) is an oxymoron: if an event occurs, then perforce, it's natural – not some "mysterious way of the Lord". Consequently, any "miracle" described in any "holy book", such as the claimed miracles in *Exodus* [e.g., Moses turning his staff into a snake, turning the water of the Nile into blood, parting the Red Sea (or, translated correctly, "Reed Sea"), etc.] is either a mistaken description of some natural phenomenon or a lie.

And actually, it's crucial for humanity that no miracle (in the biblical sense) ever be validated, because if it were, then our fundamental basis for understanding reality would collapse: we could no longer trust our basic premiss of causality (i.e., that all events have causes). Of course, religious people argue that they don't seek to violate causality (for example, they claim that their "prayers of intercession" stimulated their god to cause the tornado to bypass their church), but as Robert Carroll summarizes at his Skeptics Dictionary website:<sup>8</sup>

In conclusion, there are logical, scientific, and metaphysical reasons for not seriously investigating such a notion as invoking a [Supernatural Being] or metaphysical force to alter external reality from its natural course. The idea is logically contradictory, scientifically preposterous, and metaphysically demeaning. It requires God to be perfect and imperfect, it makes a mockery of the notion of scientific tests of causality... it belittles the Omnipotent Infinite God, if such exists, and ignores the possibility of lesser supernatural powers or malevolent energies interfering with nature in untold ways.

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<sup>6</sup> At <http://zenofzero.net/docs/IiIndoctrinationInIgnorance.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> At <http://zenofzero.net/docs/IgGainingConfidenceandTrust.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Copied from <http://skeptdic.com/prayer.html>.

Consequently, for people who are no longer children, all supernatural stunts described in all “holy books” [such as parting or walking on water, stopping the Earth’s rotation (or having it rotate backwards!), magically curing diseases (including death!), seeing and communicating with nonexistent supernatural beings such as angels, and so on, including specific prophecies (i.e., beyond general statements, such as the prediction that the sun will probably rise again tomorrow)] should be treated as just fluff, perhaps fitting for fairy tales and TV cartoons but not to be “believed” by adults who have even just half-functioning brains.

### 3. *Historical and archeological studies*

As can be found from reviewing even just reports on the internet, extensive and defensible historical and archeological studies have shown that the events described in the *Pentateuch* dealing with Moses (e.g., the mass exodus of enslaved Jews from Egypt) and, for that matter, most “important events” depicted in the entire Bible, never occurred. In fact, last night (2008/11/22), I watched a tape of the 2008/11/18 PBS-NOVA program “The Bible’s Buried Secrets”,<sup>9</sup> and though it whitewashed the origins of monotheism and ignored the critical role of the Persians and Zoroastrianism, its review of archeological data rather completely showed that the *Pentateuch* stories are vast exaggerations of what actually occurred.

In the case of the alleged exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, for example, defensible historical studies of Egyptian history started soon after Champollion deciphered the Egyptian hieroglyphs on the Rosetta stone in the early 1820s. At present, quite possibly more reliable information is available about ancient Egypt than about any other ancient culture. For example (as one of many examples), see André Dollinger’s impressive website.<sup>10</sup> From such information it has been reliably concluded that neither all the troubles that Moses’ god allegedly caused the Egyptians nor the mass exodus of the Jews from Egypt depicted in the OT’s *Exodus* ever occurred.

Similar conclusions (and much more) have been defensibly reached from archeological studies in “the land of the Canaanites” during the past half-century.

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<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/bible/>.

<sup>10</sup> At <http://www.reshafim.org.il/ad/egypt/index.html>.

The first century of such archeological studies (starting roughly in 1850) were, not only indefensible, they degraded the science of archaeology. As described in detail at Mike Magee's thorough *AskWhy!* website,<sup>11</sup> as well as many other websites,<sup>12</sup> the "archeologists" involved in earlier studies not only didn't "let the data speak for themselves", they destroyed archeological sites in their careless excavations. Their goal wasn't to understand but to find evidence to confirm their biblical biases.

During the most recent half-century, in contrast, defensible archeological research has led to the inescapable conclusion that the OT stories about Moses (as well as many other OT stories) are just "priestly fabrication"/lies. The following is an illustrative summary, copied from an article by Bernard Katz and published in the 2003 January/February issue of the *American Rationalist*:<sup>13</sup>

Abraham, the Jewish patriarch, probably never existed. Nor did Moses. The entire Exodus story as recounted in the Bible probably never occurred. The same is true of the tumbling of the walls of Jericho. And David, far from being the fearless king who built Jerusalem into a mighty capital, was more likely a provincial leader – a warlord – whose reputation was later magnified to provide a rallying point for a fledgling nation. Such startling propositions – the product of findings by archaeologists digging in Israel and its environs over the last 25 years – have gained wide acceptance among non-Orthodox rabbis. But there has been no attempt to disseminate these ideas or to discuss them with the laity – until now...

The notion that the Bible is not literally true "is more or less settled and understood among most Conservative rabbis," observes Davis Wolpe, a rabbi at Sinai Temple in Los Angeles... But some congregants, he says, "may not like the stark airing of it." Last Passover, in a sermon to 2200 congregants at his synagogue, Rabbi Wolpe frankly said that "virtually every modern archeologist agrees that [the way] the Bible describes the Exodus is not the way it happened, if it happened at all." The rabbi offered what he called a "litany of disillusion" about the narrative, including contradictions, improbabilities, chronological lapses, and the absence of corroborating evidence...

It's good to see that at least some Jewish clerics (such as Rabbi Wolpe) aren't totally delusional, but unfortunately, fundamentalist Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Mormon clerics continue to claim that the fabricated stories

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<sup>11</sup> The index is at <http://www.askwhy.co.uk/index.php>; see details at <http://www.askwhy.co.uk/judaism/0100Scriptures.php> - Archaeology.

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., [http://www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/Religions/non-iranian/Judaism/Persian\\_Judaism/book4/pt10.htm](http://www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/Religions/non-iranian/Judaism/Persian_Judaism/book4/pt10.htm).

<sup>13</sup> At <http://therationalist.eu.org/kk.php/s,2478>.

about Moses (and the rest of the Jewish patriarchs) are “God’s holy truth”, indoctrinating still another generation of Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Mormon children in biblical balderdash.<sup>14</sup>

But be that as it is, an obvious series of question is: Why did Ezra & C-C (i.e., whoever concocted the stories about Moses) do it? What was their purpose in fabricating such stories? What morals and messages were Ezra & C-C trying to convey to the Israelites with their Moses myth?

### EZRA & C-C’s INFERRED PURPOSES

Based on what I’ll address below and in the next post, it appears that Ezra & C-C’s purpose in creating the Moses myth (and in fact, the entire *Pentateuch*) was to prepare the Jewish people to be ruled in a new, Egyptian-style, Persian-approved priesthood, led by none other than Ezra et al. To accomplish their objective, it appears that Ezra & C-C (deviously but intelligently) concocted a series of fictitious stories about Moses to depict the Jews as simultaneously oppressed by others and, yet, chosen as “special” – by no less than the Persian god who allegedly created the universe.

In fact, the resulting cultural theme of *oppressed superiority* not only resonated with the poor Jewish people, it has reverberated throughout history (e.g., in communities of Christians, Muslims, Communists, Nazis, and Soviets) – and still today, it echoes in fundamentalist Jewish, Christian, Mormon, and Muslim groups (such as those affiliated with the “Christian Reich”, Zionists, the Palestinian Liberation Organization, and Al Qaeda). Thereby, with their fabricated stories about Moses, Ezra & C-C prepared the way for subsequent horrors perpetrated against the Jews and others by the Nazis (who felt oppressed superiority) and by Muslims, both past and present (who still claim to have a culture that’s superior but oppressed).

As for how Ezra & C-C might have conceived of the idea to concoct such stories about Moses (and the other “patriarchs”), I expect that they were strongly influenced by Persian stories (whether fictitious or not), especially the stories about Persian emperors. Of special interest would have been Persian stories about Cyrus the Great, for recall that he was a hero even to the Hebrews. Thus, recall that, at *Isaiah 45*, 1, Cyrus is described as God’s “**anointed**” (or “**the Messiah**”).

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<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., [http://zenofzero.net/docs/Ox20\\_Biblical\\_Balderdash.pdf](http://zenofzero.net/docs/Ox20_Biblical_Balderdash.pdf).

In one such story about Cyrus, a story relayed by “the world’s first historian”, Herodotus (484–420 BCE), in his book *The Persian Wars*,<sup>15</sup> the infant Cyrus was saved from execution, ordered by the Median ruler Astyages – just as Ezra & C-C claimed in *Exodus 2* that the infant Moses was saved from execution, ordered by the Pharaoh. Another story about Cyrus, relayed by Herodotus and more relevant for Ezra & C-C’s manipulation of the Hebrew culture, describes how the young Cyrus instilled a feeling (in the Persians) of **oppressed superiority** (over the Medes) as follows.

Afterwards, when Cyrus grew to manhood and became known as the bravest and most popular of all his compeers, Harpagus [who was ordered to kill the baby Cyrus, and when the ruler, Asytages (the grandfather of Cyrus the Great), found that Harpagus failed to do the deed, Asytages had Harpagus’ son killed and then served Harpagus his son for dinner!], who was bent on revenging himself upon Astyages began to pay him [the young Cyrus] court by gifts and messages. His own rank was too humble for him to hope to obtain vengeance without some foreign help. When therefore he saw Cyrus, whose wrongs were so similar to his own, growing up expressly (as it were) to be the avenger whom he needed, he set to work to procure his support and aid in the matter.

He had already paved the way for his designs, by persuading, severally, the great Median nobles, whom the harsh rule of their monarch had offended, that the best plan would be to put Cyrus at their head, and dethrone Astyages. These preparations made, Harpagus, being now ready for revolt, was anxious to make known his wishes to Cyrus, who still lived in Persia; but as the roads between Media and Persia were guarded, he had to contrive a means of sending word secretly, which he did in the following way.

He took a hare, and cutting open its belly without hurting the fur, he slipped in a letter containing what he wanted to say, and then carefully sewing up the paunch, he gave the hare to one of his most faithful slaves, disguising him as a hunter with nets, and sent him off to Persia to take the game as a present to Cyrus, bidding him tell Cyrus, by word of mouth, to paunch the animal himself, and let no one be present at the time. All was done as he wished, and Cyrus, on cutting the hare open, found the letter inside, and read as follows:

Son of Cambyses, the gods assuredly watch over thee, or never wouldst thou have passed through thy many wonderful adventures. Now is the time when thou mayst avenge thyself upon Astyages, thy murderer. He willed thy death, remember; to the gods and to me thou owest that thou art still alive.

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<sup>15</sup> Available at <http://classics.mit.edu/Herodotus/history.html>.

I think thou art not ignorant of what he did to thee, nor of what I suffered at his hands because I committed thee to the cowherd, and did not put thee to death. Listen now to me, and obey my words, and all the empire of Astyages shall be thine.

Raise the standard of revolt in Persia, and then march straight on Media. Whether Astyages appoint me to command his forces against thee, or whether he appoint any other of the princes of the Medes, all will go as thou couldst wish. They will be the first to fall away from him, and joining thy side, exert themselves to overturn his power. Be sure that on our part all is ready; wherefore do thou thy part, and that speedily.

Cyrus, on receiving the tidings contained in this letter, set himself to consider how he might best persuade the Persians to revolt. After much thought, he hit on the following as the most expedient course: he wrote what he thought proper upon a roll, and then calling an assembly of the Persians, he unfolded the roll, and read out of it that Astyages appointed him their general. “And now,” said he, “since it is so, I command you to go and bring each man his reaping-hook.” With these words he dismissed the assembly...

When, in obedience to the orders which they had received, the Persians came with their reaping-hooks, Cyrus led them to a tract of ground, about eighteen or twenty furlongs each way, covered with thorns, and ordered them to clear it before the day was out. They accomplished their task; upon which he issued a second order to them, to take the bath the day following, and again come to him. Meanwhile he collected together all his father’s flocks, both sheep and goats, and all his oxen, and slaughtered them, and made ready to give an entertainment to the entire Persian army. Wine, too, and bread of the choicest kinds were prepared for the occasion.

When the morrow came, and the Persians appeared, he bade them recline upon the grass, and enjoy themselves. After the feast was over, he requested them to tell him “which they liked best, today’s work, or yesterday’s?” They answered that “the contrast was indeed strong: yesterday brought them nothing but what was bad, today everything that was good.”

Cyrus instantly seized on their reply, and laid bare his purpose in these words:

Ye men of Persia, thus do matters stand with you. If you choose to hearken to my words, you may enjoy these and ten thousand similar delights, and never condescend to any slavish toil; but if you will not hearken, prepare yourselves for unnumbered toils as hard as yesterday’s. Now therefore follow my bidding, and be free. For myself I feel that I am destined by Providence to undertake your liberation; and you, I am sure, are no whit inferior to the Medes in anything, least of all in bravery. Revolt, therefore, from Astyages, without a moment’s delay.

The Persians, who had long been impatient of the Median dominion, now that they had found a leader, were delighted to shake off the yoke. Meanwhile Astyages [the Median ruler, Cyrus' grandfather], informed of the doings of Cyrus, sent a messenger to summon him to his presence. Cyrus replied, "Tell Astyages that I shall appear in his presence sooner than he will like."

Astyages, when he received this message, instantly armed all his subjects, and, as if God had deprived him of his senses, appointed Harpagus to be their general, forgetting how greatly he had injured him. So when the two armies met and engaged, only a few of the Medes, who were not in the secret, fought; others deserted openly to the Persians; while the greater number counterfeited fear, and fled.

Astyages, on learning the shameful flight and dispersion of his army, broke out into threats against Cyrus, saying, "Cyrus shall nevertheless have no reason to rejoice"; and directly he seized the Magian interpreters [i.e., the priests who, years earlier, had interpreted Astyages' dream about the infant Cyrus becoming the ruler, and therefore, Astyages' decision to kill the infant Cyrus] who had persuaded him to allow Cyrus to escape [after it was found that the infant Cyrus hadn't been executed], and impaled them; after which, he armed all the Medes who had remained in the city, both young and old; and leading them against the Persians, fought a battle, in which he was utterly defeated, his army being destroyed, and he himself falling into the enemy's [Cyrus'] hands...

Thus after a reign of thirty-five years, Astyages lost his crown, and the Medes, in consequence of his cruelty, were brought under the rule of the Persians. Their empire over the parts of Asia beyond the Halys had lasted one hundred and twenty-eight years, except during the time when the Scythians had the dominion. Afterwards the Medes repented of their submission, and revolted from Darius, but were defeated in battle, and again reduced to subjection. Now, however, in the time of Astyages, it was the Persians who under Cyrus revolted from the Medes, and became thenceforth the rulers of Asia. Cyrus kept Astyages at his court during the remainder of his life, without doing him any further injury. Such then were the circumstances of the birth and bringing up of Cyrus, and such were the steps by which he mounted the throne...

Regardless of the veracity of the above story (and assuming that Herodotus relayed it accurately – since it seems he would have no reason to do otherwise), I expect that the reader who has some familiarity with the OT's *Exodus* is amazed by both the similarities and the differences between the stories about Cyrus and about Moses. The most stunning similarity, I would argue, is that Cyrus offered the rebellious Persians the same option that Moses (allegedly) offered the rebellious Jews. In essence the option was: *follow me and be free (and blessed) – or don't and continue to be slaves (and cursed)*. In both stories, also, the leaders attempted to instill feelings of *oppressed superiority* in their followers.

\* Go to other chapters *via*

As for some differences, notice in the above story that Cyrus is portrayed as intelligent, thoughtful, careful, practical, cunning, brave, and not vindictive – even forgiving – even to someone (his grandfather) who had ordered him executed when he was an infant. In the fictitious *Exodus*, in contrast, Moses is depicted as a cowardly murderer who ran from justice, who had no qualms about the alleged killing of all Egyptian firstborn children, executed fellow Jews for having the audacity to think for themselves, and ordered the slaughter, rape, and genocide of people peacefully living on their own land.

Further, notice not only that Cyrus paid no heed to “the supernatural” (e.g., he didn’t invoke support from some god) but also that, in the story, the priests (the Magi, who interpreted the dream of Cyrus’ grandfather and advised him to kill the infant but advised him to let the young man Cyrus live) were executed. Similarly, by the way, in his *Odyssey*, Homer had Ulysses execute the priest who feasted at his expense while waiting months to marry his wife, Penelope, to one of her many suitors. Moses, in contrast, was depicted as an Egyptian priest steeped in supernaturalism, of course including his many, fake “magic tricks”.

To concoct their stories, Ezra & C-C must have realized that their stories would need to be substantially different – if they were to discharge their duties (to the Persians) to rule the Jewish people. In contrast to the Persians (and Greeks), the Jews (or better, the people living in the land of the Canaanites) were immersed in “supernaturalism”, especially since, during much of that time, Canaan had been ruled as an Egyptian province – and perhaps no culture in the world (save perhaps the Indian culture) had ever succumbed so completely to supernaturalism as did the ancient Egyptian. It was similar to the devastating influence of supernaturalism during the Dark Ages in Europe and in Islamic countries today.

### ANCIENT SPECULATIONS ABOUT DREAMS & “OMENS”

Supernaturalism was, of course, common in the ancient World, but differences are detectable and, I think, important. For example, their stories reveal that the Greeks, Persians, and Hebrews “believed” that dreams and “omens” were communications from their gods, but notice some differences in the following stories.

## 1. Hebrews

In one story in the OT, and similar to Egyptian and Babylonian stories from before 2500 BCE (when the pyramids were built in Egypt), Jacob (aka Israel) dreamt of a ladder (*Genesis 28*) or staircase,

...erected on earth with its top reaching the heavens... the angels of God were going up and coming down it, and the Lord stood at its top.

As a result of his dream, Jacob decided that the location where he slept was “the gate of heaven” and he made the location a shrine.

Also, Jacob’s favorite son Joseph was an interpreter of dreams, saying to the Pharaoh (*Genesis 41*):

It is not within my power [to interpret your dream], but God will speak concerning the welfare of Pharaoh.

That led to Joseph becoming the second most powerful man in Egypt (so the clerical authors claim).

I surmise that, upon hearing such stories, the Hebrews expected that their god communicated to them in their dreams. Such expectations were confirmed, for example, at *Numbers 12*, 6, where Yahweh allegedly says:

Hear now my words: if there is a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known to him in a vision; I will speak with him in a dream.

## 2. Persians

In the above-quoted Persian story from Herodotus, the Magi (from which the English word ‘magic’ is derived) interpreted the ruler’s (Astyages’) dream about the infant Cyrus and interpreted his behavior when he was a boy, but for their interpretations, Astyages executed the priests. I expect that, upon hearing that story, the Persians were wary of interpreting dreams!

Another story from Herodotus (quoted below) illustrates the Persians’ realization that interpreting dreams could be dangerous. It also illustrates the cunningness of the Persian (or Median) priests, i.e., the Magi (who Ezra & C-C probably emulated). This is the story about the next emperor after Cyrus the Great, i.e., Cambyses [Cambyses II, who ruled only seven years, from 529–522 BCE, who conquered Egypt in 525 BCE, and who was followed by Darius (I, “Darius the Great”)].

As an introduction to this story, I should relay Herodotus's opinion that Cambyses was "mad" (for murdering his brother Smerdis, violating custom and marrying two of his full sisters, murdering one of them for reminding him that he had murdered their brother Smerdis, murdering a boy to demonstrate how competent he was as a bowman, etc., including some disastrous expeditions with his army and his murdering many Egyptian priests).

Herodotus tells the following story (in his Book 3, starting at ¶61), which illustrates the realization that interpreting dreams could be dangerous.

While Cambyses, son of Cyrus, after losing his senses, still lingered in Egypt, two Magi brothers, revolted against him. One of them had been left in Persia by Cambyses as comptroller of his household; and it was he who began the revolt. Aware that Smerdis [Cambyses' brother] was dead, and that his death was hid and known to few of the Persians, while most believed that he was still alive, he laid his plan, and made a bold stroke for the crown. He had a brother – the same of whom I spoke before as his partner in the revolt – who happened greatly to resemble Smerdis the son of Cyrus, whom Cambyses his brother had put to death. And not only was this brother of his like Smerdis in person, but he also bore the selfsame name, to wit, Smerdis. Patizeithes, the other Magus, having persuaded him that he would carry the whole business through, took him and made him sit upon the royal throne. Having so done, he sent heralds through all the land, to Egypt and elsewhere, to make proclamation to the troops that henceforth they were to obey Smerdis the son of Cyrus and not Cambyses.

The other heralds therefore made proclamation as they were ordered, and likewise the herald whose place it was to proceed into Egypt. He, when he reached Agbatana in Syria, finding Cambyses and his army there, went straight into the middle of the host, and standing forth before them all, made the proclamation which Patizeithes the Magus had commanded. Cambyses no sooner heard him, than believing that what the herald said was true, and imagining that he had been betrayed by Prexaspes (who, he supposed, had not put Smerdis to death when sent into Persia for that purpose), he turned his eyes full upon Prexaspes, and said, "Is this the way, Prexaspes, that thou didst my errand?" "Oh! my liege," answered the other, "there is no truth in the tidings that Smerdis thy brother has revolted against thee, nor hast thou to fear in time to come any quarrel, great or small, with that man. With my own hands I wrought thy will on him, and with my own hands I buried him. If of a truth the dead can leave their graves, expect Astyages the Mede to rise and fight against thee; but if the course of nature be the same as formerly [i.e., if the dead still don't rise from their graves!], then be sure no ill will ever come upon thee from this quarter. Now, therefore, my counsel is that we send in pursuit of the herald, and strictly question him who it was that charged him to bid us obey king Smerdis."

When Prexaspes had so spoken, and Cambyses had approved his words, the herald was forthwith pursued, and brought back to the king. Then Prexaspes said to him, “Sirrah, thou bear’st us a message, sayst thou, from Smerdis, son of Cyrus. Now answer truly, and go thy way scathless. Did Smerdis have thee to his presence and give thee thy orders, or hadst thou them from one of his officers?”

The herald answered, “Truly I have not set eyes on Smerdis son of Cyrus, since the day when king Cambyses led the Persians into Egypt. The man who gave me my orders was the Magus that Cambyses left in charge of the household; but he said that Smerdis son of Cyrus sent you the message.”

In all this the herald spoke nothing but the strict truth. Then Cambyses said thus to Prexaspes: “Thou art free from all blame, Prexaspes, since, as a right good man, thou hast not failed to do the thing which I commanded. But tell me now, which of the Persians can have taken the name of Smerdis, and revolted from me?” “I think, my liege,” he answered, “that I apprehend the whole business. The men who have risen in revolt against thee are the two Magi, Patizeithes, who was left comptroller of thy household, and his brother, who is named Smerdis.”

Cambyses no sooner heard the name of Smerdis than he was struck with the truth of Prexaspes’ words, and the fulfillment of his own dream – the dream, I mean, which he had in former days, when one appeared to him in his sleep and told him that Smerdis sate upon the royal throne, and with his head touched the heavens. So when he saw that he had needlessly slain his brother Smerdis, he wept and bewailed his loss: after which, smarting with vexation as he thought of all his ill luck, he sprang hastily upon his steed, meaning to march his army with all haste to Susa against the Magus.

As he made his spring, the button of his sword-sheath fell off, and the bared point entered his thigh, wounding him exactly where he had himself once wounded the Egyptian god Apis. Then Cambyses, feeling that he had got his death-wound, inquired the name of the place where he was, and was answered, “Agbatana.” Now before this it had been told him by the oracle at Buto that he should end his days at Agbatana. He, however, had understood the Median Agbatana, where all his treasures were, and had thought that he should die there in a good old age; but the oracle meant Agbatana in Syria. [And thus the dangers, the story is relaying, not only of interpreting dreams but also in trying to understand communications from oracles!] So when Cambyses heard the name of the place, the double shock that he had received, from the revolt of the Magus and from his wound, brought him back to his senses. And he understood now the true meaning of the oracle, and said, “Here then Cambyses, son of Cyrus, is doomed to die.”

At this time he said no more; but twenty days afterwards he called to his presence all the chief Persians who were with the army, and addressed them as follows:

Persians, needs must I tell you now what hitherto I have striven with the greatest care to keep concealed. When I was in Egypt I saw in my sleep a vision, which would that I had never beheld! I thought a messenger came to me from my home, and told me that Smerdis sate upon the royal throne, and with his head touched the heavens. Then I feared to be cast from my throne by Smerdis my brother, and I did what was more hasty than wise.

Ah! truly, do what they may, it is impossible for men to turn aside the coming fate. I, in my folly, sent Prexaspes to Susa to put my brother to death. So this great woe was accomplished, and I then lived without fear, never imagining that, after Smerdis was dead, I need dread revolt from any other. But herein I had quite mistaken what was about to happen, and so I slew my brother without any need, and nevertheless have lost my crown. For it was Smerdis the Magus, and not Smerdis my brother, of whose rebellion God [i.e., Zarathustra's principal god, Ahura Mazda] forewarned me by the vision. The deed is done, however, and Smerdis, son of Cyrus, be sure is lost to you.

The Magi have the royal power – Patizeithes, whom I left at Susa to overlook my household, and Smerdis his brother. There was one who would have been bound beyond all others to avenge the wrongs I have suffered from these Magians but he [i.e., the brother he had murdered], alas! has perished by a horrid fate, deprived of life by those nearest and dearest to him. In his default, nothing now remains for me but to tell you, O Persians, what I would wish to have done after I have breathed my last.

Therefore, in the name of the gods that watch over our royal house, I charge you all, and especially such of you as are Achaemenids, that ye do not tamely allow the kingdom to go back to the Medes. Recover it one way or another, by force or fraud; by fraud, if it is by fraud that they have seized on it; by force, if force has helped them in their enterprise. Do this, and then may your land bring you forth fruit abundantly, and your wives bear children, and your herds increase, and freedom be your portion for ever: but do it not – make no brave struggle to regain the kingdom – and then my curse be on you, and may the opposite of all these things happen to you – and not only so, but may you, one and all, perish at the last by such a fate as mine!

Not incidentally, this option of a blessing or a curse described by Cambyses (similar to the option offered by his father, Cyrus the Great, to the Persians who subsequently overthrew the Medes) is the same option that Moses offered the Israelites – at least according to Ezra & C-C, who were writing their fictitious stories about Moses at about the same time Herodotus was writing about Cambyses. And in regard to Cambyses other option of “**force or fraud**”, Ezra & C-C clearly chose fraud.

### 3. Greeks

Homer's stories, similarly, provide several vignettes suggesting that interpreting dreams and omens was dangerous. For example, in Book (or Chapter) II of *The Iliad*, Zeus decided to help Achilles by sending Agamemnon “a lying dream”, purposefully deceiving him.

Also, in Book XIX of *The Odyssey*, Penelope says:

Stranger, dreams are very curious and unaccountable things, and they do not by any means invariably come true. There are two gates through which these unsubstantial fancies proceed; the one is of horn, and the other ivory. Those that come through the gate of ivory are fatuous, but those from the gate of horn mean something to those that see them.

Upon hearing that, I expect, most Greeks concluded: since one can't tell which gate through which a particular dream has come, it would be wise not to base decisions on dreams; they may be “lying dreams”!

And I admit that I don't want to resist adding the following quotations from Homer. One is the assessment of omens by the Trojan hero, Hector:

What care I whether [the birds] fly towards dawn or dark, and whether they be on my right hand or on my left? ... There is one omen, and one only – that a man should fight for his country.

Another is the statement by Ulysses' son Telemachus:

My mother [Penelope] does indeed sometimes send for a soothsayer and question him, but I give his prophesying no heed... Go home, old man, and prophesy to your own children... I can read these omens myself much better than you can; birds are always flying about in the sunshine somewhere or other, but they seldom mean anything... You may preach as much as you please, but we shall only hate you the more.

Then there's the tremendous, Humanist statement by Penelope:

Men live but for a little season; if they are hard, and deal hardly, people wish them ill so long as they are alive, and speak contemptuously of them when they are dead, but he that is righteous and deals righteously, the people tell of his praise among all lands, and many shall call him blessed.

And the cumulative statement that Homer put in Zeus' mouth:

See now, how men lay blame upon us gods for what is after all nothing but their own folly.

As the Greek philosopher Diogenes (412–323 BCE) summarized:

When I look upon seamen, men of physical science, and philosophers, man is the wisest of all beings. When I look upon priests, prophets, and interpreters of dreams, nothing is so contemptible as man.

[To be continued.]