

Article

The American Cyrus: How an Ancient King Became a Political Tool for Voter Mobilization

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Abstract: During the 2016 presidential election, Evangelical supporters of Donald Trump presented him as a modern version of the ancient King Cyrus of Persia. To many conservative Christians, the comparison offered a justification of voting for a candidate whose character supposedly was at odds with their Christian virtues. Subsequent to his inauguration, the idea of Trump being an American Cyrus continued to develop and circulate. It is the aim of this article to deepen the understanding of Cyrus as a political tool in the West and explain how he ended up as a means to mobilize American voters. With an emphasis on the last 250 years, the article looks at how various personalities have been compared to Cyrus or presented as modern Cyruses. Based on these examples, it develops a typology, arguing that the modern Cyrus can be best understood as different types and subtypes, of which several have been applied to Trump. The article demonstrates how the various subtypes have separate evolutionary lines, which in turn can be attributed to different goals and functions.

Keywords: Cyrus; Donald Trump; United States; 2016 election; Evangelicals; prophecies; Persia



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1. Introduction

Father, I pray for [our] president. (...) We ask you, Father, that he can be the Cyrus, to bring reformation, to bring change into this nation. And all the nations of the earth will say, America is the greatest nation of the earth. (NBC News 2020)

In his prayer for President Donald Trump at the launching of the *Evangelicals for Trump* coalition in January 2020, Apostle Guillermo Maldonado identified the ancient King Cyrus of Persia as *the* role model for Trump to follow in order to make America great again. Besides the search for divine favor inherent in prayer, his words connecting the two rulers sent a powerful message to the Evangelical audience: Trump was God's chosen tool to save America from immorality and destruction. As the religious leaders placed their hands on Trump, they signaled that they recognized him as such, hinting to the flock that they should follow along and vote for him on November 3.

White Evangelicals played a major role in Trump's win in the 2016 election, amounting to one third of his total number of votes (Pew Research Center 2018). Traditionally, white Evangelicals have been associated with conservative politics, and since the last decades of the 20th century this has increasingly made them an important constituency to the Republican Party (Steensland and Wright 2014; Fitzgerald 2017, pp. 291–336; Ericksen 2019). The political engagement of Evangelicals typically focus on anti-abortion, the traditional family, Christian expressions in the public sphere, the right to own guns, and a strong national defense. In addition, many Evangelicals are outspoken Zionists. Their support for Israel is related to their view of the nation as an end time sign and a fulfillment of biblical prophecy (Boyer 1992, pp. 187–93; Sutton 2014, pp. 302–3). Further, Christian Zionists believe that God's blessing of Abraham, along with the cursing of his enemies in Genesis 12:3 means that God will bless individuals and nations that support Israel, and destroy those who oppose the Jews or their nation (Durbin 2020). Political support for Israel is hence perceived as necessary to make America a great nation, and the relationship between the two countries has influenced the comparison of Trump with King Cyrus.

In this article, I will show how Cyrus the Great (c.580s–c.530), King of the First Persian Empire, became a key figure to mobilize conservative Christian voters in the 2016 US Presidential election, and how the idea of Trump as a modern King Cyrus has continued to develop in subsequent years. With regard to Trump, the usefulness of King Cyrus is undoubtedly found in the fact that the Persian ruler, despite being a pagan, is described in the Bible as chosen by God and raised up to end the captivity of God’s people in Babylon. He was the ungodly tool that God chose to use for the benefit of his people. In a similar way, Trump—who, prior to the 2016 election, was criticized for being too ungodly for many conservative Christians to feel comfortable with giving him their vote—could nevertheless be used by God to the benefit of his people in modern day America. Moreover, leading Evangelicals even prophesied that the businessman from New York had been assigned that role by God himself. These prophesies would be fulfilled, they explained, if the people of God would humble themselves, pray, and, of course, vote for him (Trangerud 2021).

Rebecca Barrett-Fox has shown how the casting of Trump as a Cyrus figure enabled white Evangelicals to insert him into their narrative of America as a Christian nation, while at the same time preserving their self-image as the nation’s moral guardians. The move did not present the presidential candidate as a fellow believer but as their champion. As a result, Trump’s rhetoric appealed even more effectively to believers’ already existing emotions of fear for the nation’s future, skepticism towards certain minority groups, and entitlement to cultural and political dominance (Barrett-Fox 2018). Also, Sean Durbin brings attention to how Evangelicals constructed Trump as part of their narrative by likening him to King Cyrus. The foundation was laid several years before Trump announced his candidacy in 2015. Christian Zionists had criticized the Obama administration for being anti-Israel and anti-Semitic, thus constructing Obama as a demonic tool who by destroying Israel brought divine judgement upon America. Trump’s support for Israel and his desire to reverse the politics of the Obama administration made it feasible to present him as God’s instrument, one who would fulfil God’s plans and make America blessed again. The identification of Trump with Cyrus worked because his actions matched the narrative (Durbin 2020).

My aim with this article is to deepen the understanding of King Cyrus as a model for comparison and a political tool for voter mobilization. While many factors may help explain why four out of five white Evangelicals voted for Trump in the 2016 election (see e.g., Gorski 2017; Smidt 2017; Fea 2018; du Mez 2020), I concentrate on the role of King Cyrus. In the second section of the article, I will describe how various personalities in the West have been compared to or presented as modern Cyruces, with an emphasis on the last 250 years. The vagueness, yet at the same time diverseness of the historical portrayal of the Persian King have allowed for much variety, and the examples presented here will show how different traits of Cyrus and the Cyrus narrative have been adapted to meet the needs of specific situations. The focus of section three will be on “the American Cyrus”; that is, American leaders who have been presented as a new Cyrus. Trump was not the first in this regard, but his likening to Cyrus has been more explicit and became more widespread than was the case of his predecessors. In the final section, based on the said examples, I will suggest a typology that may raise a better understanding of the modern use of Cyrus comparisons. Several of what I describe as Cyrus subtypes have been applied to Trump, and I will show how these follow different traditions of Cyrus comparison, as well as serve different purposes and audiences.

2. The Various King Cyrus in Time and Space

2.1. What Do We Know about King Cyrus?

The stories about King Cyrus are predominantly found in Greek and Jewish writings from the Antiquity (Shavit 1990, p. 51). It is beyond the scope of this article to look into these in great detail. However, I shall return to the works of two Greek historians, Herodotus (c.474–c.425 BC) and Xenophon of Athens (c.430–c.354 BC), in Section 2.2 as I present how their descriptions of Cyrus were used by Machiavelli as models for republican leadership in the 16th century. Of the Jewish writings, those included in the Protestant

Bible are the most significant for the Evangelical narrative, which is the main focus in this article. In the Old Testament, Cyrus is mentioned by name in the books of Isaiah, Ezra, Daniel, and 2 Chronicles. The text most relevant in relation to Trump is found in the 45th chapter of the Book of Isaiah. The chapter is part of a section that is in biblical scholarship labeled Deutero-Isaiah or Second Isaiah due to discussions of its origin. As Evangelicals refer to the whole book simply as *Isaiah*, I will do the same, as well as treat the biblical accounts as *one* narrative.

In 1879, the so-called [Cyrus Cylinder \(1879\)](#) was excavated in Babylon. The clay cylinder contains a declaration believed to be ordered by King Cyrus following the conquest of Babylon ([Stronach 2013](#), p. 55). Translations of the text differ somewhat, but the main plot deals with how Cyrus was raised up by Marduk, the patronal god of Babylon, to put an end to the religious and political abuses by the established rulers. In a third person point of view, the first part of the text informs us that Marduk, in his search for someone to bring down the ruling elite, found Cyrus to be the perfect choice, called him to service, and announced him as king. Marduk, in other words, used Cyrus as his tool to save the people of Babylon. The second part of the text is seemingly told by Cyrus himself, introduced with the words: "I am Cyrus, King of the world . . ." He goes on to tell how he acted for the benefit of the people of Babylon, as well as of the gods and cults throughout the empire: The various gods were returned to their original towns and resettled in their shrines. The text also indicates that the King let various peoples return to their ancestral lands.

While the Cyrus Cylinder is written as a story about past events—to the honor of Cyrus and glory of Marduk—it nevertheless resembles the Old Testament narrative. In the 44th and 45th chapter of Isaiah, we are told that God will raise up Cyrus and enable him to conquer nations. According to the prophetic voice, Cyrus will be God's tool to deliver his people and proclaim that the city of Jerusalem shall be rebuilt and the temple restored. Chapter five in the Book of Daniel describes the sacrilege that took place within the walls of Babylon on the very day the city was invaded, and the books of Ezra and 2 Chronicle depicts how Cyrus then fulfilled the old prophecies:

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, 'Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is among you of all His people? May the Lord his God be with him, and let him go up!' (2 Chronicles 36:22–23)

Although several decades went by before the temple was actually rebuilt, the name of Cyrus nevertheless became linked to the restoration of the Jewish nation, the reestablishment of its capital, and the building of a new temple.

In a story known as "Bel and the Dragon", which is an additional chapter to the Book of Daniel that is not included in the Protestant Bible, we are presented with a rather unflattering image of King Cyrus. The Persian King is portrayed as weak, credulous, and indecisive, while the Jew Daniel is the brave problem solver who amuses himself over the foolishness of the King. Historian Erich S. Gruen has pointed to this kind of representation by Jewish writers of not only Cyrus, but also of later Persian kings as a way of boosting their own self-image despite 200 years of dependence on their Persian overlords ([Gruen 2016](#), pp. 239–43). This unflattering image of King Cyrus stands in contrast to the Old Testament's portrayal of a savior figure. It also contradicts the description by Jewish historian Josephus (AD 37–c.100), who includes references to the old prophets and shows how Cyrus, after reading the prophecy about himself in the Book of Isaiah, was inspired to fulfil it and declared that the Jews could return to their homeland from Babylon, repair their capital, and rebuild the temple of God (*Antiquities of the Jews*, XI, 1:1–2).

Our knowledge about King Cyrus as a person is, in other words, limited. The different sources depict his character in various ways, leaving posterity with a handful of options

they may use depending on their goals and desires. This lack of a clear idea about a well-known historical figure on the one hand, and the various historical descriptions of him on the other, allow for what I below have called the plasticity of King Cyrus (Section 2.2). However, one thing we do know about King Cyrus is that he invaded Babylon in the autumn of 539 BC, thus overthrowing the Babylonian empire while expanding his own (Waters 2004, p. 93). That event literally changed the world, at least the part of the world in which the Old Testament stories unfold.

2.2. The Plasticity of King Cyrus

The Merriam-Webster (n.d.) dictionary defines *plasticity* as “the quality or state of being plastic, especially capacity for being molded or altered.” A simple example is how plastic clay can be modeled into different shapes and thus meet a variety of needs. In regard to the human brain, plasticity refers to the capacity of neurons (the cells of the nervous system) to adapt and form new pathways as the brain develops (i.e., learns new skills and stores new information), in the recovery after an injury (e.g., a stroke or trauma), or in the learning of better coping with chronic stress (Johnston 2009; McEwen 2016). Plasticity in these two senses—the capacity to acquire different forms, and the ability to make adaptations—illustrates the qualities of the Cyrus comparisons described in this article. Largely as a result of the various descriptions of him mentioned in Section 2.1, King Cyrus may assume different forms and functions, and adapt to entirely new situations. This will become clearer as we continue, but the image is worth having in mind from the outset, as it will help highlight the characteristics of the individual examples and the dynamics in play.

In his works *The Prince* and *Discourses*, Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) uses King Cyrus as a model for republican leadership. Cyrus, however, is just one of several historical figures that Machiavelli employs to demonstrate how various character attributes may account for success or failure. A point that has often been overlooked by scholars is that Machiavelli makes use of two distinct version of King Cyrus, which he utilizes to advance different points about leadership (Hunsicker 2013, pp. 19–23). On the one hand, he operates with a harsh version of Cyrus as a model for founders of principalities based on the account in Herodotus’ *Histories*. On the other hand, a seemingly humane version based on Xenophon’s *Education of Cyrus* is used as a model for republican leaders.

According to the Greek historian Herodotus, there already existed several versions of the life and death of the Persian King when he wrote his *Histories*. In his own account, as analyzed by Harry C. Avery, Herodotus pays particular attention to the King’s character, as he seeks to use him as a moral model. Herodotus describes Cyrus as a successful conqueror, but also how he later ended his life as a result of military failure. A reason for this change in the King’s fortune is found in his change of attitude. In his early campaign, he accepted advice from others, used his natural intelligence, desired little, and saw himself as a mortal, subject to divine punishment. Later, he became more self-confident and certain of the gods’ favor, desired too much, and would no longer consider the consequences of his actions. Cyrus had, in other words, lost his initial virtues. At the time he conquered Babylon, however, Cyrus was a successful military leader (Avery 1972).

Like Herodotus, Xenophon too has a major focus on Cyrus’s character and what posterity may learn from it regarding leadership. Xenophon’s Cyrus is “handsome, affectionate, devoted to (practical) learning, ambitious, and willing to endure all sorts of labor and face all sorts of danger for the sake of praise” (Ray 2006, p. 154). This final point is central. While Xenophon’s Cyrus often acted humanely towards both friends and enemies, his motives were not necessarily honest. Rather, he was motivated by a desire to be loved and admired. To him, virtues were means to another end (praise), and he would depart from them whenever necessary (Ray 2006, p. 170). Machiavelli also makes the point that Xenophon, in his biography of Cyrus, demonstrated that it is sometimes necessary to deceive (Hunsicker 2013, p. 27). However, Cyrus’s ambition to rule and his desire for love and admiration nevertheless made him a great benefactor (Ray 2006, p. 169).

While their portraits of Cyrus differ, both Herodotus and Xenophon emphasized certain traits of the King's personality in order to convey an educational message about the features of a good and successful leader. Their descriptions were hence helpful to Machiavelli in his project of finding the best political models for republican leadership. As Hunsicker demonstrates, Machiavelli employs the two Cyruses to make different points: The Cyrus of Herodotus is used as an example of harshness, while the Cyrus of Xenophon functions as an example of humanity (Hunsicker 2013, p. 19). In these versions of Cyrus, the focus is on the human being, the man Cyrus himself, and how his character traits more or less explain his stories of success and failure. This stands in contrast to the Cyrus type based on the Old Testament narrative which has been used by Jewish and Christian Zionists, as well as by Evangelical Trump supporters in the 2016 election, where his human traits disappear, and the focal point is the accomplishment of certain actions and God's guidance of the process.

2.3. *Not the Man, but the Deed*

The discovery of the Cyrus Cylinder in 1879 can be said to mark a change in the application of what I will call the Old Testament Cyrus type. According to Yaacov Shavit, King Cyrus has traditionally held a marginalized position in Jewish historical consciousness. The knowledge about the King and his deeds has been available (e.g., in the biblical scriptures), but he has not been commemorated through community markers like songs, site names, ceremonies, or public celebrations. Only during a brief period in the late 19th century (see Section 2.4) did Cyrus become prominent in the historical memory of European Jews (Shavit 1990, pp. 56, 62). Prior to 1879, Cyrus was occasionally used as a comparison for rulers who did well to their Jewish subjects. Some examples mentioned by Shavit (1990, pp. 65–66) are the Habsburg Emperor Joseph II (1741–1790), Tsar Alexander II (1818–1881), and Napoelon Bonaparte (1769–1821). The first two comparisons were made by adherents of the Jewish Enlightenment movement, Haskalah, whose goal was to promote Jewish secularization and integration in the civil societies of their respective nations (Brown and Berk 1977, p. 18). What these said "Cyrus rulers" had in common was the accomplishment of actions that corresponded to the Haskalah's goal.

Emperor Joseph II was compared to Cyrus in 1781 after issuing the Patent of Tolerance (Shavit 1990, p. 65). This edict was radical in that it granted religious liberty to non-Catholic minorities. Joseph II also issued a number of local patents of toleration which improved the legal status of the Jews, for instance by providing equal educational opportunities. Like the adherents of Haskalah, the Emperor sought to promote integration, while at the same time protecting Jews from forced baptism and unnecessary humiliation, or interference with their religion (e.g., when doing military service). Most Jews, however, did not welcome his policy as they considered it a threat to their traditional lifestyle (O'Brien 1969, pp. 29–30). This illustrates an inherent aspect of the Old Testament Cyrus type—namely, subjectivity. There are no objective criteria to define him, such as the character trait checklist we find in Machiavelli's models. The only factor involved is the accomplishment of a desired (but undefined) action. A ruler is consequently not a Cyrus to all, but only to those whose goals he actually promotes.

In 1865, Tsar Alexander II was compared to Cyrus by poet Yehudah Leib Gordon, a leading figure in the Russian Haskalah movement. In his poem "The Road of My People", Gordon praises Alexander II for allowing Jews to attend higher education, and he explains the Tsar's actions as a result of divine intervention similar to that which ended the Jewish captivity in Babylon: "For God has roused his spirit as the heart of Cyrus" (quoted in Shavit 1990, p. 66). The Russian Tsar ended some of the restrictions that had formerly been placed upon the Jews, but not all, and definitely not equally to all (Feiner 1996, p. 73; Acemoglu et al. 2011, p. 903). Nevertheless, his reforms to stimulate integration and improve the educational opportunities for Jews were, as with Joseph II, sufficient to justify a comparison with King Cyrus, at least from a Haskalah point of view. The fact that Joseph II and Alexander II were Christian leaders—Catholic and Russian Orthodox, respectively—

illustrates another aspect inherent in the Old Testament Cyrus type: The ruler who carries out the desired act is a non-Jew. His religious views and his relationship to God are—just like his character traits—simply not relevant. Anyone can be Cyrus, as long as he has enough power or influence, and uses it to promote the right cause.

The comparison of Napoleon with Cyrus is slightly more complex. In March 1807, an assembly of Jews gathered in Paris at the request of Napoleon likened the Emperor with various ancient heroes, one of them being King Cyrus (Weider 1997). The background for the assembling was a complaint about Jewish usurers by peasants in Alsace. The issue was addressed by Napoleon in a decree on 30 May 1806. In addition to dealing with this local problem of usury, Napoleon ordered the creation of an assembly of 111 Jews living in French territory. The assembly—now known as the Assembly of Jewish Notables—gathered in Paris a few weeks later to answer twelve questions regarding Jewish laws and their relationship with France, the French, and the Civil Code (Delage and Papot 2019; Schechter 2003, pp. 195–96). The resulting document praised the “sacred person” of the Emperor, and stressed that the Jewish religion was in line with all civil obligations; it even required obedience to the French law should there be any conflicts with their own religious code or its various interpretations (Assembly of Jewish Notables 1806).

While the document was clearly conforming to the Emperor’s policy, Napoleon seemingly wanted to place higher Jewish authority behind it. In September, he therefore ordered a new gathering of Jews based on the model of the ancient rabbinical court, the Sanhedrin, which met in the Temple in Jerusalem until it was destroyed in AD 70. The 71 members of what Napoleon named the Grand Sanhedrin, assembled in Paris from February till March, 1807. Their objective was to outline a religious foundation for the obligations of Jews towards France and its non-Jewish inhabitants (Schechter 2003, p. 197). It was during their final session that the Grand Sanhedrin made the comparison with King Cyrus.

Napoleon did carry out acts that made him a savior figure to the many Jews. During his campaign in Italy, for instance, he opened several ghettos, thus reinforcing his image as a liberator (Schechter 2003, pp. 199–200). However, the date of 30 May 1806 also made it into history. In an engraving from 1806, Francois-Louis Couché depicted a standing Napoleon, crowned with laurels, and surrounded by figures symbolizing Jews and Judaism (Schechter 2003, pp. 207–8). The title of the picture—*Napoléon le Grand rétablit le culte des Israélites, le 30 mai 1806* (Napoleon the Great, reestablished the cult of the Israelites, 30 May 1806)—clearly points to similarities with Cyrus the Great and his order to let the Jews rebuild their temple in Jerusalem (thus restoring the cult). The accompanying text further elaborates the idea of Napoleon as a new Cyrus. After describing the lengthy injustice and cruelty committed towards the Jews, who have been spread across the world yet miraculously preserved as a people, the text continues to exalt Napoleon and express gratitude for his actions:

A new *Cyrus* has appeared, but he has done more for them than the olden one. If he has not reconstructed their temple, he has given them a homeland and protective laws for their cult and their civil rights; in making them citizens and members of the great nation, he has done them honour; in giving them principles, he has forever secured them from the contempt of his peoples. Penetrated with gratitude for such precious gifts, the children of Israel have prostrated themselves at the feet of the throne of the *Great Napoleon* (...). (Quoted in Mainz 1996, p. 207)

Although presented as praise and appreciation, the fundamental message is that of submission and loyalty. As stated in the final sentence, “(...) each day [the Jews] prove they are worthy of the favours of the Sovereign by their attachment to his august person and by their submission to his laws” (quoted in Mainz 1996, p. 207). As shown by Schechter, the Jews were used by Napoleon as symbols to legitimize and bring glory to his rule and to himself as a ruler (Schechter 2003, p. 195).

The case of Napoleon demonstrates the flexibility of the Old Testament Cyrus type: On the one hand, a comparison with King Cyrus may convey acknowledgement in the sense of reward or expression of gratitude for certain deeds. On the other hand, the comparison

may simply be used as propaganda by the new Cyrus himself, sending signals to a targeted audience about authority, benevolence, and even divine approval. A third possibility, to which we shall now turn, is that of inducement—that is, the cry of a group (or on its behalf) for someone to step up and fill the role of a sorely needed Cyrus. This use of Cyrus resembles the narrative of Josephus: as the Persian King saw the prophetic words about himself, it inspired him to carry out its action (Section 2.1).

2.4. Zionism and the Need for a New Cyrus

The likening of Joseph II, Alexander II, and Napoleon to King Cyrus were all based on local reforms, notably involving elements of integration in their respective nations. Further, these comparisons rested on actions of the past. Cyrus, however, could also be used in appeals for local future reforms. This can be illustrated by the petitions presented to Shah Nasr al-Din by European Jews as he toured the continent in 1873. Spurred by the suffering of Jews in Persia, influential Jews in Europe tried to convince the Shah to “be the Cyrus of our days” and improve the difficult situation of his Jewish subjects. While the Shah seemed responsive and even introduced some changes, the interactions resulted in little improvement in the overall situation (Fischel 1950, pp. 130, 136–37). The example nevertheless shows the perceived utility attributed to ancient King Cyrus as a means to induce action on the behalf of a dependent group.

Another version of a future Cyrus, which gained special prominence with the rise of Zionism, aimed for a repeat of the original deeds associated with the Old Testament Cyrus: the return of the Jewish people to their ancestral land, the reestablishment of their capital, and the rebuilding of their temple. Already in the early 19th century, writers in Virginia newspapers discussed the possibility that Napoleon could be the one to restore the Jews to Palestine. Like Cyrus, some argued, he could be the non-Jewish instrument that fulfilled prophecies believed to declare that their nation would once again flourish. An 1808 editorial even claimed that Napoleon had intentions to do so, and thus become a second Cyrus (Shulim 1945). The idea of a potential future Cyrus was, in other words, not based on accomplished actions of the past, but on the person’s willingness to perform them in the present. The issue is no longer retrospective satisfaction or gratitude, but theological speculations (as in the Virginia newspapers) or outright activism.

The notion of a future Cyrus became more common after the discovery of the Cyrus Cylinder in 1879. Contributing to this change was the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881, for which the blame was put on the Jews. This resulted in violent persecution, as well as more legal and economic discrimination (Chapman 2010, p. 118; Gibson and Howard 2007, pp. 197–98; Lederhendler 2008, p. 514). Many Jewish intellectuals now left the idea of equality through integration and looked increasingly towards the creation of an independent Jewish state to relieve their situation (Luce 2017, pp. 24–25; Salmon 1978, p. 432). While emigration of Jews from Eastern Europe had taken place also prior to the 1880s, the numbers now increased dramatically. An estimated 750,000 out of Russia’s c. 5,000,000 Jews emigrated between 1881 and 1905 (Lewis 2010, p. 323). A vast majority chose the United States as their destination, but some also settled in Palestine (Lederhendler 2008, pp. 510–11; Salmon 1978, pp. 435–36).

From the early 1880s, a number of proto-Zionist organizations were established in Eastern Europe. Known as *Hibbat Zion*, the movement encouraged immigration to Palestine, raised money to buy land, and established settlements (Taylor 1964, p. 434; Luce 2017, p. 25). According to Shavit, it was only during the heyday of *Hibbat Zion* in the late 19th century that Cyrus, his Declaration, and the Return to Zion obtained the position of active memory in Jewish history (Section 2.3). The perceived similarities between the situation of the Jews in the 6th century BC and their situation in the 1880s made Cyrus and his Declaration a convenient means to legitimize the project of *Hibbat Zion* in Palestine (Shavit 1990, pp. 56, 67–68). In those days, most religious Jews believed that God himself would end their dispersion. They therefore rejected the idea of a Jewish state, especially one created through the efforts of man (Lewis 2010, p. 25). *Hibbat Zion*, however, was proto-

national, not messianic. While the movement did employ a messianic rhetoric, it favored romantic, heroic and nationalistic symbols, not the miraculous (Shavit 1991, pp. 105–7).

In the Book of Isaiah, Cyrus is referred to as “his messiah”, that is, “God’s anointed” (Isaiah 44:1). An example of how this aspect of divine appointment has been applied to a non-Jew in modern times is found in the letters from adherents of *Hibbat Zion* to Laurence Oliphant (1829–1888), a British Christian Zionist who since the late 1870s had worked to advance Jewish settlement in Palestine. If Oliphant, like Cyrus, succeeded in returning the Jews to the Holy Land, he would likewise become “the messiah of Israel”, it was stated. The likening to Cyrus thus offered a justification of human efforts to realize the goal of establishing an independent Jewish state without divine interventions (Shavit 1990, pp. 70–71). The example of Oliphant also illustrates that even ordinary men without sovereign power may become a Cyrus. As with character traits and religious devotion, the person’s social status and position do not really matter; only the desired action does.

While *Hibbat Zion* presented a form of practical Zionism, political Zionism became dominant from the 1890s, largely thanks to Theodor Herzl (1860–1904) and the establishment of the *Zionist Organization* at the First Zionist Congress in 1897. In his opening speech at the Congress, Dr. Karpel Lippe (1830–1915)—himself a member of the *Hibbat Zion*—presented three parallels of Jewish exiles and subsequent returns to the holy land. After their first exile in Egypt, the Israelites conquered the land “in the natural way of warfare.” Then, after the exile in Babylon, the land was once again regained the natural way, but this time “on the basis of diplomatic negotiations with Cyrus, king of the Persians, and an international treaty.” Now, as the Jews were dispersed around the world in their third exile, Lippe suggested they should no longer wait for “redemption [through] divine, supernatural miracles” but rather “attempt our own redemption in a natural way.” The way he suggested was that of King Cyrus—an international treaty (Lippe quoted in Reimer 2015, p. 19).

Although Lippe did not explicitly talk about a future Cyrus, he did point to the Turkish Sultan, Abdülhamid II (r.1876–1909), in a way that could indicate a potential Cyrus. This should not be seen as a surprise since Palestine was still part of the Ottoman Empire and the Jews needed the Sultan’s goodwill to immigrate. The Sultan, however, was against Jewish settlement and had recently been criticized for his involvement in a massacre of Armenians (Reimer 2015, p. 21, fn. 9). Lippe nevertheless referred to the sultan’s “well-known grace”, and assumed that the Sultan, well aware of the blessings brought by Jews everywhere they settled and their loyalty towards the sultan, would not fail to allow more Jews into his empire (Lippe quoted in Reimer 2015, p. 20). Also Joseph Marco Baruch (1872–1899), who represented another version of Zionism than that of Herzl, did in 1895 refer to the Turkish Sultan as the potential instrument to realize the dream about a Jewish state in Palestine. For this, Baruch referred not only to the role of Cyrus, but also to a more recent figure following the same path—Napoleon (Daccarett 2005, p. 324).

2.5. The Friendly Gentile Nation

While political Zionism emerged among secular European Jews in the late 1800s, the roots of Christian Zionism can be traced back to the 16th century. Prior to the Reformation, the predominant view of the Catholic Church was that the Jewish nation had no longer a role in God’s plan, and that God’s “true Israel” now consisted of Christians. Protestant theologians would reconsider this belief and advocate various views, one of which being a mass-conversion of Jews to Christianity at some point in the future. Thanks to a marginal note in the 1560 edition of the Geneva Bible, this view became increasingly popular among adherents of the Calvinistic tradition. A related idea, which was developed in England between 1585 and 1640, was that the mass-conversion (or spiritual return) of Jews would be accompanied by a physical return to Palestine (Lewis 2010, pp. 26–29). In the 17th century, such theories about the future of the Jews were prevalent among British Puritans (Engberg 2020, pp. 40–41). Isaac Newton (1643–1727) wrote that a “Kingdom friendly to them” might be responsible for the restoration of the Jews (quoted in Lewis 2010, p. 34)—a

scheme that closely resembles the template of King Cyrus. A more positive view of the Jews (e.g., that they secured blessings to other nations), the belief that they had a role in the future, and the notion of their restoration to Palestine were popularized among English-speaking Christians in the 19th century through the widespread distribution of Thomas Scott's *Commentary on the Bible* (1788–1792) (Lewis 2010, pp. 40–42).

The supportive attitude towards the project of restoration held by many British Protestants in the 1800s, along with the idea that Britain could or should play a major role in the process, laid the foundation for later political interventions, such as the Balfour Declaration of 1917 (Lewis 2010, pp. 12–13, 115; see also Schölch 1992 and Crome 2018, pp. 266–71). In this environment, Cyrus was functioning as a fully developed concept. This can be illustrated by one of several references made to the Persian King by Anthony Ashley Cooper (1801–1885), also known as Lord Shaftesbury, in his diary. A leading champion of Zionism, Shaftesbury believed that the Jews had to return to Palestine before the Second Coming of Christ (Boyer 1992, p. 183). In 1839, he wrote, “Who will be the Cyrus of Modern Times, the second Chosen to restore God’s People?” (quoted in Lewis 2010, pp. 117–18). To many British Protestants in the 19th century, the connotation of Cyrus was the practical arrangement of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine. As such, Cyrus could also be used in appeals for political interventions, as he was in a memorandum from 1839 calling Protestant nations to repeat his actions regarding the Jews:

As the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, was stirred up to build the Lord a temple (...), who is there among you, high and mighty ones of all the nations, to find the good pleasure of the holy will of the Lord of heaven, saying of Jerusalem, ‘Thou shalt be built,’ and to the temple, ‘Thy foundations shall be laid?’ (Quoted in note 4 by B. H. Roberts, in Smith 1908)

The memorandum was delivered to Queen Victoria by Lord Palmerston, then secretary of state for foreign affairs (Green 2012, p. 146).

Another example of a Christian Cyrus appeal is found in a petition written to Lord Palmerston in 1841 by inhabitants of the Irish city of Carlow and its vicinity. The memorial was signed by both Protestants and Catholics, clergy as well as laity. After reminding the statesman of the “unparalleled sufferings” of the Jewish people, the signatories pointed out that providence had placed Britain in a unique position to prevent further persecution. The land of Palestine, they claimed, had been given to the Jews by God, and he intended for them to return “and that the Gentiles shall be employed as their means of their restoration” (quoted in Frey 1843, p. 282). This was, in other words, a task for Cyrus.

Happy shall those be who shall be employed in accomplishing God’s purposes of mercy to his ancient people, for ‘they shall prosper who love Zion.’ The honour and happiness to be thus obtained appear to be now within our reach (...). It is foretold also that the ships of Tarshish shall be employed in conducting the lost tribes of Israel to their home, and who are more likely to be employed in this service, or could more easily accomplish it, than the nations whose fleets have been long engaged in protecting and succouring the wretched, which have accessed to countries where Jews are to be found. That the promises of Jehovah shall be accomplished by some Gentile nation is absolutely certain, and everything seems to indicate their speedy fulfilment; and it remains now to be seen whether her majesty’s government is to be the chosen instrument in accomplishing this blessed work, (as Cyrus, the great King of Persia, was in ancient time,) or whether the honour and consequent prosperity are to be conferred upon some other maritime power. (Quoted in Frey 1843, pp. 282–83)

The petition further stressed that Britain’s destiny would depend on how they treated the Jews, then quoted a Bible verse which implied that God would destroy the nation should it not offer its assistance to help the Jews (Frey 1843, p. 283).

Some decades later, news reached Britain about the persecution of Jews in Russia following the assassination of Tsar Alexander II. In February 1882, a large public meeting

was conducted in London. Here, Shaftesbury argued that the issue was not actually about the persecution of Jews, but about basic principles like human rights and religious freedom (Lewis 2010, pp. 324–25). His appeal directed towards the news tsar, Alexander III, nevertheless followed the Cyrus mode:

[I]f we approach the present Emperor, what are we asking for? Are we asking anything to abate his dignity or to lower his power? Nay, on the contrary, are we not asking him to do that which will conduce very much to his honour? Are we not asking him to do justice to a large body of his loyal and suffering people? Are we not asking him to restrain violence, murder, outrage, and spoliation? Are we not asking him to be a Cyrus to the Jews and not an Antiochus Epiphanes? (Quoted in Lewis 2010, pp. 325–26)

While the restoration of the Jews had much support among pious Christians in Britain, none of the aforementioned petitions led to the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. They show, however, that Cyrus was indeed functioning as a concept, needing little additional explanation, if any. When Shaftesbury rhetorically asked the Tsar to “be a Cyrus to the Jews”, he was clearly not referring to the Cyrus of Herodotus or Xenophon. To many English-speaking Christians in the 19th century, Cyrus was almost unequivocally linked to the idea of ending the current Jewish exile; that is, helping the Jews return to their ancestral land.

The religious sentiments and arguments of Christians in support of the Jews and their homeland were only some of several influences upon British politics in the Middle East. A noteworthy example of their impact, though, was the reinforcement of the view of Jews as a distinct people (as opposed to having other national identities), which in turn would underline the need for a separate state. This view influenced several leading politicians during World War I, such as Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour (1848–1930), the author of the Balfour Declaration (Schölch 1992, pp. 40, 44–48; Lewis 2010, pp. 12, 330–35; Black 2018, pp. 55–57). On 2 November 1917, as Britain was about to seize Palestine from the Ottoman Empire, Balfour declared the sympathy of the British with the Jewish Zionist cause in a letter to Lionel Walter Rotschild. According to Balfour, the Government saw “with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and [would] use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object” (quoted in Lewis 2010, p. 2).

Some saw the Balfour Declaration as a parallel to the Declaration of Cyrus (Podeh 2017, p. 12; Goldblatt 1968, pp. 471, 495; Shavit 1990, p. 74). In Palestine, during the British Mandate, the Jewish community commemorated the Declaration annually until 1948. Opinions were mixed, however, as some would celebrate, while other expressed dissatisfaction with the mandate solution (Podeh 2017, pp. 1–4). The Cyrus Declaration did, in other words, offer hope to some that the Balfour Declaration would give similar results. Reality turned out to be different, however, and like King Cyrus, the Balfour Declaration faded from the active memory of the Jews (Shavit 1990, pp. 74–76). In addition, when the state of Israel was established on 14 May 1948, Independence Day replaced the need for a Balfour Declaration Day (Podeh 2017, p. 7).

3. The American Cyrus—One of the Many?

3.1. *A Calling to the American President*

John Ray raises the question, “Was George Washington an American Cyrus?” His point of departure is a speech delivered in 1810 by American politician Robert Goodloe Harper (1765–1825) in which he discusses the similarities between King Cyrus and the first president of the United States. The Cyrus in question is explicitly Xenophon’s Cyrus, who at the turn of the 18th century was a well-known figure, at least to the audience that Harper addressed (Ray 2006, pp. 151–52). Harper’s speech was delivered only a few years after the aforesaid discussion in the Virginia newspapers of whether Napoleon could be a Cyrus (Section 2.4). The late George Washington (1731–1799), however, was clearly not a candidate for the Old Testament Cyrus type employed by Jews and Christian Zionists as

described above. The Cyrus presented by Harper followed a different tradition in which the focus was on his character traits—in this case, as portrayed by Xenophon. In Harper’s view, this Cyrus could not compare to the greatness of Washington. Ray, who 200 years later extends the comparison, concludes that the two leaders were indeed similar in many ways, and he describes Washington as a “modern liberal version” of Xenophon’s Cyrus (Ray 2006, pp. 176–77).

The search for an American Cyrus of the Old Testament type, on the other hand, became serious towards the end of the 19th century. In 1891, William E. Blackstone (1841–1935) organized a campaign to persuade President Benjamin Harrison (1833–1901) to follow in the footsteps of Cyrus and promote the restoration of Jews to Palestine. A leading Christian Zionist in his days, Blackstone had recently visited the Holy Land where he interpreted what he considered a transformation of desolate land into Jewish agricultural settlements as an end time sign (Ariel 2006, p. 77). Convinced that the second coming of Christ was imminent, Blackstone organized missionary activities to convert Jews to Christianity (Mouly and Robertson 1983, p. 98). He did, however, not regard conversion to be a prerequisite for restoration of Jews to Palestine (Obenzinger 2005, p. 251). In 1890, Blackstone organized the first conference between Christians and Jews in Chicago. It was in the aftermath of this conference that he arranged for the signing of the petition which he presented to Harrison in March 1891. “What shall be done for the Russian Jews?” stated the opening words, referring to their difficult situation following the assassination of Alexander II. According to the signatories, the only solution for the Jews was to emigrate, and the only reasonable destination was Palestine. As for the rationale, theological arguments were presented as equally valid as political and practical considerations.

Why not give Palestine back to them? According to God’s distribution of nations it is their home, an inalienable possession from which they were expelled by force. (...) Does not Palestine as rightfully belong to the Jews [as other nations to other peoples]? (...) We believe this is an appropriate time for all nations and especially the Christian nations of Europe to show kindness to Israel. (Blackstone Memorial 1891)

The more than 400 signers—representing leading politicians, publishers, clergy, and businessmen, both Jews and Christians, from various states (Ariel 2006, p. 77)—closed with a plea to President Harrison and his Secretary of State, James G. Blaine, to use their influence and hold an international conference on the matter. In his covering letter, Blackstone presented additional arguments—such as his belief that the project was “both feasible and politic”, based on his own observations from Palestine in 1889. “[O]nly peaceable diplomatic negotiations is necessary” he further argued, and pointed out that the American government was in the right position to take action. The Cyrus analogy then followed:

[T]here seem to be many evidences to show that we have reached the period in the great roll of the centuries, when the ever living God (...) is lifting up His hand to the Gentiles, (...) to bring His sons and His daughters from far, that he may plant them again in their own land (...). Not for twenty-four centuries, since the days of Cyrus, King of Persia, has there been offered to any mortal such a privileged opportunity to further the purposes of God concerning His ancient people. (Blackstone 1891)

As with the petition to Lord Palmerston in 1841 (see Section 2.4), the plea to follow in the footsteps of Cyrus was not just presented as a calling of divine origin, but also as a golden opportunity to receive a special blessing. In the final sentence of his letter, Blackstone disclosed the principle which made this a “privileged opportunity”: If the President and his Secretary of State would respond to the calling and secure a home for the Jews in Palestine, they would themselves receive great benefits from God due to the promise he gave to Abraham in Genesis 12:3, “I will bless them that bless thee” (Blackstone 1891). While the petition did not result in efforts to establish a Jewish state, it

did receive much publicity (Mouly and Robertson 1983, pp. 99–100). Months later, in his Third Annual Message to Congress on 9 December 1891, President Harrison addressed the issue and informed that his government “in a friendly spirit” had expressed their serious concern about the treatment of Jews in Russia. The President further addressed the potential problems caused by the increasing number of Jewish immigrants to the United States, yet without mentioning an autonomous state in Palestine as a possible solution (Harrison 1891).

The theological tradition followed by Blackstone placed much emphasis on Palestine as the correct location for a Jewish state. The father of political Zionism, Theodor Herzl, on the other hand, also considered alternative solutions, like Uganda and Argentina. When Blackstone learned about this, he sent Herzl a Bible in which he had marked all passages that in his opinion showed that Palestine had to be the site (Prior 2002, p. 477). Although his 1891 petition seemed fruitless, Blackstone did not give up his search for an American Cyrus to help fulfill these prophecies. On 8 May 1916, just a few weeks before he became associate justice on the Supreme Court of the United States, Jewish Zionist Louis D. Brandeis (1856–1941) sent his gratitude to Blackstone for his work of promoting the Zionist cause, calling him the actual “Father of Zionism”, and underlining the “valuable contribution” of his 1891 petition (quoted in Merkley 1998, p. 89). Further, Brandeis encouraged Blackstone to present an updated version of his memorial to President Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924), focusing on endorsement from non-Jews. To Brandeis, Christian endorsement was essential since few American Jews—less than 15,000 in 1914—supported Zionism (Black 2018, p. 55). The document was soon revived, this time with 82 signatures representing leading Protestant denominations. To find the best timing, however, the petition was not presented to President Wilson until 30 June 1917 (Merkley 1998, pp. 89–90; Klinger n.d., pp. 8–9).

In a covering letter to President Wilson dated 17 November 1916, Blackstone again introduced the Cyrus calling, pointing to the opportunity of divine blessing, and appealing to Wilson’s own religious sentiments:

A marvelous sphere of usefulness seems clearly predicted for our Nation as God’s chosen instrument in these last days. Just as surely as God raised up Cyrus to befriend His ancient people, in the days of Persia’s supremacy, so I believe, has he raised up you, for leadership of our Nation in this crux of opportunity. And just as sure as you are true to God’s Word and His purposes revealed therein, will you be supernaturally upheld and guided to bring blessing, not only to Israel, but to the whole world. (Blackstone 1916)

The idea that the United States, as well as the President himself, were part of God’s plan and timeline was more explicit in this letter than in the previous memorial. To become the modern Cyrus was still just an “opportunity”, as were the blessings that the correct actions would bring. But the idea now conveyed by Blackstone was that God indeed had “raised up” Wilson for this purpose. It was his personal calling as the leader of a nation with a special role to play in the current era. Since the presentation of the petition did not take place until several months later, Blackstone wrote a new cover letter on 14 June 1917. Although much shorter and far less focused on the personal calling of the President, the fact that Cyrus was still part of the appeal demonstrates the symbolic value placed on the Persian King in this regard.

In God’s providence, it has been my privilege to secure a remarkable endorsement of the memorial in behalf of the Jews (...). Believing that the progress of events augur the imminence of the psychological moment for benign action in behalf of the Jews, similar to that exhibited by Cyrus of Persia, and assured of your sympathy and willingness to aid the Jewish people in their present tragic sufferings, and praying that you may seize the opportunity of securing to yourself and our nation the blessing, promised by God to Abraham and his seed, by showing kindness to Israel. (Blackstone quoted in Klinger n.d., pp. 9–10)

Although the President was sympathetic to the petition, his public approval was withheld as it was thought to interfere with current political affairs. Just a few months later, on 2 November 1917, Arthur Balfour sent the declaration to Lord Rothschild about the establishment of a national home for the Jews in Palestine (Merkley 1998, pp. 90–91). While Wilson himself never became the American Cyrus, Blackstone’s memorial may have had some influence on his support for the Balfour Declaration (Mouly and Robertson 1983, p. 100). Without Wilson’s support, the British Cabinet may not have approved the Declaration (Black 2018, p. 55).

3.2. “I Am Cyrus”

In the 1920s and 1930s, the United States did little to follow up the Balfour Declaration. During World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt (1882–1945) considered alternative locations for the Jewish refugees, but gained little support. American Zionist leaders, on their part, would highlight Old Testament passages referring to Palestine—presented as prophecies about a Jewish restoration—to increase the base of religious endorsement for their cause. In 1944, both the Republican and the Democratic party platforms supported a Jewish homeland, and an opinion poll from 1947 showed that a majority of Americans favored the partition of Palestine (Benson 1997, pp. 19–20, 187–88).

When the state of Israel was proclaimed on 14 May, 1948, America was the first nation to recognize it. In his book *Harry S. Truman and the Founding of Israel*, Michael T. Benson disputes the claim made by some that President Truman (1884–1972) based his decision on domestic political considerations when he recognized the new Jewish state despite opposition from the State Department and his own secretary of state. Truman did not, according to Benson, give his approval in order to win Jewish votes for the 1948 presidential election. Instead, he did what he thought was right, and he was motivated by various factors related to the unjust treatment of Jews in Europe, and the belief that the Balfour Declaration gave the United States a duty to help establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine. In addition, his support for the Zionist cause was strongly influenced by his Christian upbringing and his familiarity with the Bible (Benson 1997, pp. 5–7, 54–55). Scholars disagree, however, on the extent of biblical influence on Truman’s decision. While the Bible did contribute to shape his view of Palestine as the historic Jewish homeland, it is highly unlikely that Truman believed that the creation of Israel or his own role in the process represented the fulfilment of prophecy (Robins 2016, pp. 450–64). What we do know, though, is that Cyrus the Great was one of several historical figures that Truman admired since his childhood (Ferrell 2002, p. 136).

In the final chapter of his book, under the subheading “The American Cyrus”, Benson includes two accounts linking Truman to King Cyrus. Early in 1949, Israel’s Chief Rabbi Isaac Halevi Herzog visited the White House. “God put you in your mother’s womb so that you could be the instrument to bring about the rebirth of Israel after two thousand years”, he told the President. Then he read a statement by King Cyrus, from the Book of Ezra, that “[t]he Lord God (...) hath charged me to build Him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah” (quoted in Benson 1997, p. 190). Moved to tears, Truman asked the Chief Rabbi whether his actions should be interpreted that way and if God’s hand had been involved. The Chief Rabbi confirmed that this was the task he had been given, and which would make him part of Jewish history, just like King Cyrus. The second episode took place when Truman visited the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City a few months after the end of his presidency in 1953. During a conversation, his Jewish friend Eddie Jacobson pointed toward him and said, “This is the man who helped create the State of Israel.” Truman immediately replied, “What do you mean, helped create? I am Cyrus, I am Cyrus!” (quoted in Benson 1997, p. 189).

Intentional or not, Truman’s statement echoed the words of the Cyrus Cylinder, “I am Cyrus, King of the world . . . ” Not everyone has agreed to the comparison. Truman was, for instance, neither a sovereign monarch nor in charge of the land involved (see e.g., Kirsch 2009). These aspects, however, are not relevant to the Old Testament Cyrus

type as it has developed in recent centuries. Truman fulfilled the most important criteria: He was a non-Jew, and he performed the correct action in regard to a Jewish homeland in Palestine. On 23 January 1953—just a few days after the end of Truman’s presidency, and still prior to the second Cyrus event described above—*The Jewish News* published a commentary with the headline, “Harry S. Truman: The Modern Cyrus.” Here Philip Slomovitz praised Truman as “a great man who understood our problems, who recognized an historic moment and utilized it properly.” Although the roles of Cyrus and Truman were “not entirely analogous”, Slomovitz explained, they were indeed related: Cyrus *ordered* freedom, while Truman used his power to *sanction* the new Jewish state, sending a powerful signal to other nations. Truman’s contribution therefore made him “The Modern Cyrus”, and his name would “go down in history as the man who knew the arrival of an historic moment and he linked it promptly with American history” (Slomovitz 1953).

The story about Truman’s Cyrus comparison has been sporadically recalled by various authors (see e.g., Adler 1973, p. 425; Fraser 1989, pp. 1–2; Benson 1994, pp. 21–22; Mart 2000, pp. 192–93; Merkley 2004, pp. 1–6; Pencower 2004, p. 623; Davidson 2005, p. 163; Beschloss 2007, p. 221; Clark 2007, p. 143; Shannon 2012, p. 382; Robins 2016, pp. 447–48). It seems, however, to have had its own rebirth in America in the wake of the increased focus on King Cyrus related to the 2016 presidential election. In 2019, the words of the Cyrus Cylinder, as echoed in the mouth of Truman, found its way to the title of a new book, *I Am Cyrus: Harry S. Truman and the Rebirth of Israel*, written by Evangelical author Craig von Buseck. The central message is underlined by an additional text on the title page, “The epic story of prophecy fulfilled.” Both of the Cyrus accounts described above are included in the book’s epilogue—“Born for Such a Time”—ending with the words of Truman, “Helped create Israel? I am Cyrus. I am Cyrus!” (von Buseck 2019, pp. 377–78). While Truman himself may not have believed he fulfilled prophecy, his words have become a symbol to many Evangelicals that he did.

3.3. Cyrus, Trump, and the 2016 Election

Prior to the election of 8 November 2016, Charismatic and Pentecostal Evangelicals shared their prophecies about Donald Trump being chosen by God to become the 45th president of the United States. These were new revelations, as opposed to the prophecies found in the Bible (mentioned above). While there may well have been additional prophecies that have received little public attention, there were at least three that linked Trump to King Cyrus (see the collection of Trump prophecies in Beverley 2020). These comparisons were fundamentally different from the ones described so far in this article, most notably in that Cyrus was disconnected from both the Jews and the Middle East. The link to biblical authority, however, was preserved.

Canadian publisher Larry N. Willard shares his Cyrus revelation in the foreword to James A. Beverley’s book, *God’s Man in the White House: Donald Trump in Modern Christian Prophecy*. Unaware of other prophecies about Trump, Willard had his own “unusual experience” during the primaries. As he was thinking about Trump’s candidacy, he suddenly felt compelled to read Isaiah 45, the chapter in which God says he has chosen Cyrus to deliver his people. As he read, it became clear to him that “[t]his is why Trump will be selected.” The experience, he explains, changed his “view about Trump as it relates to his selection or at least favor by God for the job as president at this moment in history” (Beverley 2020).

Pastor Jeremiah Johnson’s prophecy came in July 2015, about six weeks after Trump had announced his run for president. It was published in the Prophetic Insight blog of the Evangelical *Charisma* magazine with the heading, “Prophecy: Donald Trump Shall Become the Trumpet.” Johnson informs that God spoke to him while he was praying several weeks earlier. The message was that God would use Trump as his “trumpet” to expose “darkness and perversion in America”:

I will use the wealth that I have given him to expose and launch investigations searching for the truth. Just as I raised up Cyrus to fulfill My purposes and plans,

so have I raised up Trump to fulfill my purposes and plans prior to the 2016 election. You must listen to the trumpet very closely for he will sound the alarm and many will be blessed because of his compassion and mercy. Though many see the outward pride and arrogance, I have given him the tender heart of a father that wants to lend a helping hand to the poor and the needy, to the foreigner and the stranger. (Quoted in [Beverley 2020](#))

In his additional comment, Johnson explains that God does not only use righteous people but also “accomplish His will through men and women who have ignored and rebelled against him”—as was the case with Cyrus. “Could God not use the wicked and ungodly to bring about His plans and purposes thousands of years ago”, he rhetorically asks, “and can He not still do the same thing again, especially in the midst of the crisis that we find America in today?” (quoted in [Beverley 2020](#)).

Johnson’s statements caused much debate and criticism (see e.g., [Corey 2015](#); [Throckmorton 2015](#)). After allegedly reading hundreds of e-mails, he published a clarification about what his article did *not* state (that Trump would become GOP nominee or president, that he endorsed Trump’s decisions, and that Trump was a Christian), as well as what it *did* state: God would use Trump to expose darkness and perversion, and Christians must listen to him. The most relevant idea related to the role of Cyrus was that “God can use anyone He chooses to fulfill His purposes and plans in the earth.” King Cyrus is only one example of this, and to illustrate his point, Johnson also adds “Nebuchadnezzar [the Babylonian King who conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the temple], the Jews who crucified Jesus, and Donald Trump, among many” (quoted in [Beverley 2020](#)).

Johnson’s reference to Cyrus is evidently a variant of the Old Testament type. Compared to its previous use, however, the emphasis has changed. God’s plan and purpose is at the center but it is not defined as one particular cause, such as the restoration of Jews to Palestine (which was the act originally attributed to King Cyrus). This time it all has to do with America and its government, which is in a critical state and in need of divine intervention. Cyrus is no longer just a non-Jew, but also a non-Christian, one example of many “wicked and ungodly” people who God not only has used, but even “raised up” for a particular purpose. This message seemed to be tailored to deal with the concerns of conservative Christians regarding Trump, as he was already a highly contested candidate (see e.g., [Fea 2018](#), pp. 3–5). Johnson addresses this too:

Some Christians appear to be absolutely infuriated at the thought or prophetic word that God is going to use Donald Trump as a Trumpet to expose darkness and bring truth because of His [sic] moral background and political views. (...) I, like many of you, was shocked by the word I received regarding Donald Trump. (...) Again, I am not called to prophecy what I think or what my opinion is. I simply deliver the word of the Lord (...). (Quoted in [Beverley 2020](#))

At the time when the presidential race had just begun, the focus on Trump as a modern Cyrus was primarily on his role as a “trumpet” that would uncover corruption and lies in America. Johnson explicitly denied any revelation of him winning the Republican nomination or becoming president. There were several other candidates, and Trump was not considered a likely winner. He could nevertheless act as a divine tool to expose evil. At this point, that was his mission as Cyrus.

The focus on Trump as a “trumpet” was not unique to Johnson. Two days before the publication of Johnson’s prophecy, Lance Wallnau—whose Trump prophecy later would have even greater impact on linking the candidate with Cyrus—wrote a piece discussing whether Trump was being used as a “trumpet” ([Wallnau 2015](#)). Here he quoted a prophecy presented by Charismatic Prophet Kim Clement in 2007, stating among other things that “Trump shall become a trumpet, says the Lord! I will raise up the Trump to become a trumpet” ([Clement 2007](#)). This prophecy did not say that Trump would be president. Nevertheless, after Trump’s victory, the idea that Clement was among the first who prophesied Trump being elected president has spread among Evangelicals (see e.g., [Strang 2017](#), p. 69; [Strang 2020](#), p. 150; [House of Destiny 2021](#)). In accordance with the

change of Trump's status, the "trumpet" has, in other words, come to mean "president of the United States." A similar development also took place with Cyrus. In 2015, he just represented a divine tool to expose corruption, but after Trump won the nomination, the Persian King became a symbol of the one God had selected to save America from cultural, spiritual, and economic destruction.

With Wallnau, Cyrus became a political tool for voter mobilization. His Trump-prophecy was particularly spread during the final months of the election, largely thanks to Evangelical media networks like the *Charisma* magazine and podcast (Strang Report 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2016d, 2016e, 2016f, 2016g), as well as televangelist shows (see e.g., Jim Bakker Show 2016a, 2016b). In a serial of three articles published by *Charisma News* in August 2016, Wallnau shares two revelations he allegedly received about Trump. According to Wallnau, God spoke to him prior to his first meeting with the candidate in Trump Tower together with other Evangelical leaders in September 2015. The message was, "Donald Trump is a wrecking ball to the spirit of political correctness" (Wallnau 2016a). The next revelation came before his second meeting with Trump.

I was updating some random social media activity when I ran across a simple PowerPoint showing Trump seated in the oval office with the words 'Donald Trump, the 45th President of the United States.' (...) I was dazed. Literally no one was thinking this would be a possibility but I was sensing that this was more than some random Facebook meme; it was a prophetic picture. It struck me the same way the 'wrecking ball' word did. The Spirit impressed upon my mind 'read Isaiah 45.' (Wallnau 2016b)

As Wallnau read Isaiah 45, he became convinced that this meant that there was a "Cyrus anointing" on Trump, and that "the 45th President is meant to be an Isaiah 45 Cyrus" (Wallnau 2016c). Wallnau's message dealt directly with the controversy of Trump's character and the reluctance of conservative Christians to vote for him. The Old Testament Cyrus type offered a flexible solution to this problem. Wallnau's account emphasized one aspect in particular. In Isaiah 45, God tells Cyrus that he has called him by his name, "though you have not known me" (Isaiah 45:4). God further calls this non-Jew "My anointed", which shows that he was "specifically chosen and set apart for a specific task" (Wallnau 2016b). The lesson learned, according to Wallnau, is that "God anoints secular leaders who are not part of the faith community", and this time it was Trump (Wallnau 2016b). To strengthen his argument, Wallnau refers to a theological distinction between "saving grace" and "common grace." While the former brings salvation, the latter represents God's influence on all people, regardless of their faith, "to help them affirm the good and resist the bad, personally and in institutions" (Wallnau 2016c). Thanks to this "common grace", secular men and women may be more qualified for a certain task than a seemingly good Christian. Wallnau lists several examples of modern politicians who were "instruments raised up by God to meet a singular crisis": Winston Churchill, Abraham Lincoln, Ronald Reagan, George S. Patton, and Margaret Thatcher (Wallnau 2016b). In his book, *God's Chaos Candidate: Donald J. Trump and the American Unraveling*, Wallnau calls these "Cyrus leaders", and he there adds Harry Truman to the list, implying that his utterance "I am Cyrus" showed that he "understood his role in modern history" (Wallnau 2016d, pp. 26–27).

The political usefulness of King Cyrus in the 2016 presidential election is found in the provision of a biblical argument for supporting a candidate whose character seemed at odds with Christian virtues. Wallnau and other influential Evangelicals made deliberate use of this tool to mobilize Evangelical voters, who were strategically targeted by Trump (Wallnau 2016d, p. 43; Strang 2017, pp. 26–27, 41, 59; see also Trangerud 2021). Similar to political slogans, the Cyrus arguments were repeated to reinforce the impact. The aforementioned articles of Wallnau were republished with some minor editions in a special issue of *Charisma* one month prior to election, this time with the heading "Why I Believe Trump Is the Prophesied President" (Wallnau 2016e). In his book, which was published almost simultaneously, Wallnau broadened the narrative, stressing that the election was

critical and that Trump was the only candidate who could save America from destruction. Still, although God had chosen and anointed Trump, he would only be a Cyrus president if the Christians would engage and vote him into office:

Just because Trump is a Cyrus doesn't mean the people can't end up rejecting him. God never told me Trump would win. He told me Trump is a Cyrus for our nation if we have eyes to see. My burden is to get the church to see! (Wallnau 2016d, pp. 32–33)

Despite this explicit safeguard against failure, Wallnau—like Clement—has after Trump's victory been recognized as one who successfully prophesied his win (Hafner Josh 2016; Strang 2017, p. 178; 2020, p. 152). This has given the narrative impetus to develop and spread during Trump's presidency. However, the purpose of bringing Cyrus into the picture was not to predict the event, but to make it happen. "This is the proposition I give to Christians who are dispirited by failure of their favorite candidate to capture the nomination", Wallnau wrote, "Don't ask, 'Who is the most Christian?' Instead ask, 'Who is the one anointed for the task?'" (Wallnau 2016e). As a political tool for voter mobilization, King Cyrus was taken out of his traditional context and connected with God's plan and purpose for the United States, the "true" Christians (i.e., born-again Evangelicals), and the federal government.

3.4. *The Story Continues to Evolve*

Subsequent to his victory in the 2016 election, Trump has been more closely connected with King Cyrus, both by Evangelicals and by Jews. After his inauguration, several books were published in which leading Evangelicals continued to propagate the idea of him being selected by God to make America great again, spiritually, morally, militarily, and economically. The aim was further mobilization of conservative Christian voters, first in the 2018 midterm election, and then to secure Trump's reelection in 2020 (Trangerud 2021). Cyrus became emblematic, despite being only one of several examples of "wicked and ungodly" people who had been used by God in the past (Section 3.3). The suitability of the Persian King can be illustrated by the discussion of whether Trump, as God's chosen president for America, was "Cyrus (deliverer) or Nebuchadnezzar (agent of judgement)" (Horn 2017, 2019, p. 19; see also Strang 2017, p. 73). While the latter represented a dark prospect, an instrument to punish God's people for their sins, Cyrus was a symbol of redemption, which in this context meant "God's way of putting his foot down on the socialist-globalist runaway agenda to allow for a respite and opportunity for spiritual awakening in this country" (Horn 2017). This version of Cyrus is remote from the harsh Cyrus of Herodotus, as Evangelicals associate both Cyrus and Nebuchadnezzar primarily with their effect on "God's people" as described in the Old Testament. Consequently, as a tool for voter mobilization, the redeeming Cyrus did by far surpass the destroying Nebuchadnezzar.

During his presidency, the political linking of Trump with Cyrus took place on two levels. On the informal level, there were statements and publications typically made by Evangelicals who aimed at convincing their fellow believers (for books, see e.g., Wallnau 2016d; Charm 2016; De La Rosa 2017; Strang 2017; McGuire and Anderson 2018; Antwi 2018; Badalian 2018; Cahn 2019; Horn 2019; Strang 2020; Cioccolanti 2020a, 2020b; Wallnau and Sparks 2020). On the more formal level, leading politicians added legitimacy to the narrative, as well as an increased sense of reality. Addressing America's relationship with Israel before a large Christian Zionist audience in 2019, Trump's secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, recapitulated the story of Truman's visit by Israel's Chief Rabbi in 1949. Quoting King Cyrus' statement that God had "charged [him] to build Him a house in Jerusalem", Pompeo expressed his "unending pride to know that American hands helped build the modern house of Israel", the house now symbolizing "the new Jewish state." The link between the current president and the Persian King was indirectly established by Pompeo calling Cyrus "a real friend to Israel" and later referring to Trump as "an immovable friend of Israel" (Pompeo 2019). When the targeted audience is familiar with the narrative,

such subtle cues are sufficient to bring forth the message. This can also be illustrated by Ambassador David Friedman's reliance on the Christian Zionist understanding of Genesis 12:3 when he at the same conference, instead of mentioning the passage itself, referred to it with statements like "right makes might", and

It is undoubtedly in America's best interests to support Israel. (...) President Trump understands this better than any President that has come before him. It is why President Trump is the greatest friend of Israel ever to serve in the White House. (Friedman 2019)

A more explicit likening of Trump to Cyrus was made by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu following Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. With reference to the collective memory of the Jewish people, Netanyahu added Trump to a list of benefactors consisting of Cyrus, Balfour, and Truman, and assured that he would "be remembered by our people throughout the ages" (Netanyahu 2018). Israeli Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked expressed her gratitude on Twitter, stating "Trump is in his generation, as Cyrus in his" (Shaked 2017). These comparisons, made by Jewish political leaders, followed the more traditional scheme of acknowledgement or reward for certain deeds (Section 2.3). American Evangelicals, on their side, portrayed the event as fulfilment of prophecy. Mike Evans, founder of Friends of Zion Heritage Center in Jerusalem, told the Christian Broadcasting Network that he would say to Trump on their upcoming meeting that he, like Truman, was a modern Cyrus:

I will be in the White House on Monday and the first word I'm going to send to him, "Cyrus, you're Cyrus. Because you've done something historic and prophetic", and he promised us he would do it. (Mitchell 2017)

To Evans, Cyrus represents one who "saved the Jewish people" and "was used as an instrument of God for deliverance." The implication of this is expressed through a description of Trump as an "imperfect vessel"—a "flawed human being like you or I"—who God has used "in an incredible, amazing way to fulfill his plans and purposes" (Mitchell 2017). This idea of Cyrus, highlighting flaws and imperfection, is related to Johnson's argument that God can "use the wicked and ungodly to bring about His plans and purposes" (Section 3.3), and Wallnau's depiction of Cyrus as a "secular reformer" (CBN 2017). However, Evans does not make Cyrus a representative of the ungodly. Instead, he compares him to ordinary Christians with their ordinary struggles—"like you or I." The message here is not that God's tool is non-Jewish or non-Christian, but that it is imperfect, a sort of reversed character criterion. Evangelicals have used the same notion to defend Trump referring to other biblical personalities, such as Moses, Saul, David, Solomon, Jehu, and Esther (see e.g., Rodriguez 2016; Briggs 2016; Praeger 2016; Cahn 2017; Cohen 2019; Mitchell 2019; Lovett 2019). The imperfection of these biblical role models—who nevertheless received divine favor and were used to fulfil God's perfect will—reminds us that we are all sinners, and hence have no right to judge Trump or dismiss him as unusable.

Trump's recognition of Jerusalem and the moving of the American embassy also incited other Cyrus comparisons. On Fox News, Jeannine Pirro, herself a Catholic, claimed the following:

... it was the king of Persia who, 1000 years before Mohammad was even born, said that Jerusalem was the capital of the Jewish people's country (...) Trump recognized history. He, like King Cyrus before him, fulfilled the biblical prophecy (...) that Jerusalem is the eternal capital of the Jewish state and that the Jewish people deserve a righteous, free, and sovereign Israel. (Pirro 2018)

In his bestselling book, *The Oracle*, Messianic Jew Jonathan Cahn relates the event to a prophetic timeline foretelling the gradual restoration of Israel. According to Cahn, Truman became the first American Cyrus when he recognized Israel in 1948, and Cahn too recalls the two Cyrus stories presented by Benson (Section 3.2). Describing Trump as the second American Cyrus, Cahn—like Wallnau—emphasizes the "you have not known Me" passage of Isaiah 45, and informs that God still used him to add another piece to the

puzzle; namely, international recognition of Jerusalem (Cahn 2019, pp. 120–23, 205–9). In a far less known book, *The Modern-Day Cyrus*, Robert Antwi draws an even stronger line between the recognition of Jerusalem and Trump’s win in 2016:

I believe Donald Trump won the election to declare and recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. (...) I have declared President Donald Trump the modern-day Cyrus. Just as King Cyrus set the Israelites free from the Babylonian captivity, Donald Trump is setting Jerusalem free from the slave [sic] of unrecognition. (Antwi 2018, blurb)

When the acquisition of the land and the restoration of the capital had been fulfilled, there was still one left of the three deeds associated with the Old Testament Cyrus: The restoration of the temple. While Pompeo referred to the “the house” as a symbol of the state of Israel, some Jewish organizations, like the Mikdash Educational Center and the (Nascent) Sanhedrin, chose a literal approach. In early 2018—as part of their efforts to promote the construction of a third temple in Jerusalem (MEC 2021a)—the Mikdash Educational Center minted 1000 coins depicting Trump and King Cyrus. Inspired by the ancient tradition of paying an annual tax of a silver coin to the temple, these modern “temple coins” were sold for a donation of \$50+ to support the work of the organization (AP 2018). The text on the coins presented a clear message: “Cyrus—Balfour—Trump Declaration 1917–2017.” A few months later, the organization released another “temple coin” with Trump and Cyrus to mark the moving of the American embassy on 14 May 2018. Its inscription read, “To fulfill 70 years”, thus suggesting a parallel between the length of the Jewish captivity in ancient Babylon and the current state of Israel’s 70th anniversary. The back side of both coins showed the reconstructed temple, and the latter also included the words of King Cyrus, “And He charged me to build Him a house in Jerusalem” (Hunter 2018; MEC 2021b). The coins followed the tradition of using Cyrus to appeal to foreign rulers, this time with the goal of restoring the temple.

When Trump won the 2016 election, the (Nascent) Sanhedrin—a modern version of the ancient rabbinical court established in 2005 (Arutz Sheva 2005; Sanhedrin 2021)—sent a letter to Trump, as well as to Russian President Vladimir Putin, asking them to act as modern Cyruses and move the embassy and assist the rebuilding of the temple, respectively (Berkowitz 2016). The two “temple coins” minted in 2018 honored Trump for doing his part. However, according to spokesman Hillel Weiss, Trump would only receive God’s blessings if he also assisted in the rebuilding of the temple:

Trump’s political agenda can only succeed if it is focused on building the Third Temple on the place that God chose: The Temple Mount. He must not advance any two-state solution or this will lead to his downfall. (Quoted in Berkowitz 2018a)

The promise of divine blessings following the right deed echoes the arguments of earlier Christian and Jewish Zionists. The coins reminded the modern Cyrus that he had to further the rebuilding, and called for support to the Jewish claim to the Temple Mount (Berkowitz 2018b, 2018c). The “temple coins” were, in other words, intended as both a reward and a visual appeal to Trump. However, this was not exclusive. According to Weiss, “[i]f Putin decides that he would prefer to build the Temple with Trump rather than go to war with him, then we would be happy to put his image on the next coin alongside Trump and Cyrus” (Berkowitz 2018d).

Just as Trump is not the only (potential) Cyrus to these Jews, he is not the only one for Evangelicals. Cahn (2019) mentioned two American Cyruses, Truman and Trump. Evangelical preacher Perry Stone added a third, Ronald Reagan (Jim Bakker Show 2018). In Wallnau’s model, there were still others (Washington, Lincoln, Patton), all “raised up” by God to “deal with the crises of their times” (Wallnau 2016d, pp. 26, 127). In addition to these national Cyruses, Wallnau in his 2016 publications also included two British Cyruses (Churchill, Thatcher). What all these modern Cyruses have in common, according to Wallnau, is that they fell short to the Evangelical standard but nevertheless ended up

defending Christian values. They were handpicked, so to speak, by God at a point in history when people were tested (Wallnau 2016d, pp. 64–65). Churchill, for instance, was raised up during WWII as the instrument to stop Hitler. Churchill saw the bigger issues and described the grand theme of their crisis as a contest involving the survival of “Christian civilization.” (Wallnau 2016d, p. 19)

In 2016, these imperfect secular leaders—later recognized as heroes—were used as comparisons to defend Trump and convince skeptical Christians to vote for him. The current crisis described by Wallnau and other Evangelicals was one of “national suicide”, and God offered a solution to prevent it. As with other Cyrus callings, this was still just an opportunity, and it was up to the believers to accept it and vote Trump into office (Wallnau 2016d, p. 29). Following Trump’s victory, Wallnau has continued to develop and promote his idea of “Cyrus-type leaders.” In a 2020 publication, he explains that he has identified such leaders “all over the globe”, or more precisely in Amerika (Trump), the UK, Poland (President Andrzej Duda), Georgia, Hungary (Prime Minister Viktor Orbán), Australia, Brazil (President Jair Bolsonaro), Guatemala, and Israel. Wallnau describes these “Cyrus rulers” as plain-spoken, non-religious populist leaders who are raised up by God in response to prayer. For the sake of “God’s people” (i.e., conservative Christians), they work to preserve traditional values, religious heritage, and national borders from socialism, globalism, and cultural decay (Wallnau and Sparks 2020, pp. 6–17). While Wallnau describes Trump as just one among many such leaders, it is apparent that this version of Cyrus has been formed in the image of Trump.

4. Discussion: A Typological Understanding of King Cyrus

The collection of Cyrus comparisons presented in this article should not be seen as exhaustive. Given the great variety of sources in which they are found, there will unquestionably be more should we look for them, and the examples presented here illustrate that great diversity. They include both public and private sources, as well as both textual and graphic modes of communication: poems, letters, diaries, newspapers, books, magazines, news reports, sermons, speeches, prayers, art, and commemorative coins. King Cyrus is, in other words, used both as a way to express personal thoughts and as a means of information exchange with others. The examples further illustrate what I have called the *plasticity* of King Cyrus: the Persian King does not represent a fixed model, but may assume different forms and functions, and adapt to various situations. Based on the aforesaid examples, I will here suggest a typology which can help explain the modern use of Cyrus comparisons, and also highlight the nuances of the different Cyrus references made with regard to Trump.

As a means of comparison, Cyrus can be divided into two main types. The article has already made several references to *the Old Testament type* in order to identify the source of the comparisons in question (i.e., the Old Testament books), and to distinguish them from the other main type which we find in Machiavelli’s models for republican leaders (Section 2.2) and Ray’s evaluation of Washington (Section 3.1). While it may be tempting to make this a distinction between a religious and a secular type, such categories would be misleading as the latter does not necessarily exclude the religious (e.g., Herodotus pointed to the King’s attitudes towards the gods as part of the explanation for his success and failure). A better designation for the latter would be *the character type*. The label emphasizes that the focus is on the King himself and his character traits. The comparison is made according to a checklist of selected traits, and may thus be seen as objective (i.e., you are not a new Cyrus unless you fulfil the criteria). The character type can be divided into subtypes based on whose description of Cyrus is used. This article provided two examples, namely Herodotus’ harsh Cyrus, and the more humane version by Xenophon (Section 2.2). We could add a third subtype, that of the imperfect vessel (Section 3.4). However, in contrast to the types created by Herodotus and Xenophon, the imperfect vessel does not relate success or failure to the person himself. Instead, the person is by definition imperfect, and the

success is found in God's perfect will and intervention. Despite the focus on character, this version of Cyrus is therefore better explained as part of the Old Testament type.

In contrast to the character type, the Old Testament type focuses on a desired action, not on the person accomplishing it. Since the action is presented as God's will or plan, the person is, in lesser or greater degree, understood as a divine tool. This type shows great plasticity, something which can be ascribed to its lack of an objective checklist. Neither the man nor the deed is defined except from being part of God's will (which in itself is an ambiguous category). This opens for a more pragmatic use, as well as subjectivity: The person will only be a Cyrus to those whose goals or desires he fulfils.

The Old Testament type can be divided into six subtypes. First, Cyrus may be used as a reward or an expression of appreciation for deeds already accomplished. This can be seen as the traditional Jewish type. It may be related to local reforms, as was the case with Joseph II and Alexander II (Section 2.3), or to the Jewish nation, as when Herzog and Slomvitz commended Truman for his recognition of Israel (Section 3.2) or when Netanyahu and Shaked expressed their gratitude for Trump's acknowledgement of Jerusalem (Section 3.4). A second subtype is that of inducement. Here, the role of Cyrus serves as an appeal to someone with political power to convince them to use their influence to make the desired action happen. As with the first type, this may be a local reform, like when European Jews petitioned the Shah of Persia to improve the condition for his Jewish subjects (Section 2.4), or it may be related to Israel, as was the case of Jewish and Christian Zionists (Sections 2.4 and 2.5). Especially the Zionist examples show that the call for a modern Cyrus may include pressure, at least to those who ascribe to the same belief system—such as the idea that God will bless the nations and individuals that bless Israel, and destroy them that do not (Sections 2.5 and 3.1). To become this Cyrus is an opportunity, not a destiny; the person must actively accept the calling. The third subtype is related to the second in that it deals with the same acts and a potential future Cyrus. Rather than activism, however, this type consists of theological speculations. We saw examples of this in the Virginia newspaper discussion of whether Napoleon could be a second Cyrus (Section 2.4), and in the diary notes of Lord Shaftesbury (Section 2.5). The main distinction from the second subtype is that the potential Cyrus here is not aware of the discussion.

In the final three subtypes, Cyrus is decontextualized from the Jewish people and Israel, and relocated to national politics in the West. The fourth subtype represents pure political propaganda. The comparison to Cyrus is used to legitimize the person's rule, or send signals about authority, benevolence, or divine approval to a targeted audience. This was how Napoleon himself utilized Cyrus (Section 2.3). Somewhat related, yet different in that the context is now that of a democracy, the fifth subtype designates the use of Cyrus as a tool for voter mobilization. This is what we saw in the 2016 presidential election when Trump's Evangelical supporters sought to convince fellow believers to vote for him (Section 3.3). Cyrus, the pagan ruler, then functioned as a justification of voting for an ungodly candidate, and sent a signal of divine approval, with an inherent warning about going against God's will by staying home or voting for the wrong candidate. In this case, the Cyrus calling is not intended for the (potential) Cyrus himself, but for the voters who are now responsible for fulfilling the prophecy. The final subtype is closely related to the fifth. It too deals with the ungodly, or secular leader who is used by God to solve a crisis and defend Christian values. The purpose, though, is not to mobilize voters in order to elect a person to the Cyrus office. As with the first subtype, this modern Cyrus may be recognized after the deed has been accomplished. One example is Wallnau's post-mortem recognition of Churchill (Section 3.4). In that instance, the function of the comparison was clearly supportive: Churchill became a Cyrus in 2015 to justify the application of the type on Trump in the election. The sixth subtype may also refer to contemporary national leaders. Like Trump, these are plain-spoken, non-religious populist rulers who defend traditional values, religious heritage, and national borders (Section 3.4). The notion of the imperfect vessel may be seen as part of the fifth or sixth subtype, depending on its use and aim.

The described types and subtypes present Cyrus in various ways as they build on different sources and are tailored to suit specific situations and audiences. Consequently, two persons may become modern Cyruses based on very different criteria. Every comparison must therefore be interpreted within the framework of the correct subtype in order to be properly understood. At the same time, comparisons from various subtypes may influence one another and enhance the impact on the audience. This was the case with Trump. To a lesser or greater degree, all the Old Testament subtypes have been applied to him by different people (Sections 3.3 and 3.4): He was rewarded for his recognition of Jerusalem by Netanyahu and Shaked (subtype 1); Jewish groups appealed to him to support the building of the third temple (subtype 2); some speculated whether he would actually be a Cyrus or a Nebuchadnezzar (subtype 3); while not propagated by himself, his Christian supporters referred to him as a Cyrus to legitimize his presidency (subtype 4); prophecies about him having the Cyrus anointing were used to mobilize Christian voters (subtype 5); and he was described as one of the multiple modern Cyruses raised up by God to solve a crisis and defend the Christian civilization (subtype 6). A comparison of Trump with the character subtypes could perhaps have been more applicable, but the writings of Xenophon and Herodotus are not as well-known today as they were when Harper praised Washington in 1810 (Section 3.1). The authors of the Trump–Cyrus comparisons were Jews and Christians. Their source for comparison was the Bible, and it was the biblical version of Cyrus that they and their audience knew best. In addition, they sought to achieve a desired action. Only the Old Testament subtypes are useful in that regard.

The subtypes applied to Trump have different evolutionary lines. For instance, Netanyahu's reference to Cyrus followed the Jewish tradition of expressing gratitude for an accomplished deed (subtype 1), while the request for support to rebuild the temple followed the practice of Zionists (subtype 2). The most significant Trump–Cyrus comparisons, however, were those related to the election of 2016 and successive years (subtype 5, which in turn inspired subtype 6). This subtype had a completely different origin, which allowed for a recontextualization into an American setting. While Wallnau described his likening of Trump to Cyrus as the result of a divine revelation, he was nevertheless not the first to recognize the utility of King Cyrus as a political tool. In 2012, just prior to the presidential election, an author called J. D. Edwards published a Kindle book entitled *The Cyrus Test: A Biblical Approach to Voting When Candidates Don't Share Your Faith*. Like Wallnau four years later, it too focused on the dilemma that Christian voters may face when their preferred candidate does not share their religious beliefs. Edwards found the solution in the biblical texts about Cyrus, and introduced a test—"The Cyrus Test"—to help unveil whether a candidate was really a Cyrus and not just a gambling choice. According to Edwards, the test was his own creation, although credit was given to an earlier publication by Richard T. Wright for introducing "The Cyrus Principle." In *Biology Through the Eyes of Faith*, published in 2002, Wright utilized Cyrus to illustrate how non-Christians may serve God for the benefit of the environment. Edwards, in turn, transferred that principle to the political context (Edwards 2012). This shows, at least, that the idea of the divine tool was circulating among Christians in America long before Trump was revealed as a modern Cyrus.

The geographical location of Cyrus varies according to the interests that are promoted. Antedating political Zionism, the desire of Haskalah Jews for local integration shaped their views on Cyrus and his deed, and placed him in a national context. Jewish and Christian Zionists had other interests, and their Cyrus thus became different as the goals were now related to Israel. To Wallnau and other Evangelicals who promoted Trump as a new Cyrus, the focus was on the United States and American politics. The utility of Cyrus in this context was not just a result of the flexibility of the Old Testament type and the powerful argument that God had used pagan rulers for the benefit of his people before. American Protestants have a long tradition of believing that their nation has been chosen and blessed by God and given a unique mission in the world; if not a "new Israel", then at least there are many parallels between the two nations (Mead 2008, pp. 35–37; Durbin 2013, p. 328). Such parallels are prominent in publications by the authors of the Cyrus–Trump comparisons

(see e.g., [Cahn 2017, 2019](#); [Wallnau and Sparks 2020](#)). Given these premises, there is only a short leap from a “non-Jewish” Cyrus to a “non-Christian” Cyrus; from “the people of God” (for whose benefit Cyrus works) being Jews to being American Evangelicals; and from the physical restoration of Israel to a socio-cultural restoration of the United States.

Wallnau and likeminded Evangelicals supported Trump because he was willing to promote their causes ([Trangerud 2021](#)). Their designation of Trump as a Cyrus should be understood in light of dominion theology and the desire to establish God’s kingdom on earth. The idea is that God has called Christians to dominate society; not just influencing it, but ruling and shaping it. Here, the mission of Christians is to win entire nations for Christ, not just individuals (as in traditional evangelism). The task of the church is to overcome the demonic forces, and then govern the nations on behalf of God ([Budiselić 2015](#); [Garrard 2020](#)). In his 2016 book, Wallnau incorporated Trump into this paradigm:

The United States has held the door of democracy open. Satan intends to shut it. By now I hope you can see that this is far beyond a battle of politics. (...) We are up against a malevolent and demonic agenda aimed to destroy the global force for kingdom expansion that is America. (...) Satan, well aware of America’s unique assignment to globally advance the discipleship of nations, recognizes the influence of what we export. ([Wallnau 2016d](#), p. 144)

The role of Cyrus-Trump was to stop the national deterioration—advanced by the political left—and enable America to fulfill its world mission. God raised up Trump, and if the Christians would vote him into office, he would become their Cyrus ([Wallnau 2016d](#), pp. 27–33).

Since 2015, the Evangelical version of Cyrus has developed into a complex web of multiple Cyruses located in various nations (see [Wallnau and Sparks 2020](#)). Their deed has little to do with Israel, but is defined as a defense of the Christian religion, traditional values, and national borders. This leap was possible because Cyrus was first adapted to the American national context. Consequently, the Cyruses in question resembles Trump in many ways: They are plain-spoken, non-religious populist leaders who fight to preserve their own nation. They are not only formed in the image of Trump, but also according to the goal of Christian dominion and kingdom establishment. God has raised these secular rulers up for the sake of God’s people, Wallnau explains, “not to be spiritual reformers, but to provide a *window of grace* for God’s people to do the project assigned to them” ([Wallnau and Sparks 2020](#), p. 24). This project is to take control over the various nations, and when these leaders promote their cause, they become their Cyrus.

Having in mind the different Cyrus subtypes and their respective contexts, we may return to the prayer of Apostle Maldonado at the launching of the *Evangelicals for Trump* coalition in January 2020. How shall his words be understood? While the various references to Cyrus did indeed work to reinforce the effect of one another, thus blending into a seemingly single narrative, Maldonado’s remark was clearly one of subtype 5 (voter mobilization) and 6 (dominionism):

Father, I pray for [our] president. I pray for you to give him boldness. I pray, Father, for him to defy and challenge giants in the world, and defy and challenge the enemies in this nation. (...) We ask you, Father, that he can be the Cyrus, to bring reformation, to bring change into this nation. And all the nations of the earth will say, America is the greatest nation of the earth. ([NBC News 2020](#))

5. Conclusions

It has been the aim of this article to deepen the understanding of King Cyrus as a model for comparison and a political tool for voter mobilization. The Persian King obtained a central role in the 2016 US presidential election as leading Evangelicals promoted Donald Trump as a new Cyrus, chosen by God to save the nation. Following Trump’s victory, the likening of the President to Cyrus became more prominent and the model continued to develop. The article has sought to delineate this development, as well as to explain what various actors mean when they refer to Trump as a modern-day Cyrus. Based on a

number of Cyrus comparisons from a broad range of sources, I have suggested a typology to distinguish between the different versions of King Cyrus. These reflect specific forms, functions, and aims, as well as diverse criteria for becoming the Cyrus.

As a model for comparison, Cyrus exists as two main types: *the character type*, which follows a checklist of character traits as described by certain historians, and *the Old Testament type*, which is based on the biblical narrative, and focuses on the accomplishment of a desired deed and the fulfilling of God's will. The various subtypes of the latter involve gratitude for actions of the past, a call to perform them in the future, theological speculations, and political activism. The examples presented in this article show that different people—irrespective of nationality, gender, and social status—may become a Cyrus during their lifetime or even long after their death. Several subtypes were applied to Trump prior to the 2016 presidential election and in subsequent years. The many Cyrus–Trump comparisons should be understood in the context of their respective subtypes in order to be properly understood when it comes to message, goal, and function.

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