

ry Jew should bear arms and defend himself against the Persians. And the fear of the Jews fell upon all the people. Again God had defeated the schemes, not of men only, but of the archenemy. Truth triumphed in spite of the waywardness of his people. This decree of Ahasuerus, or Xerxes, is the counterpart of the decree which will soon be issued by the beast of Revelation thirteen against the followers of God. It will find a people situated as were the Jews in Babylon; it will find others who have withdrawn from Babylon, and as the enemy rushes upon this latter class to slay them, the swords will fall like broken straws, for the angels of God will fight for his people. (SDP 175.2).

THE DELIVERANCE OF SPIRITUAL ISRAEL

This record, given in the book of Esther, is preserved in Bible history that men may know the future. God's dealings with the Jews reveal the principles of his government, and in this history is a graphic description of the sins and deliverance of spiritual Israel. Xerxes was a cruel, arrogant man, and his character is shown not only in his dealing with the Hebrew race, but with other peoples as well. Not content with the extent of territory under his control, he mustered an immense army—over five million, historians state—and crossed the Hellespont to subdue Grecia. Defeat and disaster accompanied the effort, however, and he returned unto his own kingdom. (SDP 176.1).

The Spirit of God was not yet withdrawn from the Medo-Persian court, and although Xerxes is the last king mentioned in the vision which Daniel saw, yet God was still holding out mercy to the Israelites; and it was during the reign of Artaxerxes Longimanus, the successor of Xerxes that the final decree for the return of the Jews was issued. In like manner the grand jubilee will immediately follow Satan's last effort to destroy the people of God. (SDP 176.2).

INTERMARRIAGE BRINGS CONFUSION

In the seventh year of the reign of Artaxerxes, the heart of Ezra was stirred by the Spirit of God, and he appealed to the king for assistance. In response to the appeal Artaxerxes issued the commandment recorded in Ezra seven. This is the decree of the year 457 B. C., mentioned in chapter ten, and is the date from which to reckon the beginning of the two thousand three hundred days of Daniel 8:14, and the seventy weeks of Daniel 9:24. The decree of Artaxerxes included all that was contained in the decrees of Cyrus and Darius, and gave further commandment to build the wall and establish a government.

Eighty years had passed since the decree of Cyrus—eighty

years of forbearance; but even after the experience of the days of Esther and Xerxes there was little interest manifested in the rebuilding of Zion, and the company who went with Ezra was small compared with what it should have been. The condition in Jerusalem was discouraging, for there the Jews had intermarried with the Canaanites, bringing in iniquity and confusion. The Sabbath was desecrated, and the services of the Lord's house were neglected. It was not until the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, after Ezra had labored for Israel thirteen years, that Nehemiah came from Babylon and stirred the people into activity. Then, and not till then, were the walls rebuilt. Even then it was fighting with one hand and building with the other, because of a multitude of enemies. It was only then that they began to pay tithe, and to cease from ordinary traffic on the Sabbath; it was then that they put away their heathen wives; but they did it only because threatened by God's wrath. (SDP 176.3).

Truly Israel was stiffnecked and rebellious. A remnant was saved from Babylon, but it was only a remnant; and that remnant, after years of struggling and much halting, was as a brand snatched from the burning. Jerusalem, which might have been the glory of the earth, fell a prey to each succeeding kingdom. Daniel's mind turned to the rising power of the kingdom of Grecia, and Gabriel next spoke of the mighty one who should rule with great dominion. Medo-Persia sank into a state of weakness, and the angel withdrew his sheltering wings; probation was passed for another nation. It, too, had been numbered and found wanting; and its name is dropped by the inspired penman. The history of the Persian empire, until it passed its zenith, is the history of the decrees; and when that nation ceased to help forward the people upon whom God was still bestowing light, it is lost sight of by the divine historian. (SDP 178.1).

Time waits for neither man nor nation. The life of each individual may be read in the history of the years of Medo-Persian supremacy. Let us hasten our steps toward the New Jerusalem. (SDP 178.2).

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Xerxes'
dealing with God's people

The three kings who followed Cyrus were Cambyses, Pseudo-Smerdis, and Darius. These, and their part in the history of the Jews, we have already seen. The fourth king of Persia after Cyrus the Great was noted for his wealth, and the great army he raised against the Greeks.

GOD SETS AND REMOVES KINGS

This king was Xerxes, who came to the throne on the death of Darius, in the year 486 B. C. Our interest lies in the record of his dealings with the Jews, and to that history one entire book of the Bible is devoted. Xerxes is the Ahasuerus of Esther 1 and the book of Esther is the record of the acts of this king with reference to the people of God who were still living in the kingdom of Babylon, over which Xerxes was sole monarch. (SDP 170.3).

The Medo-Persian kingdom was at its height during the reign of this king. He held in subjection one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, extending from India to Ethiopia. His capital was at Shushan, in the province of Elam. Some estimate of the wealth at the disposal of this ruler may be gained from the fact that for six months the princes, rulers, and governors of all the provinces, representing the power of the Persian king in all parts of the realm, were entertained at the royal palace; and that when this gathering was over, the palace of Shushan was thrown open for a full week, during which time all the people were feasted in the gardens.

There was drinking of wine and reveling. It was similar to the time when Belshazzar feasted with a thousand of his lords. The furnishings of the palace, with its marble walls and floors, its rich curtains and draperies of many colors, hanging by silver rings to the lofty pillars, told of the gratification of pride. The beds and couches were of gold and silver, and they drank from wine cups of gold. Truly Medo-Persia was the daughter of Babylon. (SDP 171.1).

ESTHER STANDS FOR HER PEOPLE

The story of Vashti is a familiar one. Ahasuerus commanded her to appear before his half-drunken company, and she refused. Then she was set aside, and a Jewish maiden, her nationality being unknown, became queen of the Persian kingdom. This was Hadassah, known as Esther, an orphan of the house of Saul, whose parents had been among the royal captives in the days of Nebuchadnezzar. She had lived always with a cousin by the name of Mordecai, who treated her as his own daughter. Little did Mordecai and his wife think when they took the helpless infant Hadassah that

she would one day stand for her people in the presence of the king. She was an obedient child, and consequently became an obedient woman. She was simple-hearted and unassuming, requiring little and demanding nothing. She loved her own people, although to be true to them meant that she must look death in the face. (SDP 171.2).

Daniel was no longer living, and there were few if any to represent the worship of the true God in the court of the godless king. Mordecai sat at the king's gate, it is true, and in time of a conspiracy he reported the matter to the king; but there were few occasions when he could mingle with those in authority. Wickedness and injustice abounded, and Mordecai refused to countenance such principles, and would not bow before the haughty Haman, one of the king's counselors. This was pretense enough for the enemies of the Jews to work upon, for they were now a hated race throughout the empire. They had failed to take advantage of the time of national favor, and Persia had turned against them. (SDP 172.1).

For about forty years mercy had been extended to Israel, and that people had turned a deaf ear to all entreaty. Forty years has often been called the allotted time for a generation to settle its destiny either for or against the truth. Moses was forty years in the wilderness, unlearning the things of Egypt, and being taught in the things of God; Israel wandered forty years in the wilderness, when only eleven days were necessary to make the journey from the Red Sea to the border of Canaan; forty days Christ endured severe temptation as a figure of the time before the destruction of Jerusalem; forty years sealed the fate of the Reformation in Germany; and it was forty years from the preaching of the sealing message until the time of the loud cry. (SDP 172.2).

So Israel was given forty years in Babylon while angels held the winds of strife. At the end of that time Xerxes yielded to the suggestion of Haman, and issued a decree against that "certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces." If entreaty would no longer attract the attention of the Jews, God would in his mercy let persecution come, that they might be compelled to flee to his side for protection. But when persecution and hardship are approaching, the love of God is so great that he prepares the deliverer beforehand. (SDP 173.1).

A DELIVERER BEFORE PERSECUTION

The angel of God had guarded Hadassah, and directed in her education. He had brought her to the kingdom "for such a time as this." When there was no man to represent his cause, Jehovah used a woman, and she, a young woman.

Her very beauty was consecrated to the Lord, and he made use of that. God loves the young people, as the history of the Jews certifies. Messengers were sent by post to carry the king's decree to every province in the vast empire. It was sealed with the king's signet, and the laws of the Medes and Persians were unchangeable. On a set day every Jew in the kingdom was to be put to death by the sword; old, young, men, women, and little children, none were excluded. Satan triumphed in the thought that at last Israel was in his hand, and the cause of God should fall. "The king and Haman," two of Satan's servants, "sat down to drink." (SDP 173.3).

The city of Shushan first heard the decree, and consternation filled the hearts of the Jews. There was distress in every home. "The city of Shushan was perplexed." Scarcely one year from the date of the decree and death would be their lot. There was seemingly no way of escape. Years before they might have gone up to Jerusalem, but now it was forever too late. A bitter wail of agony reached heaven, and as those messengers of the king sped on, the cry grew louder. The voices of the Jews at Shushan were strengthened by sounds of mourning from thousands of Jews in all the provinces. (SDP 174.1).

Esther, in the king's palace, was ignorant of the decree, but Mordecai made known to her the universal distress, and sent her a copy of the king's command. The crucial moment had come to her. Should she, could she, be true to her God? The Hebrews of Shushan put on sackcloth, and for three days fasted for the queen. Then she came forth in the strength of her God. Queenly, beautiful, trusting, she stood in the inner court over against the king's house, awaiting the recognition of the monarch of earth, to cross whose will meant death. On one hand she saw death at the hand of Xerxes; on the other, the approval of her God. "If I perish, I perish," she said, and God accepted her sacrifice. (SDP 174.2).

God had prepared from afar for her deliverance. The very act of kindness done years before by Mordecai wrought in the deliverance of his people. Who says there is no record kept of man's acts, or that man performs any deed of kindness unprompted by heavenly beings? God used Esther to save his people; he also used Mordecai. (SDP 175.1).

GOD SAVES HIS PEOPLE

Haman, the one who proposed the decree, was hung on a gallows built for Mordecai; Mordecai was promoted to the position of chief counselor of Xerxes; and a decree issued that on the day appointed for the slaughter of the Jews, eve-