

the weak-hearted Jews left off building the temple because of a little opposition, God was bringing a man to the throne who would carry forward the work of Cyrus. Haggai and Zechariah gathered the people together and urged them to resume the work of building, giving the word of the Lord that their poverty was the direct result of their own refusal to build in the face of difficulties. The Jews took up the burden, but presently Tatnai and others, governors of tribes in Palestine, came to Jerusalem and warned the Jews to cease. Haggai, Zechariah, Zerubbabel, and Jeshua quoted the decree of Cyrus. Tatnai then wrote to Darius, expecting, of course, that he would put an end to the work. Darius, however, caused a search to be made, and found the decree of Cyrus, with all its particulars concerning the building, the sacrifices, and the order for money for the same from the king's treasury. (SDP 166.3).

Here is a manifestation of God's goodness and mercy. That which in the eyes of men looked like defeat was turned into a glorious victory. Darius issued a decree which covered all that was contained in the decree of Cyrus, and more also. Tatnai and the men who had entered complaint were commanded to help forward the work at Jerusalem by giving their own money to bear the expense. Watch those men, Tatnai, Shethar-boznai, and their companions, who had raised such an outcry against God's work. When the decree of Darius was received, the accusers went with great speed to the Jewish leaders. Seeming defeat was turned into signal victory, because God was directing in the affairs of men. Bitter enemies became friends, or at least assistants, when the breath of Jehovah confounded their worldly policy. Again God especially favored Israel. The warnings of Jeremiah were still heard: "Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and deliver every man his soul: be not cut off in her iniquity. . . . We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed: forsake her, and let us go every one into his own country. . . . The Lord hath brought forth our righteousness: come, and let us declare in Zion the work of the Lord our God." (SDP 167.3).

"O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken." Israel heeded not. For thirty-six years—think of it, over a quarter of a century—Darius reigned, and Gabriel stood at his right hand to keep his heart tender toward the chosen people. The angels of heaven watched intently to see Israel return and build Jerusalem. To the prophet Zechariah, in the days of Darius, was given a wonderful view of the future history of the people of God. Jerusalem was given an opportunity in those days to build so as to become an everlasting city. Said one angel to another in the hearing of Zechariah, "Run, speak to this young man, saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls, for the multitude of men and cattle therein." Instead of walls of stone, such as Jerusalem and the cities of the world had hitherto been accustomed to build, God promised to be a wall of fire round about. "Ho, ho, come forth, and flee from the land of the north. . . . Deliver thyself, O Zion, that dwellest with the daughter of Babylon." (SDP 168.2).

Abounding love, like the love of a mother for her firstborn, is

heard in the words of Jehovah: "Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion! for lo, I come. I will dwell in the midst of thee." Christ's first and his second coming were both promised then, and would doubtless have followed in quick succession had Israel heeded. Throughout all the world the glory of the Lord should be seen upon Zion, daughter of the living God. "I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and JERUSALEM SHALL BE CALLED A CITY OF TRUTH!" "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion: shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee." To those who mourned because the new temple seemed less glorious than the former one, Christ, looking forward to the time when he himself should enter there with words of life for his people, said, by the prophet Haggai, "I will shake all nations, and the Desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory." "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former . . . and in this place will I give peace." This he said referring to his personal visit in the form of humanity. (SDP 169.1).

And again, by the same prophet, he asked them to witness to the fact that from the very day they began to build, the land yielded abundantly; the silver and the gold flowed in, and there was general prosperity. By Zechariah the latter rain was promised to Jerusalem; great clouds of his glory should overshadow them. In Jerusalem the weak should be as David, and David as the angel of the Lord. All this he told them by the prophet Zechariah. Read the entire prophecy for its glorious promises. If we had lived in Babylon in the days of Darius, would he have hearkened? Hear the prophet as he looks still farther into the future, and sees the Lord coming and all his saints with him to crown Jerusalem, the City of our God, the bride of the Apocalypse. It should be an eternal city, with sin and iniquity blotted from the earth. Zechariah saw these things in the days of Darius, king of Persia; and had the Jews come out of Babylon, and followed where God would have led, such would have been the history of the world. They heeded not his voice, and after a lapse of nearly twenty-five hundred years, the people of to-day find themselves heirs to exactly the same promises under precisely the same conditions. If the church of God to-day follows the instruction of the prophets, every promise of Zechariah shall be theirs. If not, the history of the Jews during the reign of the king who followed Darius, will be repeated. (SDP 170.1).

References

Haskell, S.N. (1901). The Story of Daniel the prophet. Review & Herald Publishing Association, Takoma Park.

THE LOUD CRY HERALD MINISTRY
Box 315, Katima Mulilo, Namibia, 9000
Website: www.theloudcryherald.com
Email: josh@theloudcryherald.com

The history of the
Decrees

The angel began with the history of the Persian kingdom, for at the time of the vision the Babylonian monarchy was entirely gone. It was the third year of the sole reign of Cyrus, and the fifth year since Darius the Mede had taken Babylon. It will be remembered that Daniel had seen the various nations, as they rose one after another on the stream of time. God is the only perfect authentic historian; the only unbiased record of national events is found in the Scriptures.

GOD SETS THE DRAMA OF LIFE

Men record acts, but only God can give those acts their proper setting in the great drama of life. There is one unbroken chain of events, a silken thread in the web of life, a perpetual spring in the tide of human affairs. This is the record of God's dealings with his chosen people. Egyptian history is noted in the inspired record of the world, but only as it played some part in connection with Jehovah's people. Likewise Assyria, Babylon, Greece, and Rome; whatever the nation and whatever its place in time, its history is noted by the divine historian only during the time when it has been an instrument in God's hand to spread his truth, or to protect his people. (SDP 161.1).

THE ACCESSION OF CYRUS

From the accession of Cyrus to the end of the history of Medo-Persia, Gabriel worked with the kings. His first words to Daniel in this last vision are to this effect: "I will return to fight with the prince of Persia; and when I am gone forth, lo, the prince of Grecia shall come." (Dan. 10:20). When, therefore, the influence of God should be withdrawn from the king of Persia, no power on earth could help them. This thought was made emphatic when the rough goat was seen to meet the ram on the banks of the River Granicus. Wealth, arms, and influence were without avail. (SDP 162.1).

THE EVILS OF THE HUMAN HEART

Of the seven years of the reign of Cyrus, the third was already entered at the time of the vision. His first recorded act on taking the kingdom was to issue the proclamation of freedom to the Jews. Throughout the length and breadth of the land the tidings were heralded. It did not take over twelve months for the message to reach the most remote corners of the empire where the Jews might be found. Every inducement which monarch could offer was held out to that people. The slow movement on the part of a few, and the utter inactivity with the great majority, surprised Cyrus beyond measure. It is one of the saddest commentaries in the whole Bible on the perverseness of the human heart, and its desire to cling to sin. (SDP 162.2).

ISRAEL FAILS TO TEACH THE WORLD

When it is remembered that Babylon was the personification of all vileness; that injustice and oppression abounded, and that the

decree of Cyrus was a call from God to liberty and purity of life, the effect of living long even in the sight of sin ought to appall one. This is a picture of the way the calls of God have been treated over and over again. Here is seen the exact counterpart of what people are doing to-day when asked of God to forsake modern Babylon. One reason why the Jews were slow about withdrawing from ancient Babylon was because the children and youth had been neglected during the seventy years' captivity. Jewish homes should have been schools, training these children for the city of Jerusalem. Instead, Jewish children attended Babylonian schools, mingled with Babylonian society, wore Babylonish apparel, talked, ate, and acted like the Babylonians; and consequently, when the time came to leave Babylon, they had no desire to do so. (SDP 163.2).

Had the Hebrew race been true to its privileges, they might have established schools of the prophets, from which light would have radiated to all parts of the kingdom. This opportunity was offered in the first days of the captivity, when Nebuchadnezzar was witness to the fact that all the Chaldean learning was not worth one tenth what God could teach. Daniel and his companions were brought into favor because of their knowledge of true educational principles, and had schools been established at that time, Chaldean youth would doubtless have been educated by the Jews, and in the religion of the Jews. God had always intended that Israel should be the teachers of the world, and even after sin had led them into slavery, he gave then an opportunity to teach their captors and their captors' children. Did Israel do so? The end of the seventy years and the response to the decree of Cyrus answer, No. They did not teach others; they failed even to teach their own children. As a result, thousands perished with Babylon. (SDP 163.3).

HALF-HEARTED IN THE SERVICE

Those who did go up to Jerusalem were half-hearted in their service, and ready to give up before the least opposition. When the foundation of the temple was laid, the old men wept because it did not equal in splendor the temple of Solomon, and there was little influence exerted to bring others from Babylon. There is little wonder that after waiting two full years to see results, Cyrus was perplexed and astonished at the outcome. What wonder that Daniel had to wait three weeks for an answer to his prayer, while Gabriel and Michael pleaded with the disheartened Cyrus! Cyrus was ready, had the Jews done their part, to make Jerusalem the glory of the whole earth. As it was, we do not find any record of further work by this king. He died, the work he might have done but partially accomplished because of neglect and inactivity on the part of God's chosen people. (SDP 164.1).

A FATAL NATIONAL PEACE

Satan had witnessed the workings of the Spirit of God on the hearts of men at the very center of the government he claimed

as his own. It was due to his influence that the Jews did not make a grand entry into Jerusalem. Cyrus struggled between two influences, but was restrained by Gabriel from doing any act of violence. Cambyses, his son, reigned nearly eight years, but most of his time was spent in useless and expensive warfare in Egypt and Ethiopia. Cambyses is the Ahasuerus of Ezra 4:5. To him the Samaritans wrote letters of complaint against the Jews at Jerusalem. But Cambyses was too busy with his foreign wars to give heed to this matter, and hence no action was taken either for or against the work at Jerusalem. The Jews were still at liberty to leave Babylon, but such a time of national quiet was not conducive to great activity on their part, and they remained where they were. The time came when they wished with all their hearts that they had gone out during those peaceful years. (SDP 164.2).

Cambyses was slain while in Egypt; and before the report was circulated throughout the Medo-Persian empire, an impostor took the throne which belonged to Smerdis, the son of Cambyses. The impostor, known in history as Pseudo-Smerdis (the false Smerdis), is the Artaxerxes of Ezra 4:7. He reigned but seven months, but that gave him time to consider complaints from the Samaritans, and the tribes about Jerusalem, and to issue a commandment for the building of Jerusalem to cease until further word should come from the throne. This letter of the false Smerdis is found in Ezra 4:18-22. This is the only act which the divine historian mentions in the life of this Persian monarch. Although very little is said about him, God knew every move he made. This is seen as we follow the history of the decrees. As soon as the Jews at Jerusalem heard the reading of the letter from the false Smerdis, all work ceased. "For," reasoned they, "how can we go on?" After they ceased to build, God raised up two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, and from these we gain a knowledge of how matters then went in Jerusalem. (SDP 165.2).

GOD WORKS FOR ISRAEL ALL TIMES

The people ceased to build the temple, and turned to building houses for themselves. When urged to continue the Lord's work, they complained that money was scarce. They sowed seed, but the harvest was less than the amount sown; their trees bore little or no fruit; there was drought, and the cattle died; men could not pay their rent or taxes, and became slaves because of debt, and sold their children into bondage. Then they complained to God. But all the time God was working for them, and they knew it not. (SDP 166.1).

This is the way he worked: In the city of Babylon, six of the chief men of the empire suspected that the reigning king was not the rightful heir, and they banded themselves together to find out. Forcing their way into the presence of Smerdis, they recognized the impostor, and slew him, and Darius, the chief of the band, was made king. This is the man in history known as Darius Hystaspes, and is Darius the Persian spoken of in Ezra 4:24. Gabriel still guarded the throne of the Persians, and while