

The Proclamation of Cyrus

Key Verse: “Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel.”
—Ezra 1:3

Selected Scriptures:
Ezra 1:1-11; 2:64-70

ISRAEL’S SEVENTY YEARS of captivity began under Babylon’s King Nebuchadnezzar and continued after the fall of Babylon into the ascendancy of the Medo-Persian Empire. (Jer. 25:9-11; II Chron. 36:22,23) After the seventy years passed, “the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia,” to make a proclamation granting liberty to the Jewish captives.—Ezra 1:1-6

How did the Lord stir up the spirit of Cyrus to issue this declaration? The answer to this question is that the Prophet Daniel had, for a short period of time, been in close contact with King Cyrus and was used by God to direct the king in what he was to do. Daniel was a young man when the seventy years of captivity began and was drafted into the service of Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar was succeeded by King Belshazzar, who was in turn followed by “Darius the Median,” who set Daniel “over the whole realm” of the kingdom. (Dan. 5:30,31; 6:1-3) “Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian,” Darius’ successor.—Dan. 6:25-28

During the first year of Cyrus’ reign, he issued a

proclamation of liberty to the Hebrew captives, allowing them to return to Jerusalem and, as our Key Verse states, “build the house of the LORD God of Israel.” Daniel would have been an elderly man during the first year of Cyrus’ reign. (Dan. 1:21) At the end of the seventy years of Israel’s captivity, Daniel would have faithfully borne testimony to the new King Cyrus concerning the role God had designed in the outworking of the divine purpose for Israel’s return to their land.

Daniel was a student of Jehovah’s Word, including Jeremiah’s prophecy concerning the seventy years of Israel’s captivity. (Jer. 25:11,12; 29:10; Dan. 9:2) He would have also known about Isaiah’s prophecy, recorded nearly 150 years earlier, concerning God’s use of Cyrus as his “anointed”—that is, the one divinely appointed to proclaim liberty to the Hebrews. Daniel would have likewise been aware that as the Lord’s anointed, Cyrus would be a “shepherd,” symbolically speaking, one who would “perform all” that the Lord would direct. This, Daniel knew, would include every provision for the care and protection of the Hebrews in connection with their return to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the Temple.—Isa. 44:28; 45:1-4

Daniel may have also pointed out to Cyrus the information revealed in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, where four successive world powers were depicted by gold, silver, brass, and iron in a great, human-like image. (Dan. 2:31-38) In this dream, the “head of gold” represented the Babylonian Empire. This empire was succeeded by the “breast and ... arms of silver,” representing the Medo-Persian empire, over which Cyrus ruled. Daniel would have explained that Cyrus’ authority to rule had been given by “the God of heaven,” which evidently stirred up the king’s spirit to act in the matter he did. How thankful we should be as we view the overruling providences of God with regard to his chosen people, Israel, and to those such as Cyrus, who was of the proper character to be used in a special way by Jehovah. ■