

II

FIRST GLANCES

That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid. Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut (Isa. 44:28—45:1).

Our first glances behind the veil will perhaps be hesitant and tentative. We will be reluctant to stare very long for fear that we might be contaminated.

Our observations will be distinguished from viewing only the Scriptures. Believing that the Scriptures are inspired of God, we accept them regardless of evidence which seems to the contrary. There are literally hundreds, and perhaps thousands of instances where men once thought the Bible to be wrong, only

to discover through better research and additional information that the Bible was right and its critics were wrong.

When we look beyond the veil, however, we will be probing into areas about which the Bible gives no specific information. Certainly there are dangers to be avoided, yet we are promised a certain "boldness" to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Christ. This is a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, "through the veil, that is to say His flesh . . ."

Therefore, let us look "beyond the veil" or "behind the scenes" at Cyrus. By doing so we will be probing into someone's personal experience as opposed to studying a passage of Scripture.

It is a fact that the book of Isaiah mentions a conqueror named Cyrus who would authorize the building of Jerusalem and the laying of the foundation of the temple. At this time, however, Jerusalem and the temple had not yet even been destroyed.

Isaiah lived in the eighth century before Christ. His prophetic ministry came during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (Isa. 1:1). If he began his ministry while in his twenties, he would have been over eighty years of age when Hezekiah died.

Cyrus, about whom he wrote these predictive prophecies, would not even be born until about 600 B.C.

Most children are expected only nine months before their birth, but the world expected Cyrus generations before he was conceived in his mother's womb.

Keil and Delitzsch observe that Cyrus is the only Gentile king whom Jehovah has called His "anointed."

Thus, we have some remarkable facts which cannot be gain-said or controverted, and the more deeply we probe, the more amazing the story becomes.

Since both Jesus and Cyrus are called the Lord's anointed, we should not be surprised to discover some similarities surrounding the circumstances of their entrance into the world.

In particular, we would point out the desire of Satan to have both of these babies killed, and thus thwart the plan of God and keep His prophetic truths from coming to pass.

The name Cyrus is the Latin form of the old Persian word "Kurush" and is applied to three prominent men in history.

Cyrus I - the son of Teispes and grandfather of Cyrus the Great. He lived and reigned in the 7th century before Christ.

Cyrus II - called Cyrus the Great. He reigned from 559 B.C. until his death in 530 B.C. It is this Cyrus about whom we are writing.

Cyrus the Younger - the son of the Persian King Darius II.

As we have said before, our study will focus on Cyrus the Great. Let us begin our story with Astyages, the wicked grandfather of Cyrus.

Astyages was the last King of the Median Empire and reigned from 586 - 550 B.C. He had a terrifying dream that his daughter, Mandane, would give birth to a child who would rule all of Asia. Like Herod the Great, this wicked king did not want anyone to succeed him.

In an attempt to dilute his daughter's royal blood, he had her married to a Persian whom he deemed as inferior, and when her first child was born he ordered that the child be killed. This child would later be known as Cyrus the Great.

It is immediately obvious that the things which happened to this child did not happen by accident. God was determined to keep the baby alive that the Scriptures might be fulfilled, and the Devil was determined to kill the baby that the Scriptures might be broken.

The task of killing baby Cyrus was delegated to Harpagus, the king's most trusted servant. Harpagus, however, had second thoughts about killing the king's grandson. Since the king had no sons to succeed him, he reasoned that upon the death of Astyages, the sceptre would pass to his daughter, Mandane.

Once in power, he feared she would seek vengeance upon the man who had killed her son.

At last he determined that the baby had to die, but not by his hand. Thus, he delegated the task of killing the baby to a herdsman of the king named Mitrdates. Mitrdates was instructed to take the baby into the mountains and leave it to die.

The plot thickens . . . Mitrdates was married to a female slave named 'Spaca,' which incidentally means "bitch." This fact, as we will later point out, is quite significant. Spaca, not by accident, had just given birth to a stillborn baby boy.

The herdsman and his wife decided to exchange their dead baby for the live one. Thus, their dead son would have a royal burial and Spaca would not be deprived of the joys of motherhood by adopting the baby Cyrus.

Accordingly, Mitrdates took the corpse of his own son into the mountains and exposed it. Three days later he presented that same corpse to Harpagus for burial.

The deception was not discovered for ten years, and its discovery grew out of an innocent game played by the village children. By "chance" the herdsman's boy was chosen to play king. In the course of their game, he ordered that one of his disobedient subjects be whipped. Since the boy who was so punished came from a prominent family, the incident came to the attention of some important people. The herdsman's boy became the object of careful scrutiny and the herdsman was tortured on the rack until he told the whole story.

Harpagus, whom the king had originally commissioned to kill the child, was destined to pay a terrible price for his failure. He was invited to a sumptuous banquet and before him were placed the choicest morsels of boiled and roasted meat. At the end of the feast, he was presented a basket which contained the hands and the head of his own 13 year old son. It was only then that Harpagus realized that he had just dined upon the flesh of his own child. This fact too, was to be of critical importance in fulfilling the prophecy of God about Cyrus.

The wicked grandfather, still troubled about the dreams of his daughter's child, summoned his Magi. After much consultation, the Magi concluded that the king had nothing to fear from the boy Cyrus, for the fulfillment of the dreams, they said, had already been accomplished by the child's game. Thus, Cyrus was sent to Persia to be with his parents, who for the past ten years had believed him dead.

Now ancient peoples were much given to mythology. Rome, for example, was said to have been founded by Romulus and Remus, who were abandoned in the wilderness and were suckled by a she-wolf. Since the foster mother of Cyrus was named "Spaca" which means "bitch" the story soon was circulated that Cyrus, too, had been abandoned and raised by a bitch.

As Cyrus grew to manhood, his fame increased. Ultimately, Harpagus saw him as a vehicle through which he could gain vengeance over the king for the brutal murder of his son. Skillfully, he planted seeds of discord and rebellion in the minds of influential Medians. Ultimately, he sent a secret message to Cyrus which was sewn up inside the body of a dead rabbit. Cyrus, upon reading the details of the coup, fomented a rebellion in Persia and led an army to attack his grandfather, Astyages.

The wicked king, as if deprived of his senses, appointed Harpagus to be the commander of his army, not realizing that he was, in fact, the principle conspirator against him.

Astyages was defeated and was kept as a prisoner until the day of his death, and Cyrus became the supreme monarch of the Medes and the Persians. The remarkable and incredible prophecies of Scripture were in the course of being fulfilled.

Since Isaiah 45:1 mentions the conquest of nations, loosing the loins of kings, and opening the two leaved gates, the description of the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus will be of particular interest to you.

As Cyrus advanced toward Babylon, he came to the banks of a stream called "Gyndes" which empties into the Tigris. The stream was so swift and treacherous that one of the sacred white horses was drowned trying to swim across.

Cyrus was so enraged at the insolence of the river that he determined to break its strength so that a woman could walk across its waters without wetting her knees. Accordingly, he directed his army to dig 180 trenches on each side of the river, leading off in all directions. The water of the river thus diverted in 360 different channels was tamed, but not without the loss

of an entire summer season. This "chance" incident, however, would play a critical role in the conquest of Babylon.

Having wreaked his vengeance upon the Gyndes, Cyrus set out the following spring for Babylon. A battle was fought some distance from the city, and the Babylonians were forced to retreat into the city.

The city of Babylon was felt to be virtually impregnable. Its towering rampart walls formed a perimeter 56 miles long around the city, and were 300 feet high and 90 feet thick. The River Euphrates flowed through the midst of the city, but was adequately protected by walls on each side of the river.

Cyrus, however, had recently discovered that the waters of a river could be tamed. He therefore, left part of his army where the Euphrates entered the city, and part of his army where it made its exit. He then took a third group of men upstream from the city and diverted the river waters into a marsh. The river thus became so shallow that it reached only midway up to a man's thighs.

This information is recorded by Herodotus in Herodotus 1:191, and I will here report the next part of the story in his own words:

Had the Babylonians been apprised of what Cyrus was about, or had they noticed their danger, they would never have allowed the Persians to enter the city, but would have destroyed them utterly; for they would have made fast all the street gates which gave upon the river, and mounting upon the walls along both sides of the stream, would so have caught the enemy as it were in a trap. But, as it was, the Persians came upon them by surprise and so took the city . . .

Herodotus continues that the city of Babylon was involved in a festival of dancing and revelry. We read about it in the book of Daniel and the 5th chapter. During the midst of the banquet by Belshazzar, a sleeveless hand wrote his doom in unforgettable letters across the wall, and his kingdom was given into the hands of the Medes and the Persians.

Belshazzar was so frightened that his knees smote one against another (Dan. 5:6), and the two leaved gates which opened to the river were carelessly left open. The city of Babylon was captured and the Scriptures were remarkably fulfilled.

REFLECTIONS

Here we have a remarkable story. A part of it is found in the Bible, and a part of it is found in secular history. Each complements the other, so that there is a beautiful harmony between them. There is no conflict between inspired truth and uninspired truth.

Even the most cautious and devout student of the Scriptures will, therefore, probably find this story interesting and intriguing, and perhaps even edifying.

We will place complete confidence in the Scriptural part of the story, and will hold to the rest as tentatively true, realizing that additional information may lead us at some later point in time to revise our position.

This is the way it should be! Extra biblical information should be judged by the Scriptures and not vice versa.

We shall now endeavor to proceed from a remarkable story that happened over 2,000 years ago . . . to remarkable stories that happen today. If these stories, or experiences, are contrary to the Scriptures, we must summarily reject them as wrong. The Scriptures have stood the test of time.

If these stories, however, are not contrary to the Scriptures, and if they enhance our service for God, I suggest that they may very well be valid contacts with the Christ . . . beyond the veil.

Our next chapter is entitled "Into the Deep" and contains some remarkable stories about answers to prayer. If you believe that God does not give wisdom to those who pray for it, you will find this next chapter quite offensive. If, on the other hand, you have longed for guidance and direction from God in your life today . . . you will find a certain exhilaration in seeing His hand at work in the lives of others.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER II

1. Which is more true, inspired truth, or uninspired truth?
2. God had plans for Cyrus before he was born. Does God have plans for us before we are born?
3. List some of the ways in which the Devil tried to keep the prophecies about Cyrus from coming true.
4. List some of the providential things which happened to Cyrus which helped in fulfilling the prophecy.
5. Discuss the difference between "accident" and "providence."
6. Is it possible that spiritual forces are at war over us much as they were over Cyrus?
7. Have you ever had close calls when you were near death?
8. Is it possible that God has a special reason for sparing your life?
9. If God wanted to give you guidance today, how do you think He would do it?
10. How can we discern the leading of God from that of the Devil?