

DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

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Seventeenth Week - Second Day

CYRUS ACKNOWLEDGES JEHOVAH

"Thus says Yahweh to His anointed, to Cyrus . . . I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places, that you may know that I, Yahweh, who call you by your name, am the God of Israel" (Isaiah 45:1-3).

Josephus relates that when Cyrus became master of Babylon the Jews there showed and explained those prophecies relating to him; and we know, indeed, that there was one man in Babylon who had direct access to him and who stood high in his esteem. That man, of course, was Daniel. The effect was that Cyrus saw and acknowledged the Hand by which his path had been marked out and his steps guided, and he hastened to testify to these convictions by zealously executing the task to which he had been called--that of restoring the Jews to their own land.

These are the memorable words of that edict: *"All the kingdoms of the earth Yahweh God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah"* (Ezra 1:2). There is nothing indefinite or uncertain in this. If he had simply said "the God of heaven," we might have been doubtful as to his meaning. It might have been understood of the god he had been used to worshiping. But here he gives Him the name by which the Lord was peculiarly known among the Hebrews--the great name of Jehovah [Yahweh]. He declares unreservedly his conviction that Jehovah was "the God of heaven." Surely this is a great declaration. It shows not only that Cyrus recognized the truth and inspiration of these prophecies, but that they worked the conviction in his mind that Jehovah, in whose name they were uttered, was and could be no other than "the God of heaven."

Cyrus could only have known from Isaiah's prophecy that it was this "Jehovah, the God of heaven" (and not his own Ormuzd) who had given him all the kingdoms of the earth. Indeed, if he believed anything at all of the prophecy, it was that he owed all his glory and his greatness to his being the predestined and chosen agent of Jehovah, and that it was Jehovah and no other who had made nations *"as dust to his sword, as driven stubble to his bow"* (Isa. 41:2). It was only through Isaiah's prophecy (Isa. 44:28) that Cyrus could have told the exiles that it was Jehovah God of heaven who *"commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah"* (Ezra 1:2), for nowhere else is this command given. And the intensity of Cyrus' conviction is manifested by the speed and fullness with which he discharged the high duty

imposed upon him. Jehovah, he says, "charged *me*,"--me and no other. It was not a duty imperative on any king of Persia but on him personally and individually.

Cyrus goes further in recognizing who that God was who chose him: "*Who is among you of all His people? May his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of Yahweh God of Israel (He is God) which is in Jerusalem*" (Ezra 1:3). Here "Jehovah," to whom universal and supreme dominion had been ascribed by the title of "God of heaven," is more precisely defined as the One who was generally known as the "God of Israel," whose peculiar people were the Jews and whose "house" was at Jerusalem.

Among the ancient nations, every one of which had its peculiar god, many knew that Jehovah was the God of Israel and were disposed to regard him as such. They would admit that He was as much the God of the Hebrews as the gods which they each worshiped were their own. These heathen nations also knew and admitted that Jehovah had often done marvelous deeds of deliverance for his people. But what they resisted was the claim that Jehovah was more than just the God of the Hebrews. They rejected his claim to universal and supreme dominion, that He was the Creator of heaven and earth and not merely one among many gods. They disputed the claim that not only was Jehovah the chief and highest of the gods but that He was in fact the one and only true God. To them this was a most arrogant and unreasonable pretension made by the Jews; and this repudiation by the heathen nations must be distinctly borne in mind, for it gives its coloring to the whole history of the Jews and influenced all their relationships.

But that which the heathen in general so stoutly resisted, Cyrus frankly and fully admits. He multiplies phrases in order to express the intensity of his conviction. It might have been enough to distinctly announce that the God of Israel, known by the ineffable name of Jehovah, was the "God of heaven." There could be no misunderstanding this. But in the very next sentence he finds it necessary to describe him as "the God of Israel." And as if he would exclude the remotest chance of being misunderstood, he adds the emphatic clause, "*He is God.*" Cyrus would make absolutely sure that Jehovah's almighty power would not be limited. The words can have no other meaning than "He is the true and only God."

The comparative simplicity of Cyrus' faith and its entire freedom from gross idolatries were possibly, we may reverently venture to conjecture, among the causes why he was chosen to his high destiny and may account for his being signalized by epithets of honorable distinction never in Scripture given to any idolater. We may indeed find in the prophecies that refer to him a tender anxiety, a desire to correct the errors of his faith and advance his spiritual welfare. It is easy to suppose that his memorable declaration, "He is God," included an abandonment of the errors which the prophecy corrected and an acknowledgment of the truths which it contained.

I am Yahweh, and there is no other; there is no God besides Me.
I will gird you, though you have not known Me,
That they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting
That there is none besides Me.

I am Yahweh, and there is no other;
I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity;
I, Yahweh, do all these things.

Rain down, you heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness;
Let the earth open, let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together.
I, Yahweh, have created it.

Woe to him who strives with his Maker!
Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth!
Shall the clay say to him who forms it, "What are you making?"
Or shall your handiwork says, "He has no hands"?
Woe to him who says to his father, "What are you begetting?"
Or to the woman, "What have you brought forth?"

Thus says Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker:
"Ask Me of things to come concerning My sons;
And concerning the work of My hands, you command Me.
I have made the earth, and created man on it.
I--My hands--stretched out the heavens, and all their host I have commanded.
I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways;
He shall build My city and let My exiles go free, not for price nor reward,"
Says Yahweh of hosts.

Isaiah 45:5-13