

Chapter 2 Viewpoint Activity



In the sixth century B.C., Cyrus the Great, his son Cambyses, and their successor Darius conquered many peoples to build the vast Persian empire (textbook pages 40 and 44). What was life like under Persian rule? One point of view below, from the Persian provinces, was reported by the Greek historian Herodotus about 100 years later. The other, from the Bible, describes Cyrus' generosity to the Jews who had been held captive in Babylon, after he captured that city. ♦ *As you read, think about the kind of relationship that conquered people had with the king. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

People of the Persian Empire View Their Rulers

The Persian Provinces And Darius made his power felt everywhere. . . . These things he did in Persia: the rest of his dominions he divided in twenty provinces, called by the Persians satrapies, and in each of them he established a governor. Then he appointed the tribute which each nation should pay into his royal treasury. . . . There had been no fixed tribute in the time of Cyrus, nor even in the time of Cambyses after him, but the peoples made gifts. Because of this fixing of the tribute and other things of the kind, the Persians say that Darius was a shop-keeper, Cambyses a master, and Cyrus a father. By this they meant that the first tried to turn everything to gain, the second was cruel and overbearing, whilst the third was merciful and cared for them.

The Hebrews In the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying:

“Thus says Cyrus, king of Persia: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you

of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem . . . and rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel . . . ; and let each survivor . . . be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts, besides freewill offerings, for the house of God. . . .”

“ . . . he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.”

Cyrus the king also brought out the [ceremonial] vessels of the house of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar [king of Babylon] had carried away from Jerusalem, and placed in the house of his gods.

Cyrus, king of Persia brought these out . . . to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah. . . . All the vessels of gold and of silver were 5,469.

Source: (1) Book III of *The Histories of Herodotus* (The Heritage Press, 1958); (2) Book of Ezra (Oxford Annotated Bible, Oxford University Press, 1962).

CHAPTER 2

Questions to Discuss

1. Why did the people consider Darius a “shop-keeper”? How did he compare with earlier kings of Persia?
2. What did Cyrus do for the Jews who had been held captive in Babylon?
3. **Determining Relevance** Does the Hebrew account support the viewpoint that Cyrus was “a father” to the people of the Persian empire? What do his actions show about his style of rule?

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