

Kids' Chronicle

Cyrus frees the Israelites

BY JOE SARNICOLA

These are the words of God as given to his prophet, Isaiah:

"Jerusalem will again be a place in which my people live. Cities will be rebuilt out of the rubble and my temple will once again be a house of prayer. I have chosen Cyrus to rule in my place. He will give the commands that will make all of this come true."

Cyrus had led his armies against the Babylonians and had defeated them. The God of the Israelite people who had been held as captives in Babylon spoke to Cyrus through the prophets.

On a day of rejoicing over his victory, Cyrus stood in front of the Israelites and said, "Today is for celebrating more than a victory. Today will also be a day of freedom to many who have never known it."

The crowd became silent as they waited for Cyrus to explain what he was talking about.

"The prophet Jeremiah said that his people would be held captive in Babylon for seventy years," King Cyrus said. "That time has come to an end. The God of Israel has told me what to do. The first thing I will do is to release all of you from your bondage. You are now a free people, the people of Israel, the people of your God."

Men, women and children cried, hugged each other and shouted praises to God. They were free. They could return to the country of their parents and grandparents. They could start lives of their own in freedom. Cyrus and his soldiers could celebrate their victory over Babylon, but the people of Israel would celebrate their new freedom. Just as they had once been freed from Egypt, now

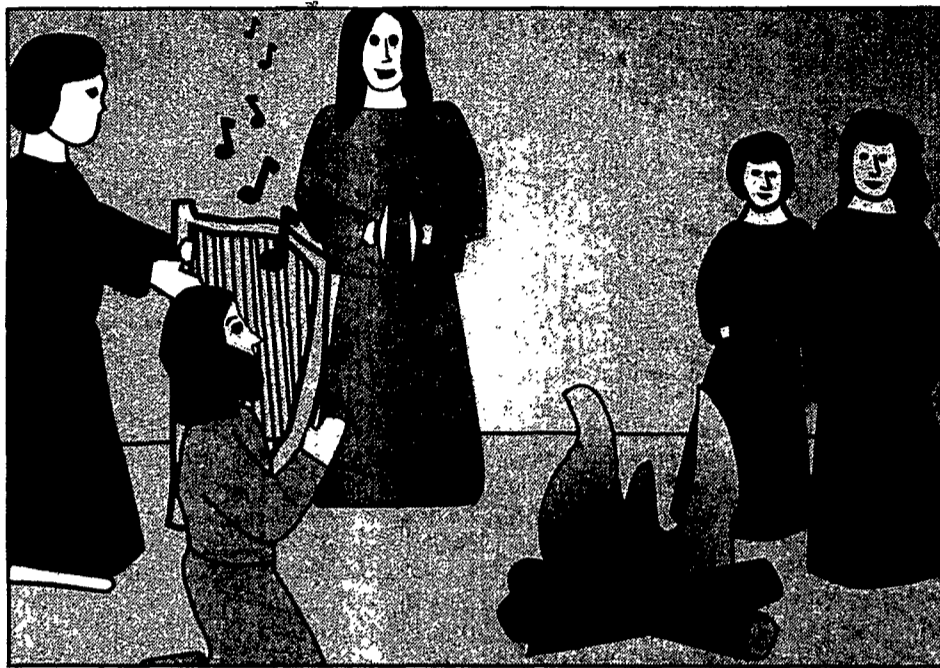


Illustration by Amy Sundstrom

they had been freed from Babylon.

One of the Israelite elders stood and motioned for silence. He opened an old scroll and read from it.

"The prophet Jeremiah said, 'When the 70 years of Babylon have come to an end, the Lord will bring his people back home.' That day is today. Let us rejoice and give thanks to him."

The people shouted praises again. Musicians played harps and cymbals. Children started singing and the adults joined in. Fires were started in preparation for a feast.

After celebrating, everyone gathered their families and their possessions together, and began the march to

Jerusalem the next morning. Cyrus gave them money and building materials so that they could rebuild their homes.

Four months later the Israelites reached their destination, the site of the city of Jerusalem. Rebuilding began immediately and the Israelites were a free people with a home once more.

Q&A

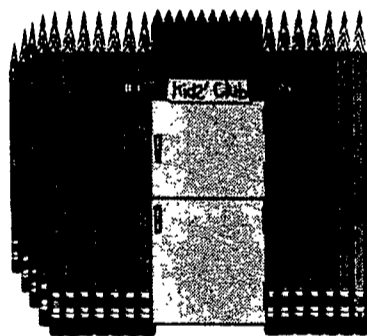
READ MORE ABOUT IT: Isaiah 45; (additional reading: Ezra 1.)

1. What city did Cyrus conquer?
2. What did Cyrus do to help the Israelites?

Trivia

King Size Trivia (taken from the First Book of Kings). Chapter numbers are given as hints. Answers can be found on page 5.

1. Which king could not keep warm? (1) David
2. He was Bathsheba's son. (1) _____
3. Whose arm became paralyzed? (13) _____
4. Which king challenged Elijah's God? (18) _____
5. Whose ships never sailed? (22) _____



You can win a \$50 savings bond by writing an essay (100 or fewer words) answering this question: Why do you think the story of Cyrus is recorded in the Bible?

Send your essay — including name, home address, telephone number, school and grade — to Catholic Courier, P.O. Box 24379, Rochester, N.Y. 14624. Deadline for entries is Oct. 24, 1996. The winner will be notified by phone and receive the savings bond by mail. In addition, the winner's essay will be published in an upcoming issue of Kids' Chronicle.

Last month's winner was Brittany Marie Devlin, a fifth-grade student at St. Joseph's School, Rochester. In response to the question Why do you think crowds of people often surrounded Jesus when he traveled? she wrote:

People often surrounded Jesus when he traveled throughout the Holy Land. People who believed in God knew he was the Son of God. They crowded around him because they thought that if they got closer to him they were becoming closer to God. They also wanted miracles.

Jesus was very kind. He helped and healed the people. He forgave those who were unkind to him. He preached and brought God into the world. He loved everybody and people loved him back.

Because of those things and others people followed him.

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Cyrus was the king of the Persians from 559 to 529 B.C. He conquered Babylon around the year 538 B.C. and he made Persia a great empire.

Cyrus' name in Persian means "shepherd." Isaiah called him God's shepherd because he was doing God's will when he freed the Israelites from the Babylonians.

Cyrus allowed the Israelites to go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the city and the temple. He gave them money and materials to help them. He also gave them back the religious items that had been taken by the Babylonians.

St. Leonardi

John Leonardi was concerned about sick people and prisoners, so he became a pharmacist and took care of them. John wanted to be able to continue to work with unfortunate people, so he studied and became an ordained priest.

He was assigned to the Church of Santa Maria Cortelandi in 1580. Three years later, he was permitted by the pope to form an order of priests. The pope was so impressed with John's work, that he gave him the charge of training other priests and monks.

John cared for many influenza victims and eventually contracted the illness himself and died in 1609. We honor him on Oct. 9.



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