

CONCERNING THE WAY

January 13, 2009

LESSON 43: PROPHECY SERIES — THE BOOK OF DANIEL



Daniel 5 - 539 BC

Chapter 5 takes place 25 years after the events of chapter 4. By this time, Nebuchadnezzar is dead, and his grandson Belshazzar is king. These are the last days of the Babylonian empire. What happened in those 25 years?

Nebuchadnezzar died in the year 562 BC. He was succeeded by his son Amel-Marduk (or Evil-Merodach, as 2 Kings 25:27 and Jeremiah 52:31-34 calls him). Apparently he wasn't much like his father, as he was a weak king, and only reigned 2 years before he was assassinated by his brother-in-law Neriglissar. Neriglissar reigned four years and apparently died of natural causes. His son Labashi-Marduk took over, but only lasted for a few months before he was executed by a rival faction led by a Babylonian noble named Nabonidus. Nabonidus reigned from 556 BC until the end of the empire in 539 BC. For various reasons he normally made his residence in other parts of the empire. Since Nabonidus was away from Babylon for much of the time he appointed his son Belshazzar as his co-regent. He eventually moved back to Babylon to try to restore the crumbling empire, but it was too late. Nabonidus faced Cyrus and the Persian army and lost. He escaped, but was eventually captured and exiled by Cyrus.

Cyrus, the king of the Persians, had defeated the king of the Medes in 558 BC and incorporated the Median kingdom into Persia. Then, in the next decade, the Medo-Persian empire chipped away at the Babylonian empire. Persian under Cyrus added more and more land and more and more warriors until he was ready to attack Babylon itself.

Daniel 5:1 Belshazzar the king held a great feast for a thousand of his nobles, and he was drinking wine in the presence of the thousand.

For years critics thought Belshazzar was a mythical character. They would point out that Nabonidus was the last king of Babylon, not Belshazzar. But over the years more and more historical texts have been found that tell us that Belshazzar was a real person, and he was co-regent with Nabonidus. This Biblical account of King Belshazzar now has much historical evidence.

As we have seen over and over in the Bible, as time goes by, archeological discoveries continue to prove over and over that these Bible stories are not just figments of someone's imagination, but real history.

So this is one big blast that Belshazzar is having in his palace. The day is October 12 and the year is 539 BC. We know exactly the day, we know exactly the month, and we know exactly the year because there were other people watching what happened on this fateful day. Fortunately it is a well attested historic fact that was observed by people outside of the Bible as well as by the writers of Scripture. And putting it all together we can gain a lot of background as to what happened and why Daniel says certain things, why the Queen, for example, in Daniel 5:10 comes in and says certain things. All this make sense once we know the historic background.

Now I point this out because I want you to see the fallacy of reasoning involved among critics of Scripture. Eventually, after many years of lecturing and book writing and all these claims that Belshazzar was a fiction, archeologists discovered a thing called the Nabonidus cylinder, plus some other encryptions, so we found some inscriptions that are not only inscriptions mentioning Belshazzar as Nabonidus' son, but explaining

why in Daniel 5 Nabonidus is not there and Belshazzar was sitting on the throne on that fateful night when the city fell. There's a whole story behind why and it was all brought out on these inscriptions.

So once again we see the critics of Scripture having problems shooting off their mouth when it comes to the accuracy of the Bible. And when the data is all in and when the archeology has discovered more data we discover, of course, **the Holy Spirit did know in fact what He was writing about, and this accuracy of chapter 5 has gone down as one of the all-time goofs of modern liberalism.** Belshazzar was a historic figure. So we now know that what we read in Daniel 5 is one of the most intimate and most divine viewpoint accounts we have of what happened on that fateful night.

Now to get some background we have to understand that there were two kingdoms involved. There was the kingdom of Babylon, or Babylonia and this is the kingdom that was the one dreamed of first in Daniel 2. Then there was another kingdom, Medo-Persia. The Medo-Persian kingdom would be the second kingdom that finally took over. Now we know from Daniel 2 that certain things that Daniel pointed out in that chapter would be true of these kingdoms. So we don't even have to read secular history to understand certain characteristics that we ought to find in these kingdoms. The first thing we know from Daniel's vision is that gold represents Babylon and silver represents Medo-Persia. We also know that these metals, besides deteriorating in monetary value also show increasing strength as you go down from that statue that was dreamed of, you go from the head to the chest to the thighs down to the toes, there is increasing strength in the metal in the statue.

By the time Cyrus finished his conquest and the Medo-Persian Empire had attained its maximum, you can see that the boundary of the east side of this empire went all the way over into what is now India. This becomes important because it becomes important for the study of the Hindu religion and Buddhism. There is a historical phenomenon that beginning in 586 BC with the collapse of Israel six world religions began within 100 years. We have a man by the name of Zoroaster begin his religion in Persia. We have the Buddhist reforms over in India and China. We have certain reforms in India, and the other was Confucius in China. Cyrus' Empire, moving as far East as it did into India apparently was a vehicle for taking some of the teachings of the Jewish prophets over into this area. And this explains why **Confucianism, Buddhism, and Zoroasterism to some degree is influenced by monotheism.** It's always been a mystery as to why these religions started very quickly, started within 50 to 75 years of each other, and why they all had similar characteristics.

Apparently then, **the Medo-Persian Empire was the means of spreading much Jewish teaching and Jewish influence.** The book of Esther is a story of some of the Jewish influence and the high court of Xerxes, and so therefore with all of this influence that's going on it shouldn't be surprising to say that this had an effect permanently on the religious history of all mankind. We're dealing with a very, very critical point of history and so we want to go back and look at how it all got started and what was going on.

The decline of the Babylonian Empire is a sad tale, that is repeated all too often in the western nations. The causes are usually the same and by studying what happened in the past we can see why God acts as He does. Babylon had two major problems. Nabonidus, the man who was Belshazzar's father, was trying to solve both of those problems when Daniel 5 erupted. One of those problems was an economic problem; the other problem was what we will call a religio-culture problem. Briefly stated its economic problem was inflation. He could not control the decline of currency. And the religious problem was a problem of unity; they had increasingly become pluralistic, you had Jews that refused to worship Marduk, you had Arabs that refused to worship Marduk. The Jews worshiped Jehovah, the Arabs worshiped Suen who was the moon god, and then you had some of the Babylonians, some did not like Marduk, others did like Marduk, and you had a lot of lesser deities. So the problem was right from the beginning with the kingdom of man, that as you conquer various and diverse peoples you have this diversity problem that crops up. Now we still have the diversity problem; the diversity problem will always be with the Gentiles; we have different races that

come from different backgrounds, we have different religious beliefs that come from different religious backgrounds, and so we have a melting pot and it's hard, sometimes, to maintain a unity in that melting pot. So this problem of religio-cultural difficulties is not a new one, it's not one that we don't know about.

Nebuchadnezzar was the one who actually set up some of these problems, by his conquests, by including so many people inside the kingdom. He also brought on the economic problem by having a fantastic building program. Nebuchadnezzar built one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the famous Hanging Gardens of Babylon. The Babylonians were able to discover such things as the Pythagorean Theorem which the Pythagoras then stole and called it his own. The Babylonians were responsible for our 360 degrees in a circle; that is not something that came out of the Arabs; it's something that came from Babylon. So even today Babylon has its influence.

Nebuchadnezzar, whether you think he became a believer in Daniel 4 or not, apparently was unable to influence the direction of his culture; he was unable to transform the kingdom of man into the kingdom of God.

Belshazzar's mother is the woman who shows up as the queen later on in Daniel 5 and she is going to say certain things that lets us know about the family life of Nebuchadnezzar. She's the queen for whom Nebuchadnezzar built the Hanging Gardens. And later on she was straightened out by Daniel and learned a lot of Bible doctrine, and she is going to be there on that fateful night when her son gets into this drinking orgy and goes down with the city. And as he goes down with the city his mother is going to stand there and give him certain instructions which she had received as a young woman in the court of Nebuchadnezzar from the prophet Daniel. So it's a very, very interesting thing, and to understand all the things that happen at the party in Daniel 5 we do have to know history.

King Nabonidus had a very strange hobby; his hobby was archeology, and he used to go all around the Babylonian Empire digging things up and he wasn't very much interested in running the show, he was actually a weak administrator. He did make some key archeological discoveries but he conducted excavations, he restored ancient temples, and all of this cost money, which of course added further to his economic problem.

Nabonidus had a summer home down where he liked to dig, in a place called Tema. So while he was down in Tema, he decided he liked it down there better than the city of Babylon and he stayed down there and put his son, Belshazzar in charge up in Babylon. So although Nabonidus is technically the king of the Babylonian Empire, geographically he's not there. And he is not there the night that it falls. We know where he was because he gave us a report, written 24 hours after the fall of Babylon.

While he was at Tema he had an idea. He noticed that there were a lot of Jews in the administration; a lot of Jews that Nebuchadnezzar had brought in, namely Daniel and his friends, plus a lot of the Hebrew royalty, and he decided that these Jews make such good administrators that he would begin to build a series of fortresses. So he had a whole string of fortresses and each one of these was managed by Jews. So he exported Jews to the south part of his empire to make it run right. And these Jews have stayed there for centuries.

During that time he came in contact with the Arabians and he noticed that the Arabs liked a goddess called Sin, that's not "sin" as we think of it; it's "tzin". And this is a goddess of the moon. So he decided that what the empire needed to help solve the religious problem was some sort of a unity. Remember that there's nothing new that's going to happen in history that hasn't happened before in history. As the antichrist rises to power he's simply going to extend further movements that have already been started in history.

Men have always dreamed of that, to create a unity on the basis of religion. So he decided to make the plunge and put the goddess Sin in charge, and he began to push this and began to dictate to the priesthood. And of course this offended the priests that worshiped Marduk, and while he was at Tema for ten years, he never went to the new year festival; there was a new year festival held each year in Babylon, and this was a very, very important festival. The king would come in, he would sit down on the throne and he would actually act out Marduk as god; he would become deity at that point and that would be when the king would integrate with nature and he would be the source of prosperity.

So now you can begin to see what happened; there became a popular movement in Babylon against Nabonidus and his son Belshazzar because they said that the reason the Medes are increasing in strength is discipline upon us because we have shelved the worship of Marduk in favor of this new god.

By the spring of that year of Daniel 5, Cyrus' army advances and as Cyrus pushes down he envelops one town after another on the road to Babylon. And as he does so Nabonidus instructs the retreating soldiers to go in and raid every single temple that you can, carry away every idol, carry away every god. So he packs all these gods into the city of Babylon; so while this drunken feast is going on the city has just been packed and crammed with gods and goddesses. There's one on every street; you could have your choice; it was the most fantastic collection of idols the ancient world has ever seen.

The final blow to Nabonidus was he thought he had many years supply of food in the city of Babylon, he had double walls around the city, he had a special set of drawbridges so that the city, from the human point of view, was impenetrable. They had water to last two years; they had food to last at least two years. So they had no worry that anybody was going to take Babylon. This is why there's the relaxed attitude in the middle of this feast in Daniel 5; even though that very night that they're drinking and having their orgy, Cyrus' armies had surrounded the city completely, the guards on the walls know it, in spite of all that they're very, very relaxed because they know Cyrus simply cannot breach the walls to Babylon.

So much for the decline and fall of Babylon; now the rise of Medo-Persia. All the while this was going on there is a fantastic story of the rise of Medo-Persia. You'll never learn these things in public school, which is a shame. The majority of people think that history is unimportant, but nothing could be further from the truth. History is the place where God acts. History is the place where you can see God at work.

The rise of the Medo-Persian Empire is a testimony to the sovereignty of God and it is a very fascinating story; this is predicted in Isaiah and Jeremiah. It goes back many, many years, back up in the northern areas; in the area of the Caspian Sea, the Black Sea, Asia Minor and eastern Mediterranean. Up in this area there are a group of tribes, they are banded together and they are called the Medes, not the Persians, the Medes. The Medes are important because they're descendants of a man by the name of Japheth; they are not Semitic peoples. They are Japhetic people; very important because the times of the Gentiles will be largely Japhetic; we are Japhetic, our civilization is largely Japhetic.

In the year 625 BC they have their first great ruler. Cyaxares I, just notice the dates so you can link it up. This is during Nebuchadnezzar's reign to the south. Cyaxares reigns from until 585 BC. Cyaxares was the man who got the Median army started. When they started to move, the Medes swept everything before them. They moved to the west and they drove over into Asia Minor and stopped at the Halys River. Cyaxares was a great soldier and finally in the year 585 BC, we don't know whether he had a heart attack when he saw the solar eclipse or what happened, but he died that year just shortly after he negotiated a treaty with Nabonidus. He was succeeded by his son; Astyages. Astyages had a daughter, who was one of the most beautiful girls in the ancient world, there were a lot of songs written about her, Mandane. What he couldn't get politically, religiously and military he was going to get through his daughter. So he noticed, as he began to take inventory of his kingdom that he couldn't keep control over, that there were a dangerous

group of people he noticed just to the east. These people were called Persians, actually the forerunners of the Persians. He got a little nervous because he saw these Persians were pretty tough people too. In fact, they were just as tough as the Medes were. And not only that but he saw a man who was called Cambyses I, who looked like he might just possibly be a better soldier than he was. So he made a deal, and Astyages married his daughter off to Cambyses.

So now watch, we have a female Mede married to this male Persian. Their son is Cyrus, Cyrus the Great. And Cyrus is going to be known in history as “the mule,” and it’s not a sign that he is stubborn, the mule is just a hybrid and he is called that because his mother was a Mede and his father was a Persian. Well, no sooner had Mandane married Cambyses and become pregnant than Astyages had a dream about her, and he dreamed that out from her womb came this vast vine, and the vine entangled all of the civilizations and crushed him who crushed others. And so he interpreted the dream of his daughter that his daughter would give birth to a world conqueror. Isaiah and Jeremiah apparently were two men who furthered this concept of news about Cyrus.

Astyages decided to bring his daughter, still pregnant, back to his capital city, Ecbatana. When he brought her back he made plans to slaughter the baby as soon as it was born, so he told one of his trusted agents to go in with the midwife and the moment that baby is born I want it killed, male or female. And so the man who was given the order to destroy it walked in and he just couldn’t bring himself to kill this baby. So he pawned the job off on one of the custodians. And this man just happened to have a wife who at that time was giving birth to another baby, and this woman, when she gave birth to her baby the baby was stillborn. And he told his wife that he had been given permission by this administrator to destroy the baby and the way to destroy the baby was to leave it exposed and let it starve to death out in the field, it would be publicly exposed. This is the way the Medes kill their people; anybody 70 years or older they just staked them out on the ground and let the dogs and the vultures eat them and this way they got rid of the aged peoples; this is how the Medes handled the old age problem.

Well, the wife couldn’t bring herself to do it, she says hey, I’ve got an idea, my baby is stillborn, how about taking the stillborn baby, we’ll put him in the field and I’ll keep his baby. So that’s what they did, and she raised this baby as her own child. And it was unknown to Astyages that this baby that was growing up right under him, the custodian’s boy, was not the custodian’s boy but he was a child of royalty. And one day when the boy was about eleven years old they had a little incident that happened when he was playing with some of the boys in the court. All the little kids got together and they were going to play king that day. And they said, Cyrus, you be king and we’ll be your servants. So this boy, in the play he was acting out the role of the king and some of the little kids that were playing his servants didn’t obey him. So Cyrus became very indignant and he said I am king, I demand that he be whipped. And so they took sticks and beat the kids that wouldn’t obey Cyrus. Well obviously the parents got hold of this little incident, and they brought it all to the attention of Astyages, and the more Astyages, when he interviewed these kids and he saw what had happened, that boy Cyrus just didn’t look right. Astyages said he didn’t look quite like the custodian’s son ought to look. And he finally tortured out of the custodian what had happened.

So then he did a very dumb thing and it shows you how the Lord worked. Cyrus is God’s man and I’ll prove it to you from Isaiah and Jeremiah in a moment. Cyrus must get to where he’s going to get, and all this is God working totally outside of Israel; totally on Gentile ground to show you His sovereign working. He shipped Cyrus back to his parents, Cambyses, and that was the worst mistake he ever did, because in 550 BC Cyrus would be back again, this time leading an army and he destroyed the capital of the Medes, Ecbatana, and that’s how the Persians finally took over the Empire.

But Cyrus was a born diplomat. When he took over the empire he had a problem, he had Medes on one side, and Persians on the other. So he came up with a most ingenious solution, one that characterized his

empire. What he decided to do was to have two crowns. He said I don't want to offend the Medes, these people are strong people, and I can't sit here and waste all my energy ruling people that don't want to be ruled, so I'll make friends with them. And so he had a dual crown; he wore one crown for the Medes and one crown for the Persians and he became the ruler of the Medo-Persian Empire. And from this point forward Cyrus had a policy of reconciliation, a reconciliation toward all peoples and all religion. And this is going to again be a fulfillment of a prophecy in Isaiah and Jeremiah.

Well all is not up yet, we're still in 550 BC and we've got to span the time from 550 BC to 539 BC, we've still got about ten years left, and those ten years become very interesting. Cyrus gets his kingdom started and he has a little problem in the west at the river Halys. To the west was the kingdom of Lydia; Lydia, capital of Sardis, had a king by the name of Croesus; Croesus was a very superstitious person. He got to thinking, Cyrus is taking over, the Medes that I made the treaty with are no longer in control of the situation. He says I don't exactly know how these Persians are going to handle the show so I'll go down to the Oracle of Delphi and consult my oracle. Now the oracle had earlier warned Croesus, saying beware when a mule rules the Medes. And he couldn't figure out the mule until Cyrus got the throne, and immediately when Cyrus got the throne he said, ah, there it is, Cyrus is the mule. So he immediately recognized a fulfillment of the Oracle of Delphi, he thought. So he went to the Oracle of Delphi the second time and he said should I cross the Halys and defeat Cyrus? And the Oracle replied in a very enigmatic way, as all non-biblical prophecy is; the prophecy reads: "Croesus, when you cross the Halys you will destroy a great empire."

Croesus immediately decides that's my green light, I'll now cross the Halys and attack Cyrus. So he crossed the Halys and he did destroy an empire, his own. He met Cyrus, and one of the most interesting techniques that was used in the ancient world in the military is recorded for us in Herodotus. Cyrus brought his army up and he had a problem. When Croesus crossed he had a tremendous group of horsemen, one of the most skilled groups of horsemen in the ancient world. Cyrus' troops were tired, they had marched thousands of miles, and when they got to the Halys River and they saw these horses, they figured how can we ever deal with this kind of a problem, we just don't simply have the force to deal with this. So Cyrus got to talking with some of his men and he came up with what must be one of the most unique ways of dealing with a cavalry situation. He commanded the camels to advance in front of his other troops against the Lydian horsemen. Behind them was to follow the foot soldiers, and last of all the Persian cavalry. When his arrangements were complete he gave his troops orders to slay all the other Lydians who came in their way without mercy but to spare Croesus and not kill him.

Well, the reason this was brilliant is because the horse has a natural dread of a camel and he cannot stand either the sight or the smell. And so Cyrus simply flipped his little whips at the camels, the camels moved up, and these horsemen just balked and panicked, some of the men were thrown off the horses, and that was the victory at the River Halys, and it was one of the famous ingenious things that Cyrus did.

All right, Cyrus had now come across all the way to the Aegean. Now you see why this is an important empire; do you see now why the Word of God will be used in the Persian Empire through Daniel? Do you see now why the book of Esther is so important that there is a Jewish girl who is going to be the queen of Xerxes? Why is that so important? Because the Word of God will be taken to India; the Word of God will be taken west to Greece; the Word of God will be tremendous in its expansion during this time, all due to the working of God through the Persian Empire.

Now turn to Isaiah 45 and you'll see why the Jews championed Cyrus as the year 539 slowly approached the armies of Cyrus began to pinch off Babylonian city after Babylonian city. The suspense heightened in the cities; the Jews consulted their books and they realized that Cyrus was the long hoped for man who would give them freedom. In Isaiah 44:28 is one of the most rare prophecies in God's Word. Why is it rare? Because it mentioned a man's name 150 years ahead of time.

Isaiah 44:28 "It is I who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd! And he will perform all My desire.' And he declares of Jerusalem, 'She will be built,' And of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid.'"

Cyrus, the man who was that baby who almost died, is going to be the Gentile means of ending the captivity. Cyrus is the man who ends the Jewish captivity.

Isaiah 45:1-4 Thus says the LORD to Cyrus His anointed, Whom I have taken by the right hand, To subdue nations before him And to loose the loins of kings; To open doors before him so that gates will not be shut: (2) "I will go before you and make the rough places smooth; I will shatter the doors of bronze and cut through their iron bars. (3) "I will give you the treasures of darkness And hidden wealth of secret places, So that you may know that it is I, The LORD, the God of Israel, who calls you by your name. (4) "For the sake of Jacob My servant, And Israel My chosen one, I have also called you by your name; I have given you a title of honor Though you have not known Me.

Verse 1-2 is a prophecy of the capture of the city of Babylon. What's the point? The God of Israel doesn't have to operate through Israel on the world, the God of Israel is so big He can operate on the world directly, a tremendous lesson for the Jews.

Now turn to Daniel 5, that feast; again the date, October 12, 593 BC. Cyrus has destroyed Lydia; Cyrus is the king; Cyrus has already got a Babylonian general, Gobyras and his army; Gobyras has defected. The Babylonian military is left leaderless. Nabonidus is frantically outside the city, he's up in a place called Uruk this night, upstream, up the river. And alone and left in total command of the city is Belshazzar, and Belshazzar throws a party. Brilliant!

Babylon is surrounded by the Persian army, but for some reason Belshazzar thinks it's a good time to have a feast. They had to know the danger, but they chose to ignore it and throw a huge party. They probably were trusting in the impregnability of Babylon's walls, and so had a false sense of security.

Daniel 5:2-4 When Belshazzar tasted the wine, he gave orders to bring the gold and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. (3) Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God which was in Jerusalem; and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. (4) They drank the wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.

Now the translation is very nice. The word "wives" means his harem women. And the word "concubines" are his prostitutes. So the wine and the women were in abundance that night.

He decides to pull out the holy vessels, cups that his grandfather took from the temple in Jerusalem and drink a toast to their false gods. Apparently they had been kept in storage all this time and now Belshazzar, in an act of defiance and willfulness. This wasn't an innocent mistake, as we'll see God's judgment for this act come immediately. This act seals the fate of Babylon.

Why were they praising the gods of gold, silver, brass and iron? Remember the city had been filled with idols. Remember what Nabonidus' tactic was on the eve of October 12? Strip all the temples, bring the idols into the city, hoping that he could get enough idols in the city, there'd be enough gods for Babylon that he could fend off the enemy. So on that last night as Belshazzar gets drunk he loses his ability to reason

and he thinks; I know what we'll do, we'll go and we'll get those sacred vessels out; the Jews don't have any idols, so we'll get all the vessels from the temple, that's the only material thing that you have. And so he brings them out and he drinks out of them.

And they start to praise the gods, this is when doom falls upon the nation. Now to see a principle of what's going on here, turn to Jeremiah 17:5, this is Belshazzar's mistake and this is a mistake of all unbelievers and some believers.

Jeremiah 17:5 Thus says the LORD, "Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind And makes flesh his strength, And whose heart turns away from the LORD.

In other words, the word curse means bring judgment down upon the man who would trust in man. The Babylonians represent Jeremiah 17:5 to the nth degree, trusting in the manmade double walls of Babylon, trusting in the manmade draw bridges, trusting in the works of man.

We can learn many things from this history; we can learn for one thing how great our God is. Think of the helpless Jews, there were Jews trapped in that city of Babylon that night; they could have been massacred, but they weren't. There were Jews who were victims to the external circumstances, and as the Jews sat and as they loyally studied the Word of God, as they trusted the Word that they had taken in, outside God was working their salvation, not through a Jewish general but through a Gentile general.

Now if God could work to bring about the Medo-Persian Empire to save the Jews of Babylon, if He could so work through this birth, as I've shown you, then our God can circumvent any external circumstance, any disaster that may befall you. As a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ you understand from history that God is sovereign and He doesn't need to work directly through just believers, He can also work directly through unbelievers; He can work through situations, He can work through adversity, through catastrophe. That is how big the God of Israel is.

And then this last lesson we learn from Jeremiah 17:5 and that is that the God of Israel also patiently waits, 2 Peter 3:9 says He is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." God waits and He postpones His judgment; He waited on the city of Babylon to see, is there positive volition there, is there any response to the teaching of Daniel, are these people listening to My Word? No. And so October 12 was the day that grace came to an end for that city.

Daniel 5:5 Suddenly the fingers of a man's hand emerged and began writing opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, and the king saw the back of the hand that did the writing.

The palace covered six square miles. The throne room was a huge room, we've discovered the room, archeologists now can give you the measurements of it, it's 173 feet long and 56 feet wide, it's part of the Hanging Gardens. This room has been found and the entrance way has been found and opposite that entrance the wall is offset into a niche, and in front of this niche is an elevated platform that was apparently being used on October 12 by King Belshazzar. Then back of the niche there is a plaster wall and the neat thing about it is there were pieces of plaster still there when the excavators discovered it. So the Bible is very, very accurate here when it talks about this plaster wall, and apparently on this table was a gigantic candelabra, so the light is shining back reflecting off this plaster wall.

And then... Belshazzar probably doesn't see the hand, he's looking out at his party, this is going on in back of him. And all of a sudden this hand comes down and starts to write. You can imagine these people, half drunk, what's this going on, thinking it's a trick, until all of a sudden Belshazzar turns around and sees it,

and then you have his reaction in verse 5. So all Belshazzar observed when he turned around was just the palm of this hand; apparently it wasn't a large hand, it was just a normal sized hand, but there was no body on it; that was the weird thing, and this hand just kept on writing, apparently in Aramaic.

Daniel 5:6-7 Then the king's face grew pale and his thoughts alarmed him, and his hip joints went slack and his knees began knocking together. (7) The king called aloud to bring in the conjurers, the Chaldeans and the diviners. The king spoke and said to the wise men of Babylon, "Any man who can read this inscription and explain its interpretation to me shall be clothed with purple and have a necklace of gold around his neck, and have authority as third ruler in the kingdom."

This sobered them up quick! Belshazzar is terrified by the hand writing on the wall, and no one can read it, so he calls the wise men to interpret this. He offers the reward of the 3rd highest ruler in the kingdom. This makes sense, as his father Nebonidus was first, he was 2nd. It was the highest position Belshazzar could offer. Daniel was not called first, but it's possible that the king didn't even know him very well. Daniel was about 80 years old at this time; he may not have been as prominent at this point.

Daniel 5:8-9 Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the inscription or make known its interpretation to the king. (9) Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, his face grew even paler, and his nobles were perplexed.

For the 3rd time in the book of Daniel, the so-called "wise men" were stumped by a message from the one true God. When Belshazzar saw this he was even more frightened.

Daniel 5:10-12 The queen entered the banquet hall because of the words of the king and his nobles; the queen spoke and said, "O king, live forever! Do not let your thoughts alarm you or your face be pale. (11) "There is a man in your kingdom in whom is a spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of your father, illumination, insight and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods were found in him. And King Nebuchadnezzar, your father, your father the king, appointed him chief of the magicians, conjurers, Chaldeans and diviners. (12) This was because an extraordinary spirit, knowledge and insight, interpretation of dreams, explanation of enigmas and solving of difficult problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar. Let Daniel now be summoned and he will declare the interpretation."

The queen was Nitocris, Nebonidus's wife and Belshazzar's mother, and she knew about Daniel. It is speculated that Nebonidus must have married a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar, making Belshazzar Nebuchadnezzar's grandson. And since there is no word for "grandfather" in Hebrew or Aramaic, "father" can also mean "grandfather".

As we mentioned before, it seems that Daniel may have lost his previous position of authority in the kingdom, probably under one of the kings after Nebuchadnezzar, and was a forgotten man. The queen knew him well, though, and suggested that her son call for him.

Nitocris was a great woman. Herodotus describes the fantastic things that she did, and she even had a sense of humor, that shows her stability too because basically humorous people are stable people. When she died she decided to play a joke on the men; she realized during her lifetime that all these men that would rule the throne were very materialistic. So, "it was the same princess," Nitocris, Herodotus says, "by whom a remarkable deception was planned. She had her tomb constructed in the upper part of one of the principle gateways of the city, high above the heads of the passers by.... So she had her tomb up where

everybody had to see it; you went down the street and there's Nitocris' tomb, "with this inscription cut upon it," and here's the sign she had placed where she had a tomb: "If there be one among the successors on the throne of Babylon who is in want of treasure, let him open my tomb, and take as much as he chooses—not however, unless he be truly in want, for it will not be for his good."

Herodotus says: "This tomb continued untouched until King Darius came to the kingdom. To him it seemed a monstrous thing that he should be unable to use one of the gates of the town and that a sum of money should be lying around idle, and moreover inviting his grasp, and he did not seize upon it? Now he could not use the gate because as he drove through the dead body would have been over his head." See, he didn't like that idea of driving under this dead woman, so he decided to do something about it. So "he opened the tomb, but instead of money he found only the dead body and a note, and a writing which said: "Had thou not been insatiate of treasure, and careless how you got it, you would not have broken open the tomb of the dead."

So she was a very humorous woman and she apparently had skill working with men and they kind of enjoyed her because she walked in without invitation, and this shows her authority.

Daniel 5:13-16 Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king spoke and said to Daniel, "Are you that Daniel who is one of the exiles from Judah, whom my father the king brought from Judah? (14) "Now I have heard about you that a spirit of the gods is in you, and that illumination, insight and extraordinary wisdom have been found in you. (15) "Just now the wise men and the conjurers were brought in before me that they might read this inscription and make its interpretation known to me, but they could not declare the interpretation of the message. (16) "But I personally have heard about you, that you are able to give interpretations and solve difficult problems. Now if you are able to read the inscription and make its interpretation known to me, you will be clothed with purple and wear a necklace of gold around your neck, and you will have authority as the third ruler in the kingdom."

Belshazzar isn't showing Daniel much respect here, stressing that he was a Jewish exile, not a former important man in Babylon. The king is asking Daniel, "are you who you say you are?"

Daniel 5:17 Then Daniel answered and said before the king, "Keep your gifts for yourself or give your rewards to someone else; however, I will read the inscription to the king and make the interpretation known to him."

Daniel made it clear that he would give an honest interpretation, but he wasn't doing it for any rewards the king could give. This shows us again what a great believer Daniel was. He was heavenly minded, not earthly minded.

Daniel 5:18-23 "O king, the Most High God granted sovereignty, grandeur, glory and majesty to Nebuchadnezzar your father. (19) "Because of the grandeur which He bestowed on him, all the peoples, nations and men of every language feared and trembled before him; whomever he wished he killed and whomever he wished he spared alive; and whomever he wished he elevated and whomever he wished he humbled. (20) "But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit became so proud that he behaved arrogantly, he was deposed from his royal throne and his glory was taken away from him. (21) "He was also driven away from mankind, and his heart was made like that of beasts, and his dwelling place was with the wild donkeys. He was given grass to eat like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until he recognized that the

Most High God is ruler over the realm of mankind and that He sets over it whomever He wishes. (22) "Yet you, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this, (23) but you have exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines have been drinking wine from them; and you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which do not see, hear or understand. But the God in whose hand are your life-breath and all your ways, you have not glorified.

Unlike how he spoke to Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel shows little respect for Belshazzar, and he really lets him have it. He rebukes him for his arrogance, and insults his worship of false gods. Daniel was politely calling Belshazzar a fool, an idiot. This was a pretty courageous thing to do, as he was speaking not only to the king, but in front of 1,000 other officials and nobles of the empire. But this 80 year old man was long past any concern he had for what men could do to him.

Daniel 5:24-28 "Then the hand was sent from Him and this inscription was written out. (25) "Now this is the inscription that was written out: 'MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.' (26) "This is the interpretation of the message: 'MENE'--God has numbered your kingdom and put an end to it. (27) " 'TEKEL'--you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient. (28) " 'PERES'--your kingdom has been divided and given over to the Medes and Persians."

So why couldn't the people and the "wise men" read it? We don't know for sure what language it was written in, for one thing. It could have been a language unknown to the wise men. In any case, the message was written in such a way on the wall that it would be difficult to decipher. Maybe it was written as a kind of puzzle, like an acrostic.

So no one could interpret it until Daniel revealed it. Upharsin is the plural of Peres in Aramaic, in case you wondered. The message was very direct - the Babylonian kingdom would be divided and given to the Persians. Daniel told him that the hand was sent by the one true God that he had been mocking publicly. Daniel clearly says that the kingdom that God would use to destroy Babylon was the dual kingdom of Medo-Persia. This confirms that the Medo-Persian empire was the 2nd empire of the dream statue.

We should never forget that God "weighs" all nations and men and all are found deficient. We who have trusted Christ have His righteousness placed on the scale so that we are now acceptable in His sight.

That's the sad destiny of every unbeliever. At the Great White Throne judgment a person who has not trusted in Jesus Christ must stand before Jesus. We have this picture of Jesus holding a sheep, sweet Jesus with a sweet little lamb; that's only half of Jesus' character, the other half is that Jesus is also the judge, and at the Great White Throne judgment those without Christ must stand before Him and they are going to be questioned on the basis of the creation ordinance of Genesis 1:28. Jesus is going to stand as the judge of the universe and He's going to say to them "what have you produced?" He probably won't even ask about the sin because Jesus has taken care of the sins on the cross, but He is going to address the creature and say what has been your production? We told you at creation that you were created for a purpose and a destiny in history which was to subdue the earth and produce. What has been your production?

The answer for every unbeliever will ultimately be - I have no production. Is God being unfair to require production? No, God is sovereign, He's our creator, He can require what He wants. And after all Jesus Christ solved the sin problem and through the filling of the Holy Spirit and through the application of Christ's

righteousness **we have the production in Christ** and so therefore a person who has trusted in Jesus Christ will not appear before the Great White Throne judgment, because in Christ we have subdued. **Make sure you understand, it's in Christ and in Christ alone that our production is focused.**

Here, when you see the word TEKEL in verse 27 that is the word to be weighed and be found wanting; it's a picture of judgment, a picture of the scales, the scales of justice, and they're tipped against us, and Belshazzar has been chosen by God in history to be a man to whom this had to happen publicly, historically, and a historical record had to be made of it all so that down through the centuries men would understand this is what judgment is like. You have been numbered and you have been evaluated and you are found wanting. And as you read this, don't just think of it as Belshazzar, because this is a model of a judgment going on. All of God's judgments are kind of like this; even the bema seat of Christ which is a judgment not to test us for our salvation but to test us for our production. Each believer must stand before the bema seat of Jesus Christ and we are going to be asked the same question; what have you brought forth in Me? In Me you have all the operating assets; My Father has foreknown you, My Father predestined you, My Father called you and during your lifetime through many instances of your personal experience, My Father justified you and has glorified you. My Father has provided everything on your behalf.

And then He's going to go through what He has done for us. I gave you My righteousness, for years I lived on earth and got My feet dusty walking around the streets of Palestine, I had dirt under my fingernails, I faced the same frustrations you face as a member of the human race and I came out of it perfect. And it's that perfect righteousness that I have generated in history that is available to you, so I solved your positional problem. I died and I rose again, I provided you with an exit from judgment so you don't have to stand before the Great White Throne judgment; you'll never be asked absolutely what have you produced, you'll only be asked at the bema seat what have you produced in Christ. And I have made intercession for you; for years and years during your lifetime every time you fell down, every time you rebelled against God's Word, every time you screwed up, I at the Father's right hand made intercession for you, I held your salvation for you, even when you weren't thinking of it I continued to make intercession for you.

Then He's going to go into the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit at the time you became a Christian regenerated you, He created within you a new nature, ex nihilo, He created you out of nothing, He created and He indwelt you. He baptized you, He sealed you unto the day of redemption, He gave you a spiritual gift and He was an advocate for you, Romans 8. Now at the bema seat we are going to be weighed and the good works, the silver and gold are going to be acknowledged and the lesser works that were human good, the worthless works will be dumped and burned up.

Daniel 5:29 Then Belshazzar gave orders, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a necklace of gold around his neck, and issued a proclamation concerning him that he now had authority as the third ruler in the kingdom.

Daniel is given the position of the 3rd most powerful man in the kingdom, but it is only for a few hours or so, because the Babylonian kingdom came to an end that night.

Daniel 5:30 That same night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain.

The Bible shows clearly that God is slow to anger, but we must never assume that His judgments are way off in the future. Sometimes God chooses to act quickly. Psalms 31:23 says, "The LORD protects the loyal, but fully repays the arrogant." Here is where the proud Belshazzar gets paid.

No details of the battle are given here, because it's not important to the point of the story. The city of

Babylon appeared to be impenetrable and safe, but it fell quickly and easily. The Greek historians Herodotus and Xenophon tell us that the river Euphrates, which ran under the wall of the city, was diverted into a reservoir, and the Persian soldiers were able to get under the first wall. Then the gates in the 2nd wall were opened by Persian sympathizers (those who hated King Nebonidus and Belshazzar), and the Persians easily took the city.

The story of that is also recorded in the book of Herodotus, Book I of his history: *Cyrus was now reduced to great perplexity. As time went on he made no progress against Babylon. In this distress, either in this distress some one made the suggestion to him or he thought himself of a plan, which he proceeded to put in execution. He placed a portion of his army at the point where the river enters the city, and another body at the back of the place where it issues forth, with orders to march into the town by the bed of the stream, as soon as the water became shallow enough. He then himself drew off with the unwarlike portion of his host,* (the engineer section of his army), *“and made for the place where Nitocris dug the basin for the river,”* (Upstream there was a tremendous reservoir that Nitocris had used earlier to divert the river into so she could line all this with tile. Well, that basin was never filled in, so he takes his engineering force up to that basin where he did exactly what she had done; he turned the Euphrates by a canal into the basin. So he dammed up the river momentarily and made all the river go into that reservoir.)

“...where he did exactly what she had done formerly. He turned the Euphrates by a canal into the basin, which was then a marsh, on which the river sank to such an extent that the natural bed of the stream became fordable. Then the Persians who had been left for the purpose at Babylon by the river-side, entered the stream, which had now sunk as to reach about midway up a man's thigh, and thus got into the town. 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,” (In other words, they had gates along there so even if the Persian army moved down the street they were shooting at them, all the time, arrows spears and everything else, they would have been sitting ducks. But they never realized that this thing was going to be pulled off that night so all the guards were taken off of that street bed.)

“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. Owing to the vast size of the place, the inhabitants of the central parts (as the residents at Babylon declare),” (Herodotus went to Babylon to talk to the people who lived during the siege and he got this story firsthand), *“long after the outer portions of the town were taken, knew nothing of what had happened, but as they were engaged in a festival, they continued dancing and reveling until they learned the capture but too late. Such, then, were the circumstances of the first taking of Babylon.”*

And that's the story of the fall of Babylon, executed under the sovereign will of God against the most formidable defense system that man had ever seen up to that point. Babylon, from the human point of view, could never have been conquered. God had decreed. Four words were written on the wall; you are numbered, you are numbered, you are weighed and it's divided. All the works of men, the great wall, the great protection against God, were over with minutes and hours.