

THE HANDWRITING ON THE WALL

With the death of Nebuchadnezzar the greatness of Babylon began to wane. Although it had been revealed in the experiences of Nebuchadnezzar that “the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will,” and that “He is the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and His ways judgment,” and these great truths had been proclaimed to all the world, so that all men “might put their confidence in God, and not forget God’s doings, and keep His commands,” yet “they soon forget His works.” The Gospel of the kingdom, which had been made known to Nebuchadnezzar in the great threefold experience of the great of the image, the deliverance of the three Hebrews from the furnace, and the dream of the tree, had been declared to all by a royal proclamation, and thus the lesson was just as personal as though each one had passed through the experiences for himself. But the message had been disregarded, and the living God had not been glorified, and now the armies of the conqueror were at the gates. This is the only place in the entire Bible where the fall of Babylon is presented from a historical perspective.

It is no wonder that Belshazzar the king regarded the city of Babylon as impregnable. Its wall was about 350 feet high, and about 85 feet thick at the top. There were one hundred gates “of solid brass, with brazen lintels and posts, and fastened with bars of iron.” The river Euphrates flowed diagonally through the city, with strong walls built on each bank. A good proportion of the land enclosed within the walls was cultivated, so that it was able to produce enough to supply the actual needs of the people in the city. Thus with gates closed the inhabitants could endure a siege of indefinite duration, bidding defiance to any enemy however powerful.

Daniel 5:1. “Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand.”

Belshazzar means, “O Bel, protect the king!” During the last ten years of Nabonidus’s reign, which he spent in Teima, Arabia, his son Belshazzar acted as vice-regent in Babylon. He was almost fifty years of age.

Nebuchadnezzar was succeeded by his son, Evil-merodach; but “his lusts, and other wickedness made him so intolerable, that at length even his own relations conspired against him and put him to death,”

after his having reigned two years, and Neriglissar, his brother-in-law, reigned in his stead. Neriglissar reigned nearly four years, and was succeeded, by merely in name, by Laborosoarchod, “a mere boy,” who was suffered to remain only a few months when Nabonadius, the father of Belshazzar, took the throne, B. C. 555, and held it till the end of the empire, B. C. 538.

In order to show his utter contempt for the besieging army, Belshazzar the king determined to celebrate with unusual abandon the annual feast of the god Tammuz. He was a lavish entertainer and knew how to throw a party.

Daniel 5:2. “Belshazzar, whiles he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem; that the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, might drink therein.”

The invitees to this banquet included the upper class of official Babylonian society—a thousand of the lords or nobles of the realm. The king also invited his wife, his secondary wives, the concubines from the royal harem (5:1, 3).

The Babylonians were famous for their beer making, and some of the tablets describing their procedure for making beer have been found. Alcohol is a drug that affects the faculties of judgment in the human mind and its higher, moral thought patterns. Belshazzar was no exception to this effect.

Belshazzar “spoke on the order of wine.” He was acting under the influence of the wine when he ordered that the gold and silver goblets be brought in.

Daniel 5:3. “Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God which was at Jerusalem; and the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, drank in them.”

The king went beyond merely having a banquet at which quite a bit of drinking was done. He brought out the vessels that had been taken from the temple of Yahweh, or Jehovah, in Jerusalem and used them as receptacles from which to drink alcohol (5:3; see also 2 Kings 24:12, 13). Clearly, the use to which he put these vessels indicated his contempt for God from whose temple they had come. According to Ezra 1:11, fifty-four hundred “articles of gold and silver” were kept in Babylon.

The arrogance demonstrated during this banquet included disregard for the ancient oriental custom of men and women eating and

drinking in two formally separated locations. It may be considered an act of debauchery that breached the bonds of morality. The second element was—

Daniel 5:4. “They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone.”

They praised the Babylonian gods. Belshazzar’s drinking from the temple vessels also involved certain theological beliefs. According to Babylonian theology, many gods existed in heaven. These gods acted on earth through their representatives so that when a particular event took place on earth it meant that the same action had also taken place in the realm of the gods. For example, when Babylon scored a victory over one of its enemies this indicated that in the heavens, Marduk, the god of Babylon, had defeated the god of that country. Thus earthly events reflected what had happened as well among the gods. So for Belshazzar to drink from the vessels that had come from Yahweh’s temple was an expression, for him, of the superiority of his god over that of the Jews.

It was a public and formal repudiation on the part of Belshazzar the king, of that Gospel of the kingdom which had been received and proclaimed by his predecessor, Nebuchadnezzar. Under the influence of the same messages, the one glorified Him that liveth for ever, while the other praised the work of men’s hands. As an inevitable consequence, one was established in his kingdom, the other lost both his life and his kingdom.

these idols were “the work of men’s hands,” the visible expression of their own ideas, and were therefore simply a deification of their own thoughts concerning religion, which they put in the place of the revelation which the High God had made of Himself and the Gospel of His kingdom in His dealing with Nebuchadnezzar. Thus in rejecting the Gospel of the kingdom and the authority of the Most High, and in teaching the heathen rites, Belshazzar was exalting himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, and was blinding the minds of all the people to the true teaching of the kingship of God.

This same thing has been done during all the centuries since the time of Belshazzar, by those who have either openly rejected the true God, or else have set aside the revelation which He has made of Himself and His will concerning man’s relationship to Him, the laws of His kingdom, and have substituted their own ideas of God, and their own ideas as to how He should be worshipped, and their own

interpretation of His law, even when professing to be His loyal servants.

When king Belshazzar and his thousand lords, the representatives of the whole nation, openly repudiated that Gospel of the kingdom which had been preached to Nebuchadnezzar, and had been both accepted and proclaimed by him, and made themselves drunken with the wine of Babylon from the vessels out of the Lord's house, they finally and irrevocably rejected the protecting presence of the Lord of hosts, and in death and destruction they simply ate the fruit of their own doings.

Daniel 5:5. "In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote."

God's response to this act of blasphemy by Belshazzar and his nobles was sent in the form of a prophecy written upon the wall of the throne room or audience chamber in which the banquet was held (vss. 5, 6). Thanks to the spade of the archaeologist, we have a pretty good idea where this occurred. The palace area of Babylon was located just inside the great Ishtar gate on the north side of the inner city. Coming south through the processional way, a traveler would pass through that gate and turn right toward the Euphrates to enter the palace area. The buildings of the palace were arranged around a central courtyard; the building on the south side was the one in which the king held audiences, and so it probably was the building in which Belshazzar held his banquet.

The outside of this building was covered with ornate and elaborate figures framed in colored enameled bricks. Among the figures portrayed were lions reminiscent of the first "beast" of Daniel 7:4 which symbolized Babylon. The walls inside the building, however, were plain white, so in whatever medium the disembodied hand wrote, the letters would have stood out distinctly against that background.

Belshazzar, the text says, "watched the hand" write on the wall. It is implied that his guests could not see the hand doing the writing but only the words it wrote. The writing appeared on the part of the wall that was well illuminated so that all, especially the king, could see it.

Here was a disembodied hand. The effect of this eerie scene must have left an indelible impression upon the mind of the king. Belshazzar's vision remains one of the most haunting images in literature.

Daniel 5:6. "Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another."

The impact upon Belshazzar's psyche was one of both fear and terror. The noble silhouette of the king crumbles to a heap of bones rubbing against each other in fear.

Daniel 5:7. "The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. And the king spake, and said to the wise men of Babylon, Whosoever shall read this writing, and show me the interpretation thereof, shall be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about his neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom."

He was saying that the person would be third in rank, after Nabonidus and himself. Purple clothing was very expensive and denoted royal authority and even coregency. He would wear a gold collar.

Daniel 5:8. "Then came in all the king's wise men: but they could not read the writing, nor make known to the king the interpretation thereof."

The wise men of Babylon were utterly incapable of dealing with the revelations which were made in Babylon concerning the course of events in the kingdom. Twice had they failed to justify their claims to superior wisdom when Nebuchadnezzar had turned to them for help, and now for the third and last time it was revealed in Babylon that the education which ignores God, and substitutes human speculation for "sound wisdom" cannot interpret to man "the mystery of His will."

Many are unable to read the message for this time so as *to make known the interpretation to the people*. The Spirit of prophecy is needed in order to read aright the prophecy: "For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. . . . But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." 1 Corinthians 2:11-14.

This is in spite of Belshazzar's promise to lavish gifts on the person who can read and explain the mysterious writing on the wall.

Daniel 5:9. "Then was King Belshazzar greatly troubled, and his countenance was changed in him, and his lords were astonished."

This vision of judgment caused terror in the king. The consternation of the king and his lords, and the cause of it, soon became known outside the great palace.

Daniel 5:10. "Now the queen by reason of the words of the king and his lords came into the banquet house: and the queen spake and said, O king, live for ever: let not thy thoughts trouble thee, nor let thy countenance be changed."

Then the queen (vs. 10), probably the queen mother of Belshazzar, remembered the old days half a century earlier when Daniel had served at the court as a wise man superior to all of the other wise men of Babylon. On at least two occasions, Daniel had been able to unlock the mysteries of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams, and this stuck in the memory of the queen mother.

This makes it clear that the Gospel of the kingdom, and the preacher, had made an impression in Babylon, which the lapse of twenty-five years had not effaced, and shows why it was that the lessons to Nebuchadnezzar were not repeated to Belshazzar. A lesson given to one man and then made known by him to others is just as much a personal lesson to those who hear it as to the one who experienced it.

Daniel 5:11. "There is a man in thy kingdom, in whom is the spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of thy father light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, was found in him; whom the king Nebuchadnezzar thy father, the king, I say, thy father, made master of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers."

Her name was Nitocris and she was King Nebuchadnezzar's wife and either Belshazzar's mother or grandmother. The queen mother rightly connects Daniel's high position with both the spirit of the holy gods and with the grandeur of the famous empire builder King Nebuchadnezzar, whose own words she has borrowed to describe Daniel's greatness (Dan. 4:8, 9, 18).

Daniel 5:12. "Forasmuch as an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, interpreting of dreams, and showing of hard sentences, and dissolving of doubts, were found in the same Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar: now let Daniel be called, and he will show the interpretation."

She presents a glowing report of Daniel's credentials. He has a proven track record in things requiring wisdom and understanding of deep mysteries revealed from the Divine. One cannot help but think that the queen mother herself was a believer in Daniel's God. The

proclamation of the gospel in Nebuchadnezzar's day had made lasting impressions upon the royal court.

Daniel 5:13. "Then was Daniel brought in before the king. And the king spake and said unto Daniel, Art thou that Daniel, which art of the children of the captivity of Judah, whom the king my father brought out of Jewry?"

Daniel was an old man, probably in his eighties. From the starting gate, Belshazzar addresses him with put downs reminding him of his inferior status as "one of the exiles from Judah."

Daniel 5:14. "I have even heard of thee, that the spirit of the gods is in thee, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom is found in thee."

Belshazzar deliberately ignored Daniel. He had tried hard to bury the past and with it the God of Israel. Deep down, he knows and has always known the truth. And because it disturbs him, he seeks to destroy it, to forget it.

Daniel set forth in Babylon principles of education which, if they had been followed, would have revolutionized the whole Babylonish system and established the Christian system in its place. Then the wisdom of God would have directed the affairs of the kingdom, and the pages of history would have told a different story. But now that "light and understanding and excellent wisdom" which was found in Daniel could only be used to read the sentence of destruction which was already upon the wall.

Daniel 5:15. "And now the wise men, the astrologers, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing, and make known unto me the interpretation thereof: but they could not show the interpretation of the thing."

A Babylonian king faces a serious crisis with wise men who cannot help and thus contribute directly to the bankruptcy of Babylonian astrology. He frankly admits to their ignorance and lack of insight.

Daniel 5:16. "And I have heard of thee, that thou canst make interpretations, and dissolve doubts: now if thou canst read the writing, and make known to me the interpretation thereof, thou shalt be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about thy neck, and shalt be the third ruler in the kingdom."

Why would Belshazzar offer to make the successful person the "third" ruler in the kingdom? It would be much more natural to offer to make him the "second" ruler. Or failing that, to simply give him great honor. But an offer of the "third" position in the kingdom seems oddly

specific. Why the “third” position?

It all becomes clear when we understand the political situation in Babylon at the time. The kingship of Babylon was involved in an unusual arrangement just then. The official king was Nabonidus, Belshazzar’s father. But because of his extended absence from the kingdom he had made Belshazzar co-regent. In his own words, he “entrusted the kingship to him [Belshazzar].” For ten years while Nabonidus was away in Tema of Arabia, Belshazzar had remained in Babylon and administered the kingdom.

Now, however, Nabonidus had returned. But the situation had become even more threatening than it had been when he was off in Arabia. With the Medes and Persians assaulting the eastern frontier of the empire, Babylon was in danger of crumbling. Two rulers were vitally necessary at this time—one in the field to meet the onslaught of the enemy, and the other in the capital to hold the kingdom securely in his control. Nabonidus took the role of field commander and led one division of the Babylonian army out to the Tigris River to meet Cyrus and his troops. Belshazzar stayed in the city with another division of the army to protect the capital. Nabonidus was defeated on the fourteenth day of Tishri, and the city of Babylon fell to the Persian army two days later. Through the use of tables compiled by modern astronomers and Assyriologists, the day that Babylon fell can be identified as October 12, 539 B.C. in terms of our calendar.

This explains Belshazzar’s offer of the “third” position in the kingdom to anyone who could interpret the writing on the wall. Nabonidus occupied the first position as senior king. As co-king, Belshazzar was the second in the kingdom, and the successful interpreter would be elevated to the third highest position, that of prime minister, serving under these two kings.

Later historians lost the knowledge of this situation in Babylon and even of Belshazzar’s existence. Only an inhabitant of Babylon in the sixth century B.C. could have known of such an unusual arrangement and used such a specific, yet irregular, designation as “third highest ruler in the kingdom” (vs. 16, emphasis supplied). Daniel received that honor because he interpreted the writing (vs. 29), but he occupied the post only a few hours. Then the Persian army conquered the city, and Belshazzar was killed (vs. 30).

Daniel 5:17. “Then Daniel answered and said before the king, Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation.”

The fundamental truth which every man is to recognize whatever station he may occupy and whether he has much or little, is that everything comes as a gift from God. Daniel acknowledged this for himself and taught it to others. And so he repeated to Belshazzar what he declared to Nebuchadnezzar, in the interpretation of the dream of the great image, that the kingdom over which Nebuchadnezzar ruled, and all the glory of it, were bestowed upon him by "the most high God," and that all his great power among the people of the earth was due simply to "the majesty that He gave him." The real acceptance of this truth removes all ground for pride and self-glorification.

Daniel 5:18. "O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honor."

For Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar was a living parable. Daniel then reminded Belshazzar of the self-exaltation and the pride of Nebuchadnezzar and how they led to the loss of his kingdom and his place as a man among men, until he learned the lesson that "all flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field," and that the God of heaven is to be recognized as "over all, and through all, and in all." But these facts were mentioned simply as preliminary to the personal message which was to be given to Belshazzar himself.

Daniel 5:19, 20. "And for the majesty that He gave him, all people, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him: whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down. But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him."

In the experiences of Nebuchadnezzar, the Gospel of the kingdom, the greatness of God, and the nothingness of man, had been preached, and by the royal proclamation these truths had been spread abroad in all the earth. No man could hear of these things and escape the responsibility which a knowledge of the truth involves. By his acceptance or rejection of the message which had thus been proclaimed in Babylon, every man determined his own future. He would either glorify God and humble himself; or he would exalt himself in place of God. And the course which the king and his lords might take would determine the fate of the nation.

Daniel 5:21. "And he was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses:

they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will.”

Instead of recognizing God’s hand in his privileged life and prosperity, Nebuchadnezzar became very proud, and this led to his fall. He dared to claim for himself divine prerogatives, such as that of preserving or ending people’s lives. Yet, in the end, when God humbled Nebuchadnezzar, the experience produced genuine repentance and a radical change in attitude toward the God of heaven. That in its turn led to his complete restoration.

Daniel 5:22, 23. “And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this but hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified.”

The indictment of Daniel was both dramatic and devastating. He delivered the punch line. The son had not learned the most important lesson from his father.

The reason for the fall of Babylon of the Chaldees is plainly stated. The Gospel of the kingdom had been presented in a three-fold message, revealing the true God, His saving power, and His sovereignty both in heaven and earth, and all the people had thus been called upon to “give unto the Lord glory and strength,” to “give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name.” Belshazzar knew all this, and yet he lifted up himself against the Lord of heaven, and did not glorify Him. In thus refusing to give unto God what was His due, and to acknowledge Him as King over all, he deprived himself of that glory and honor with which God crowns His loyal subjects, and thus having no longer the power of a ruler he lost his kingdom. The gods which he praised were a falsehood. “Eyes have they, but they see not; they have ears, but they hear not.” Thus he “exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever.” So Babylon of the Chaldees fell because man was put in the place of God, a lie in the place of the truth, and glory was not given to God.

The fact that Belshazzar knew of these experiences of Nebuchadnezzar, and yet did not glorify God, was sufficient for his

condemnation. He had rejected the Gospel of the kingdom. It is clear from this that the story of God's dealings with Nebuchadnezzar ought to be made known in this day to all the people of the earth, and that this is the distinct message for this time when the history of Babylon is being repeated. This is the fulness of the message, of which we have the mere syllabus in Rev. xiv. 6-12. It is also clear that wherever this story of God's dealings with Nebuchadnezzar is told, "not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power," the Gospel of the kingdom will have been preached for a witness, and men will make their final choice, either to glorify God or to lift up themselves against the Lord of heaven. For this reason the book of Daniel and its meaning ought to be, and will be, taught as the Gospel of the kingdom in every corner of the earth.

From the experiences of Nebuchadnezzar, as given in the book of Daniel, and the lessons which were taught to him, we learn what it really means to fear God and give glory to Him, so that for a full understanding of what this Gospel message includes we must study the Gospel of the kingdom as preached to Nebuchadnezzar. Furthermore, if we would understand the cause of the fall of Babylon in this time, we must note the cause of its fall in the olden time. In both instances the rejection of the Gospel message and the failure to give glory to God result in the fall. And in both instances the rejection of the Gospel message is shown by the exaltation of self, the putting of man in the place of God. In the time of Belshazzar this refusal of the Gospel invitation to give glory to God and to worship the Creator was shown in open and gross idolatry. They "praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone." "Knowing God, they glorified Him not as God, neither gave thanks: but became vain in their reasoning, and their senseless heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God for the likeness of an image of corruptible man, and of birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things." In the Babylon of to-day the apostasy from God is revealed in the working out of the same principle under a different form. Instead of deifying their own imaginations, or reasonings, by putting them into some material form and then worshipping the work of their own hands, there has been such a perversion of the Gospel, which is professedly accepted, by substituting tradition for the word of God by putting man's idea of God and His character in place of the revelation made, by teaching for doctrines the commandments of men, that the

true God is not worshiped any more than in Belshazzar's time. Now, as then, there are those in Babylon who are loyal to the living God, and obedient to the truth of the Gospel, who are witnesses for the principles of righteousness, but the very essence of idolatry pervades the hearts and minds of the great majority.

Daniel 5:24, 25. "Then was the part of the hand sent from him; and this writing was written. And this is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN."

Daniel read the words as nouns, but he explained them as passive verbs: Numbered, numbered, weighed, and divided. *Mene* is a measurement of weight for gold and silver—a *mina* equivalent to sixty shekels. Likewise, *Tekel* is a measurement of weight. *Upharsin* means "divisions." Literally translated, they are, "Numbered, Numbered, Weighed, Divided." A most accurate account had been kept, and there was no mistake in the books. The end of the kingdom had come; it was about to fall to pieces by its own weakness.

Daniel 5:26. "This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it."

But the nouns required interpretation for them to have any meaning. The word "mene" is repeated to emphasize the idea of "to number" or "to count." God is the Numberer, the Counter. He is the great Mathematician. God has audited the kingdom of Babylon and put a fork in it. Period! Finished!

It is interesting that this word was repeated. This can be meaningful in terms of the two rulers—Nabonidus and Belshazzar—who ruled together on the same throne at the time. One would not outlive the other and reign on; the reign of both was to come to an end at the same time—Belshazzar through death, and Nabonidus through defeat and exile.

Daniel 5:27. "TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting."

Tekel means "to weigh." The Standard of weights and measurements has divinely evaluated and judged the kingdom. When might God have made such a judgment concerning Babylon? Of all the days in the Jewish calendar, the Day of Atonement was the day of judgment *par excellence*. It was a day of judgment in the camp of ancient Israel, and it is still considered to be a day of judgment in modern rituals of the synagogue. There would have been no more appropriate time for God to have passed sentence upon Babylon and

Belshazzar than the Day of Atonement, which preceded the overthrow of the kingdom by just five days.

Daniel 5:28. "PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians."

Parsin, the fourth and final word, told of the power that would receive the kingdom when the Chaldean dynasty fell. *Parsin* referred to the Persians; the Media-Persian Empire was to expand and incorporate into it what had formerly belonged to Babylon.

It is evident that the sentence of destruction was not pronounced upon Babylon without a judicial investigation. The stability of the kingdom depended upon the character of the men in the kingdom, and when it was revealed by the conduct of these men that they had fallen beyond any hope of recovery, even God Himself could not save them and their kingdom without denying His own character. The city fell because the men inside the walls had already fallen, having persistently refused that power by which alone can men be holden up.

Daniel 5:29. "Then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom."

Daniel 5:30. "In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain."

Herodotus:—

"Cyrus on his way to Babylon came to the banks of the Gyndes, a stream which, rising in the Matienian Mountains, runs through the country of the Dardanians, and empties itself into the river Tigris. . . . When Cyrus reached the stream, which could only be passed in boats, one of the sacred white horses accompanying his march, full of spirit and high mettle, walked into the water, and tried to cross by himself; but the current seized him, swept him along with it, and drowned him in its depths. Cyrus, enraged at the insolence of the river, threatened so to break its strength that in future even women should cross it easily without wetting their knees. Accordingly he put off for a time his attack on Babylon, and, dividing his army into two parts, he marked out by ropes one hundred and eighty trenches on each side of the Gyndes, leading off from it in all directions, and setting his army to dig, some on one side of the river, some on the other, he accomplished his threat by the aid of so great a number of hands, but not without losing thereby the whole summer season.

Having, however, thus wreaked his vengeance on the Gyndes by dispersing it through three hundred and sixty channels, Cyrus, with first approach of the ensuing spring, marched forward against Babylon.”—*Book 1, chap. 189, 190.*

“Withdrawing the greater part of his army from the vicinity of the city, and leaving behind him only certain corps of reservation, Cyrus marched away up the course of the Euphrates for a certain distance, and there proceeded to make a vigorous use of the spade. His soldiers could now appreciate the value of the experience which they had gained by dispersing the Gyndes, and perceive that the summer and autumn of the preceding year had not been wasted. They dug a channel or channels from the Euphrates, by means of which a great portion of its water would be drawn off, and hoped in this way to render the natural course of the river fordable.”—*Seven Great Monarchies (Rawlinson).*

Intemperance was the secret of Babylon’s loss of empire, and of her awful fall. In Cyrus’s address to his army he said: “Do you know the nature of the enemy you have to deal with? They are soft, effeminate, enervated then, already half conquered by their own luxury and voluptuousness: men not able to bear either hunger or thirst, equally incapable of supporting either the toil of war or the sight of danger: whereas you, that are inured from your infancy to a sober and hard way of living; to you, I say, hunger and thirst are but the sauce, and the only sauce, to your meals; fatigues are your pleasure, dangers your delight.”

Cyrus carried on the siege for some time with no prospect of success against its “mountain-high” walls, and its braze, iron-barred gates, protected by an impassable moat. But midsummer coming on, and with it the grand Babylonian festival in honor of the god Tammuz, Cyrus determined on a stratagem. Knowing of the boundless license in which it was the wont of the Babylonians to indulge in that debilitation, Cyrus went up the Euphrates a considerable distance, and dug channels by which to turn its waters from their course. As the Euphrates flowed through the city under the great walls, Cyrus’s plan was to draw the water down so shallow that men could wade without difficulty, and have them march into the city by the river-bed. But even that would have been of no avail, had not the Babylonians given themselves up to utter heedlessness in their wild orgies. For on each bank of the river, within the city, stood walls about a hundred and fifty feet high, with double gates of solid brass; and if only these gates had

been shut or even watched, the Persians in the bed of the river would have been certainly caught in a trap.

Daniel 5:31. "And Darius the Median took the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old."

"And Darius the Median took the kingdom." Says Rawlinson: "The genius of Cyrus was essentially that of a conjurer, not of an administrator. . . . In Babylon he gave the entire direction of affairs in the hands of a Mede, to whom he allowed the title and style of king."—*Fifth Mon., chap. 7, par. 35*. Rollin says (Book 4, chap. 1, art. 3, sec. 1): "When Cyrus judged he had sufficiently regulated his affairs in Babylon, he thought properly to take a journey into Persia. In this way thither, he went through Media, to visit his uncle Cyaxares, to whom he carried very magnificent presents, telling him at the same time that he would find a noble palace at Babylon, all ready prepared for him; and that he was to look upon that city as his own. Indeed, Cyrus, as long as his own uncle lived, held the empire only in co-partnership with him, though he had conquered and acquired it by his own valor. Nay, so far did he carry complaisance, that he let his uncle enjoy the first rank. It is Cyaxares who is called in Scripture Darius the Mede, and we shall find that under his reign, which lasted but two years, Daniel had several revelations." At the death of Darius, Cyrus very naturally assumed sole control of the empire. See Dan. 6:28.