

## Sabbath School Lesson #6 – From Arrogance to Destruction – 1-7 Feb 2020

**C**hrist had taught king Nebuchadnezzar that God rules forever and ever; “And He changeth the times and the seasons: He removeth kings, and setteth up kings: He giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding” (Daniel 2:21), but unlike king Nebuchadnezzar, his grandson, Belshazzar, did not learn the lesson that God rules. And so the Lord allowed the kingdom of the Medes and Persians to succeed Babylon in the dominion of the world (Daniel 5:28), and BC 538 Cyrus the Persian conquered Babylon, placing upon the throne his uncle, Darius the Median (Daniel 5:30-31).

In the fifth chapter of Daniel, Belshazzar had made a feast and defied God by drinking liquor from the sacred vessels of God. But Daniel had been forgotten by Belshazzar until called upon to explain the writing on the wall. Daniel took the opportunity to reprove king Belshazzar (Daniel 5:22-23). The Lord’s prophets’ and His true servants have never feared to administer reproof even to kings. The cases of Nathan, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, and many others, might be cited. They will always be very careful, however, to speak the word of the Lord, and that only, lest they do more harm than good. Those who love to give reproof are almost sure to do it in their own spirit, and not in the spirit of Christ. Those who are kind and merciful in spirit do not enjoy giving reproof. It pains them to do such work. They will be sure to seek the Lord that they may reprove wisely and in the spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In Daniel 5:25-28, Daniel read what was written on the wall and gave the meaning of it to Belshazzar. It is not known in what language this inscription on the wall was written. If it had been in Chaldean, the king’s wise men would have been able to read it. It would only be conjecture to suppose it was in Hebrew language. It more likely that it was a character strange to all the parties, and that it was specially made known to Daniel by the Spirit of the Lord. The words and their definitions are as follows: *Mene*, numbered; *tekel*, weight; *pens*, divided (*peres* is singular, and *upharsin* is the plural). It needed the wisdom of God to know to what He would have these words on the wall applied, and Daniel, the prophet of God, had wisdom imparted to him so he could apply them correctly, as the sequence clearly proved.

Chapter five of Daniel tells of the fall of Babylon in the hands of Cyrus. One hundred and thirteen years before Cyrus was born, Isaiah called him by name, and said that Cyrus should take that mighty city (Isaiah 45:1-5). In the fourth year of Zedekiah, Seraiah was sent as an ambassador to Babylon; and by him Jeremiah sent a copy of the prophecies contained in the fiftieth and fifty-first chapters of Jeremiah. Seraiah was to take the prophecy with him, and when he reached Babylon, he was to read it all, and when he had finished the reading of it he was to bind a stone to it, and cast it into the midst of Euphrates, and say, “Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise from the evil that I will bring upon her” (Jeremiah 51:59-64).

In that prophecy Jeremiah said that the power of the Medes should destroy Babylon (verses 11, 28). Isaiah said that Elam should be joined with Media: “Go up, O Elam; besiege, O Media” (Isaiah 21:2,9). Yet only a short time before Babylon fell, Elam was one of the provinces of the Babylonian Kingdom (Daniel 8:1-2). Elam was the Susiana of ancient geography, and Cyrus was of Elamite origin, and the recognized chief of the Susianians, and when he began to spread his conquests, the Susianians (Elamites) only waited for the opportune moment to revolt from Babylon and join the standard of Cyrus. The armies of Media and Persia were united under the command of Cyrus, and left Ecbatana, the capital of Media, in the spring of 539 BC, on the expedition against Babylon. In that prophecy which Jeremiah had sent to be read in Babylon, it was said to the people of Israel: “My people, go ye out of the midst of her, and deliver ye every man his soul from the fierce anger of the Lord. And lest your heart faint, and ye fear for the rumour that shall be heard in the land; a rumour shall both come one year, and after that in another year shall come a rumour, and violence in the land, ruler against ruler” (Jeremiah 51:45-46). Here was given a definite sign by which the people of Israel might know when to escape from Babylon, and from the ruin that was to fall upon her. There were to be two rumours of danger to Babylon, and the rumours were to be a year apart. As stated above, Cyrus started for Babylon in early spring, BC 539, but he went only about half way that year. The cause of this because Cyrus, on his way to Babylon, when he reached the stream, Gyndes, which could only be passed in boats,

one of his 'sacred' horses drowned in the stream, and enraged at the insolence of the river, Cyrus *put off for a time his attack on Babylon*, and spent the whole summer with his army digging one hundred and eighty trenches on each side of the Gyndes, leading off in all directions, so the Gyndes was reduced to waters that can be crossed by children. After Cyrus wreaked his vengeance on Gyndes, in Spring, he marched forward against Babylon.

Here then were the two rumours which Jeremiah said there should be: First, when Cyrus started from Ecbatana, the rumour reached Babylon, and the Babylonians made all ready to meet him in defence of the city. But he stopped and stayed a year, and then started again for Babylon, which would be the cause of the second rumour. This was what the people of Israel were waiting for; then they knew it was the time to get out of Babylon, for then would surely be violence in the land, ruler against ruler. And thus that prophecy was certainly fulfilled beyond all reasonable dispute. In the spring of BC 538 Cyrus proceeded to Babylon without hindrance. Nabonadius, the king of Babylon, drew up his forces in the plain outside of the city, prepared to give battle. Cyrus attacked him at once and easily defeated him. Nabonadius himself took refuge in Borsippa, while the greater part of his army escaped within the walls of the city, where Belshazzar was in command. When they all got within the mighty walls of Babylon, with all the brazen gates securely fastened with the heavy iron bars, they felt perfectly secure, and laughed defiance at Cyrus and all his forces, and at all his efforts to force his way in. But Cyrus had already made a success of turning the river Gyndes out of its banks, and he determined to do the same thing for the Euphrates. The Euphrates ran directly through the city, under the walls, and Cyrus determined to turn the waters out of the channel, and then, under cover of darkness, follow the bed of the river into the city. This also was in fulfillment of prophecy: "A drought is upon her waters; and they shall be dried up." "And I will dry up her sea, and make her springs dry" (Jeremiah 50:38; 51:36). Isaiah was shown in vision that Babylon would fall in a time of feasting: "Prepare the table, watch in the watch-tower, eat, drink;" and that in the midst of it she would be attacked: "Arise, ye princes, and anoint the shield" (Isaiah 21:5,9). Daniel 5 tells what happened there.

Jeremiah said it was "a land of graven images," and prophesied that they would be "mad upon their idols" (50:38). And Daniel says that in that night's feast which he saw "they drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone" (Daniel 5:1-4). Isaiah, one hundred and seventy-six years before, said that their night of pleasure should be turned into fear (21:3-4). Daniel tells what did it: "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" (Daniel 5:5).

Isaiah in vision pictured him thus in his fear: "My heart panted, fearfulness affrighted me;" "therefore are my loins filled with pain; pangs have taken hold upon me; .... I was bowed down at the hearing of it; I was dismayed at the seeing of it." Daniel tells what was the reality: "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" (Daniel 5:6).

Isaiah showed that he would call in the astrologers: "Let now the astrologers, the star-gazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee;" "none shall save thee" (47:13,15). Daniel says the king did so: "The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers; ... but they could not read the writing, nor make known to the king the interpretation thereof. Then was king Belshazzar greatly troubled, and his countenance was changed in him, and his lords were astonished" (Daniel 5:7-9). This was the scene in the king's banqueting-house, but it was only a sample of what was going on all over the city, for it was a national feast. Jeremiah had said sixty years before: "And I will make drunk her princes, and her wise men, her captains, and her rulers, and her mighty men; and they shall sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake, saith the King, whose name is the Lord of Hosts." "In their heat I will make their feasts, and I will make them drunken, that they may rejoice, and sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake, saith the Lord" (Jeremiah 51:57,39). As all this was being so wildly carried on in the city, outside of it the Medes and Persians were waiting for the waters to run low enough to allow them to wade in the bed of the river, even as Jeremiah had said (51:12).