

[R2497 : page 172]

WEIGHED IN THE BALANCES.

JULY 23. – DAN. 5:17-31.

"God is the Judge." – Psa. 75:7.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S kingdom, altho very prosperous, and wealthy by the gathering of the spoils of centuries from the great surrounding nations, was of short duration. Secular history mentions the father of Nebuchadnezzar as the founder of new Babylonia, and quite a number of Bible students have thus been misled to reckon the "Times of the Gentiles" as beginning before Nebuchadnezzar's time in the days of Nabopolassar. But while it is doubtless true that that monarch was prominently identified with the organization of Babylonia, the "Times of the Gentiles" could not have begun in his day, because God still had his own typical Kingdom in the earth, as represented by the Jews – down until Zedekiah's captivity to Nebuchadnezzar, 606 B.C. We should remember that the "Times of the Gentiles" merely means the times or years in which the world's affairs are delivered over to Gentile supremacy, between the time of the removal of God's typical kingdom and the time of the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom October, 1914.* This Bible view of the matter is further confirmed by the fact that the ruins of Babylon show the name of Nebuchadnezzar on the bricks of the principal palaces, and thus give evidence that it was under his administration that the empire reached its [R2497 : page 173] zenith, or became, in the language of the dream, the golden head of the image, which represented Gentile dominion. – Dan. 2:38.

*See MILLENNIAL DAWN, VOL. I. Chap. 13; VOL. II., Chap. 4.

Secular history seems to give the name of Nabonidus, as king of Babylon, at the time of its fall, but the Scriptures make no mention of this name, giving us instead Belshazzar, denominating him the son of Nebuchadnezzar. Two explanations are possible: Belshazzar may

have been the son of Nabonidus and the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, or Nabonidus may have been his original name, and Belshazzar a name adopted when he assumed the office of king; or reversely, Belshazzar may have been his original name, and the one by which Daniel and the people at home would speak of him, while Nabonidus may have been the name he assumed officially as king. At all events the name that appears on the tablets is Nabonidus, while the name which Daniel gives repeatedly is Belshazzar, a name of the same signification as that given to Daniel, who was called Belteshazzar, both words signifying "Favored of God." We can safely hold to the Scriptural account, assured that time will justify our confidence in this, as it has done in other matters.

At the time of our lesson, Babylon, the capital city of Babylonia, was the most wonderful city in the world. The following observations respecting it are from the pens of others. "Nebuchadnezzar converted his capital, Babylon, into one of the most magnificent and beautiful cities of antiquity." "Herodotus, who visited it about B.C. 450 [nearly a century after the date covered by our lesson], while its walls and buildings were still perfect, describes it as forming a square of nearly fourteen miles on each side." "The walls surrounding the city, according to Herodotus, were three hundred feet high and eighty feet broad. A hundred gates, with their great posts, leaves and sills of brass, and their bars of iron, permitted entrance to the city." "Such a city was never seen before, and was the work of Nebuchadnezzar. The bricks marked with his name, and the inscriptions which he wrote, being hidden in the ruins, have now come forth from their grave as witnesses to the truth of God's Word." "In those days Babylon was the metropolis of the world, the center of commerce, art and wisdom." "The great plain on which it lay, a Paradise of fertility and cultivation, was intersected by countless canals, both small and great, serving alike for irrigation and navigation." "Babylon was a university city. The wealth of the world poured into the coffers of the Babylonian merchants."

Such wealth and prosperity were likely to beget luxurious ease on the part of the Babylonians, as they also excited the cupidity and ambition of enemies. Accordingly, the Medes and Persians had consolidated; and their army under Cyrus for several months had been besieging Babylon, whose citizens, however, felt quite secure behind their immense walls, and amply provisioned for a longer siege than it was supposed any army could enforce. So great was the confidence of the king of Babylon in the strength of his capital that he made a great feast to a thousand of his lords.

This feast would seem to have been in the nature of a boast in the greatness of Babylon; and as tho to emphasize his power and to remind his nobles and lords of how none of the gods of the surrounding nations had been able to deliver their peoples out of the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar had called for the vessels of gold and silver brought from the Jewish Temple, and these were profaned by drinking therefrom to the honor of Bel, the god of Babylon.

In the midst of the revelry of the feast, the king, his counsellors and lords were astonished to see a part of a hand writing certain fiery letters upon the wall of the palace. The revelry ceased, a hush of fear came over all; the flush of confidence upon the king's face gave place to one of terror; he trembled and called for the advice of the wise men to interpret the wonderful message, but they were unable to explain the matter satisfactorily. Even if they had deciphered the letters and words, they had no interpretation to offer, because from their standpoint any other meaning than the true meaning would have been more reasonable; nothing would have seemed further from the truth to Babylon's wise men than the message which these miraculously written words conveyed. The king was greatly disappointed, but his mother came to his assistance, informing him of Daniel, who had given to his father, Nebuchadnezzar, an interpretation of a dream, when all the wise men of Babylon had failed, and accordingly Daniel was sent for.

The aged Prophet, at this time about ninety years of age, as an officer of the kingdom doubtless resided in one of the palace buildings near by, and in response to the king's command he stood before them. The king, realizing the importance of the message, manifested his anxiety by offering, first to the astrologers, and now to Daniel, a great reward for the interpretation – to be robed in royal purple, with a royal golden chain as insignia of rank, and to be third in dignity and power in the empire. The first thing in the lesson which strikes us is the nobility of God's servant, in renouncing all claim to these gifts as a reward for the service of interpreting God's message. "Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known the interpretation."

We may stop here long enough to take a valuable lesson, to the effect that all who would be the mouth-pieces **[R2497 : page 174]** of the Lord, and speak forth his Word, should, like Daniel, do so without stipulation of compensation. Only from this standpoint can any hope to be entirely free and untrammelled in speaking words of truth and soberness which may be very distasteful to those who inquire the mind of the Lord. Had Daniel thanked the king for the promised gifts, and thus accepted them as a reward for his service, he would have felt obligated to the king to such an extent that it might have warped his judgment, or have weakened his expression of the Lord's message. And the king in turn would have felt that, having paid for the information, it should be a smooth, favorable message. And just so it is with some of the Lord's true servants in mystic Babylon. They have the opportunity presented to speak the Lord's Word; yet many of them are handicapped by reason of having received honors and robes, and are more or less inclined to hide and **[R2498 : page 174]** cover the message now due to Babylon in this its Laodicean epoch. They are bound by the chain of gold around their necks. – Rev. 3:14-22.

The aged Prophet displayed gentleness as well as fearlessness in the delivery of his message. It was stated as kindly as the truth would permit, but the truth was not withheld by reason of fear. He recounted

to the king his father's exaltation to power, and ascribed it not to the god of Babylon, but to the God of Israel. He reminded him of how pride had been his father's downfall, resulting in his degradation to bestial conditions for seven times (seven years – corresponding to the seven times, *i.e.*, 2520 years, of Gentile domination). He reminded Belshazzar of how in the end his father had acknowledged the God of heaven as the real ruler amongst men, and then he charged home to the king that instead of profiting by this experience, of which he well knew, he had lifted up his heart to pride, had ignored the only true God, and had even brought what he knew were the sacred vessels of Jehovah's service, to profane them in the worship and glorification of idols – "gods of silver, gold, brass, iron, wood and stone, which see not nor hear nor know." He pointed out to the king that he had thus dishonored and defied "the God in whose hand [power] thy breath is [the God of all life – Acts 17:28,29], and whose are all thy ways [who has full power to control your course]." This true God he had not glorified, but dishonored.

By thus kindly but plainly showing the king the truth, the Prophet prepared the way for the exposition of the fateful words – "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin." *Mene* was repeated twice, probably for the sake of emphasis – Numbered! Numbered! – the limit of the time of your dominion has expired. *Tekel* – short weight, lacking. *Peres* signifies divided, and its plural form, *Upharsin*, gives the thought of broken or crushed into pieces – destroyed. Nothing in the word *peres* signifies Medes and Persians, but the Prophet knew from the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's vision that the Babylonian dominion would be followed by the Medo-Persian kingdom, and he also knew that the Medes and Persians were already besieging the city.

So far from being offended with the plain words of the Prophet, Belshazzar seems to have felt their truth, and gave command that the honors already promised should be bestowed upon Daniel. But meantime other matters were transpiring in his capital, of which the

king and his lords were unaware, so that the fulfilment of the doom written upon the palace wall was close at hand.

While the Babylonians were feasting and reveling in fancied security, Cyrus, the general of the united forces of the Medes and Persians, having studied up a plan of attack, had already caused a great ditch to be dug above the city, to divert the waters of the River Euphrates into a new channel. This river flowed through the center of Babylon diagonally, and was protected by enormous gates of brass, which were supposed to be equally as impregnable as the three-hundred-foot wall. Indeed, it would appear that the Babylonians had never a fear of attack from the river, and had left it comparatively unguarded; consequently, when Cyrus had diverted the stream into the new channel he found little difficulty in marching his troops under the brass gates into the city, so that at the very time the revelry was progressing in Belshazzar's palace the soldiers of Cyrus were taking possession of the entire city, and very shortly after Daniel's interpretation of the writing the troops reached the palace, Belshazzar was slain, and the new empire of Medo-Persia was inaugurated – "without fighting," as the tablets declare. Thus did great Babylon fall suddenly – "in one hour."

The thoughtful Bible student must of necessity have always in view the many correspondencies which the Scriptures institute between literal Babylon and mystic Babylon, and when studying the account of the fall of literal Babylon his attention is naturally drawn also to the foretold fall of mystic Babylon in the end of this age. Indeed, he must be comparatively blind who cannot see that the wonderful prophecies which speak of the fall of Babylon (Isa. 14:22; Jer. 50 and 51) were not wholly fulfilled by Cyrus the Persian. The fall of literal Babylon, while it was sudden, and while it made a great commotion amongst the nations, lacks much of filling to the full the prophetic picture. Much of the prophecy still waits for fulfilment in mystic or symbolic Babylon to-day; and this **[R2498 : page 175]** fact is abundantly supported by the prophecies of the Book of

Revelation, written centuries after the fall of literal Babylon, which unmistakably refer to symbolic Babylon, and use language almost identical with that of Jeremiah. – See Rev. 16:19-18:24.

It will be noticed, further, that, as literal Babylon sat upon the literal River Euphrates, so mystic Babylon is said to sit upon the waters, peoples. It should be noticed, also, that as the literal city was captured by the diversion of the literal waters, so symbolic Babylon is to fall by reason of the diversion of the symbolic Euphrates, which in Rev. 16:12, it is foretold, shall be "dried up – that the way of the kings of the East might be prepared."

The kings of the East, or kings from the sunrising, are, we understand, the kings of Christ's Kingdom, who are also priests – the body of Christ, the Royal Priesthood. "Thou hast made us unto our God kings and priests, and we shall reign on the earth." From this standpoint of view, Cyrus and his army, overthrowing literal Babylon, was a figure or illustration of Messiah, King of kings and Lord of lords, who with his faithful will shortly overthrow mystic Babylon, and take possession of the world in the name of Jehovah, to establish the Kingdom for which he taught us to pray, "Our Father...,thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven."

This likeness of Cyrus to Messiah is not merely in the particulars noted. It should be remembered that the name, Cyrus, signifies "the sun," and that thus in his name he reminds us of the prophecy of Christ, – "The Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in his beams." Moreover, there were sundry very remarkable prophecies respecting Cyrus, made long before he had come into prominence. Through the Prophet Isaiah (44:28) the Lord speaks of Cyrus as his shepherd, who would lead back Israel, and again (45:1-14) he calls him his anointed, saying, "Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two-leaved gates, and the gates shall not be shut; I will go before thee, and make the crooked places

straight; I will break in pieces the gates of brass and cut in sunder the bars of iron; and I will give thee the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, Jehovah, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel. For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by name; I have surnamed thee, tho thou hast not known me." In this prophecy Cyrus is evidently indicated, and yet just as evidently a greater than he is indirectly referred to, *viz.*, the Prince of the kings of the earth, who in Revelation is shown as drying up the symbolic Euphrates and destroying symbolic Babylon, and delivering spiritual Israel. And the time for the fulfilment of the symbol is clearly indicated, by the drying up of the Euphrates under the sixth vial of the "Day of Wrath:" and the fall of Babylon under the seventh vial, resulting in the liberty of all of God's people from the thralldom, through false doctrine, which has been upon them for lo, these many years, is portrayed as resulting.

Babylon literal fell because, when tried in the balances by the Lord, she was found wanting: mystic Babylon falls for a similar reason. Literal Babylon never was Israel, but the Israelites were for a time swallowed up in Babylon; likewise, mystic Babylon never was spiritual Israel, tho for a long time spiritual Israel has been in captivity to mystic Babylon. As the same Cyrus who overthrew literal Babylon made the proclamation which permitted literal Israel to return from captivity, so it is the King of kings who, upon taking his great power as earth's new King will set free all of the Lord's people – and in advance he sends the message to those who have ears to hear, saying, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of demons and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird....Come out of her, *my* people, that *ye* be not partakers of *her* sins, and that *ye* receive not of *her* plagues." – Rev. 18:2-4.

The great feast which preceded the fall of Babylon would seem to correspond well with the great denominational union expected soon, and the season of rejoicing which will accompany it. The gold and silver vessels of the Lord's house which were profaned may fitly

represent not only the precious truths of divine revelation, but also the Lord's consecrated people – the golden vessels representing the "little flock," and the more numerous silver vessels representing the "great company." What may be the character of the defilement and injury of these is of course problematical, but in any case we remember that those consecrated vessels were all highly honored, and restored to the Temple by Cyrus, and likewise we know that not only the truths of divine revelation will all be cared for by our Lord, but also that all that are his shall be glorified in the spiritual Temple which he will rear shortly.
