

WEIGHED IN THE BALANCES.

– *DANIEL 5:17-30.* – *OCTOBER 1.* –

Golden Text: – "The face of the Lord is against them that do evil."
– Psalm 34:16.

DANIEL must have been an old man of nearly ninety years at the time of the present lesson. Nebuchadnezzar was dead; Nabonidus, his son was probably also dead, and Belshazzar, the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, had but recently come to the throne of Babylonia. Babylon was the capital city, and from all descriptions must have been by far the most wonderful city of the world up to that time, and in some particulars has had no rival since. It was a very wealthy, luxurious city, enriched not only by the plunder of the palaces and temples of the nations conquered round about, but further enriched by the tributes paid by those nations year by year and by its mercantile traffic with all the nations of the world.

It was not only the largest city in the world but the strongest fortress. 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, built on this fertile plain, was fourteen miles from north to south and fourteen miles from east to west, and the walls surrounding it were 350 feet high. It had one hundred gates. The river Euphrates flowed through it, and was banked high on each side the stream with solid massive walls and intersected with water gates made of bronze. The historian says, "Babylon was the strongest fortress in the world. Even a small force of brave men could have held it for years." It would be the natural effect of having such riches and strength under his control to make the King Belshazzar proud and self-confident.

At the time of our lesson the army of the Medes and Persians under the command of king Cyrus was besieging Babylon. This was

the Cyrus whom the Lord through one of his prophets declared should set free his people, the Hebrews. To all human appearance his besieging of the city of Babylon would be a hopeless task, a failure, so strong was that fortress. Yet the Lord had timed the fall of Nebuchadnezzar's empire, and no doubt providentially guided to the accomplishment of the matter at the time intended. While Belshazzar and the people of Babylon were holding high revel, banquets, etc., convinced of the security, the impregnability of their city, Cyrus and his army were building a trench above the city into which in due time the waters of the Euphrates river were turned, and then, in the darkness of the night, the soldiers were marched through the bed of the river and gained an entrance to the city while its unsuspecting defenders were banqueting.

VANITY AND SACRILEGE.

On this same night the king gave a banquet in his chief palace to a thousand of his nobles, and lords and ladies of the empire residing in the city. The enemy was little thought of. On the contrary, Belshazzar [R3633 : page 284] boasted of the impregnability of the fortress, and declared that the gods of the Babylonians were superior to all others. He pointed to the subject nations surrounding as evidences of this, and in derision called for the holy vessels that had been brought by his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar from the Jewish Temple, that he and his lords might drink from these to do the honor of the gods of Babylon.

It was in the midst of this blasphemy and profanation of the holy vessels of Jehovah's Temple that a hand appeared and wrote in letters of fire upon the wall of the palace the words, *Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin*. The king, his counsellors, his nobles, the aristocracy of the world, were astounded and numbed. The apparition convinced them at once that some dire calamity impended. It was recognized as being of superhuman origin. The

wise men, the astrologers, etc., were sent for to give an explanation and interpretation. They came, but failed.

The King's mother remembered Daniel and his relationship with Nebuchadnezzar. She had probably heard of the wonderful interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's vision by Daniel when all others had failed. The prophet was evidently well known, and not far off, probably still engaged in some department of the government service and near the palace. He soon appeared, and his courage on this occasion is worthy of remark. He had a most painful duty to perform toward his superiors – the king, as an autocrat, had the power of his life at his tongue's end.

The king had offered both wealth and honor to the wise man able to give the meaning of the remarkable writing, but the Lord's prophet showed that he was not mercenary and that his interpretation was not influenced by any such considerations. His answer was, "Let thy gifts be to thyself and give thy rewards to another; nevertheless I will read the writing unto the king and make known to him the interpretation."

Daniel briefly rehearsed to the king his knowledge of his grandfather's experiences – his great honor and dignity and success, and subsequently his loss of reason, when for seven years he became an outcast from society and was reduced to the level of the brute beasts; how, then, the Lord had compassion on him and restored his reason, and he had confessed Jehovah to be the true God, saying, "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, extol and honor the king of heaven, for all his works are truth and his ways judgment; and those who walk in pride he is able to abase." (Dan. 4:33-37.) King Belshazzar, knowing this, should have humbled himself and been reverential toward Jehovah God, and in so much as he had defied and boastfully and knowingly dishonored him, the writing upon the wall was a message from Jehovah to him announcing the end of his dominion as a just punishment for his sacrilege.

How wonderfully timed was the whole matter! While these things were proceeding Cyrus' army was investing the city. While Daniel was explaining the meaning of the handwriting on the wall to be "Thou art tried in the balances and found wanting," the soldiers for the retribution were at work. King Belshazzar evidently recognized the truthfulness of the prophet's words and the justness of the divine decision. It is to his credit that instead of attempting to do violence to Daniel he honored him and made him the third in power in the kingdom. In a very little while the enemy was upon them, the king was slain, the government was transferred to the hands of Cyrus, and the honored Jew, Daniel, found in a position of trust, was made an officer in the new government of Medo-Persia, which by this overthrow of Babylonia became the second universal empire of the world, represented in Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the image by the arms of silver.

LESSONS TO BE DRAWN.

One lesson to be drawn from this narrative is that, although God had no covenant relationship with the other nations of the earth but only with Israel, nevertheless he exercised a general supervision of the other nations – not to the extent of chastising them and displacing them in the same manner that he did his covenant people, the seed of Abraham, but to the extent that they should have at least general lessons along general lines, that they might hear of his name although they had never been called to be his people, although no invitation was extended to them and no covenant of grace or peace proffered them. They were, as the Apostle subsequently described them, "without God, having no hope in the world," aliens, strangers, foreigners to the commonwealth of Israel. All that while the Lord hid from the Gentiles and from all people the ultimate purposes of his grace, the blessing of all the families of the earth. It was not yet due time either to redeem the world or to inform the world of the blessings that should ultimately flow from the great redemption that in the divine plan should be accomplished at Calvary.

Another lesson is that God does actually balance, weigh the conduct of people; that while grace is the basis of all his dealings, nevertheless the grace is dispensed according to certain principles of righteousness and justice and obedience to conditions, while punishments are executed upon the contrary class who neglect or ignore the divine instruction. It was so with Belshazzar, it will be so with all others eventually.

The Lord's dealings at the present time with nations no doubt pursue much the same lines that we see exemplified in Belshazzar's experiences and still further in the land of Canaan, when the Lord drove out the Canaanites, etc., when their cup of iniquity was full, and not before. Doubtless the Lord still deals with nations along these lines. For instance, the nations which have dealt unjustly with the Jews have been punished. Look at Spain, see Russia, and the nations which have persecuted the Spiritual Israelites. Undoubtedly these have received some measure of chastisements, even though they were long after the crime.

If the Lord's dealings were with the individuals of the race – if he judged every individual, punishing the evil doers and rewarding the well doers promptly, what a change it would make in the world and how speedily that change would be effected. This we see is not the case in the present time, nor according to the Scriptures has it been the case in the past. The prophet points out the fact that the eyes of the wicked stand out with fatness and they have more than heart could wish, while some of the Lord's faithful ones are permitted to be in straits, in difficulties, almost in want. This arrangement is necessary to the divine plan for the present time, to the intent that the Lord's people must walk by faith and not by sight – to the intent that those who love not the Lord with all their heart, soul, mind and strength shall not be attracted to him **[R3633 : page 285]** by merely the hope of escaping punishment nor by the hope of receiving temporary rewards. The Lord seeks now to deal with those

who can and will exercise faith in his gracious promises of a life to come.

By and by, when the Kingdom shall have been established and the Lord's will shall be done on earth as in heaven, all this will be changed. Then, as the Apostle tells us, he that doeth righteousness shall live, and he who wilfully does unrighteousness shall suffer, and, persevering, will eventually be destroyed in the second death.

The Lord's favor to Daniel in permitting him to have a high position in Babylonia and subsequently in the Medo-Persian empires is contrary to his dealings with Spiritual Israelites of the present time. He deals with us not according to the flesh but according to the spirit. Consequently the rewards we get for faithfulness to him are spiritual rewards, "much advantage everyway." The Lord expects that the heavenly hopes and prospects set before us of a participation in the heavenly Kingdom as joint-heirs with our Lord, the Messiah, will be esteemed by us as of greater value than the honors and dignity conferred upon the prophet Daniel in the past. And we, too, so esteem the matter. Let us continue to thus view things from God's standpoint, until by and by he shall say, Enough, come up higher.

The poet Heine has pictured the scenes of the lesson as follows:

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"In the monarch's cheeks a wild fire glowed,
And wine awoke his daring mood.
With daring hand, in his frenzy grim,
The king seized a beaker and filled to the brim,
And drained to the dregs the sacred cup,
And foaming he cried as he drank it up,
'Jehovah, eternal scorn I own
To thee – I am monarch of Babylon.'

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"The yelling laughter was hushed, and all
Was still as death in the royal hall.
And see! And see! on the white wall high
The form of a hand went slowly by,
And wrote, and wrote, on the broad wall white,
Letters of fire, and vanished in night."

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THE MASTER'S TOUCH.

"In the still air the music lies unheard;
In the rough marble beauty hides unseen:
To make the music and the beauty, needs
The Master's touch, the sculptor's chisel keen.

"Great Master, touch us with Thy skillful hand;
Let not the music that is in us die!
Great Sculptor, hew and polish us; nor let,
Hidden and lost, Thy form within us lie!

"Spare not the stroke! do with us as Thou wilt!
Let there be naught unfinished, broken, marred;
Complete Thy purpose, that we may become
Thy perfect image, Thou our God and Lord!"

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