

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA

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Dearest Grandchild,

In our last letter we dealt with the prophecy of Isaiah regarding Cyrus the Great. In this letter we will tell you how he came to conquer Babylon. The impact Babylon has had on the world is profound. They once led the world in art, literature, education, science, agriculture, trade, and commerce. The Babylonian system of mathematics was a sexagesimal (base 60) numeral system. From this we derive the modern-day usage of 60 seconds in a minute, 60 minutes in an hour, and 360 degrees in a circle, Etc. The Hanging Gardens of Babylon were considered one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world. The city of Babylon itself was virtually impregnable. Its towering rampart walls were 300 feet high and 90 feet thick. They formed a perimeter 56 miles long around the city. The Euphrates River flowed through the midst of the city but was adequately protected by walls on both sides of the river.

As the army Cyrus advanced on Babylon they came to the banks of the Gyndes River which empties into the Tigris. This stream was so swift and treacherous that one of Cyrus' sacred horses was drowned trying to swim across. Cyrus was so enraged at the insolence of the river that he determined to break its strength to the point that a woman could walk across it without wetting her knees. Accordingly he ordered his army to dig 180 trenches on each side of the river draining the river in all 360 degrees of the compass. He accomplished his goal but not without the loss of an entire summer season. This "chance" incident, however, would play a critical role in the conquest of Babylon.

When Cyrus approached Babylon the following Spring a preliminary battle took place that forced the Babylonians to retreat into the safety of the city. Cyrus, however, had recently learned that the waters of a river could be tamed. Consequently he ordered his army to divert the upstream waters of the Euphrates into a marsh. When the task was completed the river became so shallow that it reached only midway up to a man's thighs. For what happened next we quote from the History of Herodotus 1:191: *"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 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 . . ."* Herodotus continues that the city of Babylon was involved in a festival of drinking, dancing, and revelry. We read about this revelry in the 5th chapter of the book of Daniel.

First, however, let us return to the prophecy of Isaiah: **"This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus whose right hand I will take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him so that the gates will not be shut."** (Is. 45:1). On the night Babylon was captured the city was involved in a drunken orgy and the gates facing the Euphrates River were carelessly left open. The Persian soldiers thus entered the city without opposition and pretending to be part of the revelry went straight to the palace of Belshazzar.

Now let us summarize the story as reported in Daniel chapter 5. Belshazzar knew the Persians were at the gates of his city but was so cocky and confident that he didn't worry. In fact, to show his disdain for his enemies he gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles. To further display his contempt for God he ordered to bring in the gold goblets stolen from the Temple of Jehovah in Jerusalem. So the **"king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. As they drank the wine they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone"** (Dan.

5:3,4). It was then that a sleeveless hand wrote his doom in unforgettable letters across the wall. Daniel interpreted the message which revealed that Belshazzar was weighed in the balance and found wanting. Daniel reminded Belshazzar that he had praised the false gods of silver, gold, iron, wood, and stone **“which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways” (Dan. 5:23).** **“That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians was slain, and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom at the age of sixty two” (Dan. 5:30).** Darius the Mede apparently reigned jointly with Cyrus the Persian **“So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian” (Dan. 6:28).**

When the powerful Roman army attacked the tiny city of Jerusalem in A.D. 67 it took them three years to complete the job. Babylon, by comparison, which was many times bigger and much better fortified than Jerusalem, was captured in a single night! Isaiah predicted how it would happen: **“This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus whose right hand I will take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him so that the gates will not be shut.” (Is. 45:1).**

One moral from this story is to never bet against God! If God says that something is going to happen, it will happen! Remember! Isaiah also predicted the birth, ministry, suffering and death of Jesus! When the kings of the earth combine their armies to oppose God, He only laughs and holds them in derision (Ps. 2:1-5). **“Let God be true and every man a liar” (Rom. 3:4).**

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce