

Cyrus And Babylon

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Many centuries ago there was born into the Persian royal family a baby boy whose name had been chosen one hundred thirteen years before he saw the light of day. It had also been predicted that this baby would become a great general; and one hundred seventy-four years before his birth an exact prediction had been made of a great feat he would do when he was sixty-one years old; and also of the method by which he would accomplish it.

That baby is known in history as Cyrus, the great Persian conqueror, and the great feat of his life was the capture of that mightiest of ancient cities-Babylon on the Euphrates.

Babylon the Great

The Scriptures call this city, "the lady of kingdoms," "the golden city," "the praise of the whole earth," "the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldea's excellence."

This city was built on a broad plain on the bank of the river Euphrates, and was laid out in a perfect square sixty miles in circumference, fifteen -miles on each side. According to ancient history, it was surrounded by a wall three hundred feet high and seventy-five feet thick, which looked down upon a trench, or moat, half as deep, so constructed that it could be flooded from an artificial lake operated by locks of scientific construction.

The walls were pierced by twenty-five gates on each side, making one hundred gates in the outer wall. These were double gates of solid brass, with brazen lintels and posts, and fastened with bars of iron. On the top of the walls was a boulevard, where chariots drawn by three horses abreast could pass without interfering with one another.

The river Euphrates ran diagonally through the city. On each side of the river, inside of the city, was a strong wall, and in each of these walls were twenty-five brazen gates opening into the streets that ran from the outer gates. The banks of the river were lined with brick laid in bitumen, with sloping landing places at the gates. Artistic bridges spanned the river, ferry boats glided back and forth, and arched tunnels enabled the people to pass from side to side.

The enclosed surface of the city, consisting of two hundred twenty-five square miles, was divided into six hundred seventy-six squares, each two and a quarter miles in circumference, by fifty great streets, each one hundred fifty feet in width, crossing one another at right angles, twenty-five running each way, having their outlets at the great brazen gates. These streets were straight and level, fifteen miles in length and paved throughout.

The vast area within the city was not built up solidly with houses, as our modern cities are, but there was ample space given over to gardens, orchards, and fields, so that if ever the city should be besieged, the inhabitants might grow sufficient provisions within the walls to support the population.

But Babylon, strong and mighty, apparently invincible, was doomed to be overthrown and to pass into oblivion. The story of its fall, with the principal details of how it happened, as recorded now on the pages of ancient history, is but a complement of the words that God's prophets foretold concerning the doom of this city from fifty-seven to one hundred seventy-five years before the event took place.

Babylon Doomed

The prophets foretold what nations would march against Babylon to destroy it; who would lead the armies; the unique method of attack by which the city would be taken; what would be the condition of things in the city on the night when the invading forces

would enter; and what the future of the city would be. Fifty-seven years before Babylon fell, Jeremiah, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote two whole chapters of prophecy concerning the overthrow of Babylon. This prophecy is found in the fiftieth and fifty-first chapters of the book that bears his name.

Let us note first how Bible prophecy pointed out the very nations that would march their armies against Babylon to destroy it. Jeremiah cites the Medes by name. "Make bright the arrows; gather the shields: the Lord hath raised up the spirit of the kings of the Medes: for His device is against Babylon, to destroy it; because it is the vengeance of the Lord, the vengeance of His temple." "Prepare against her the nations with the kings of the Medes, the captains thereof, and all the rulers thereof, and all the land of his dominion." Jeremiah 51:11, 28.

In Isaiah 45:1-3 it was foretold that Cyrus would be the general who would lead these armies against Babylon. It is in this prophecy that God called Cyrus by name one hundred thirteen years before he was born.

Turning now to the pages of history, we find that in the first year of Neriglissar, or 559 BC, war broke out between the Babylonians and the Medes. Cyaxares, king of the Medes, who is called "Darius" in Daniel 5:31, in his efforts against the Babylonians, summoned to his aid his nephew, Cyrus, of the Persian royal line. This war was prosecuted with uninterrupted success on the part of the Medes and the Persians, until, in the seventeenth year of Nabonidus, or 539 BC, Cyrus laid siege to Babylon. The Babylonians, gathered within their impregnable walls, with provisions on hand for twenty years, and land within the limits of their broad city sufficient to furnish food for the inhabitants and garrison for an indefinite time, scoffed at Cyrus from their lofty walls and ridiculed his seemingly useless efforts to capture their city.

In their very feelings of security lay the source of their peril. Cyrus determined to accomplish by a strategy what he could not effect by force. Since he could not hope to gain an entrance into the city with battering rams, spears, swords, or arrows, he resolved to make use of the spade to carry out his plans.

The Fall of Babylon

There was no entrance for him into that city except where the river Euphrates entered and emerged, passing under its walls. He determined to make the channel of the river as own highway into the Babylonian stronghold. To accomplish this, the water must be turned aside from its channel through the city. The soldiers dug canals leading away from the Euphrates, so that a great portion of the water could be diverted. In this way they hoped to render the natural channel of the river fordable.

Fifty-seven years before this, Jeremiah had declared that this would be the method of the enemy's attack on Babylon. "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.

When his preparations for turning the Euphrates from its channel were completed, Cyrus determined to make his attack on the night of a certain annual Babylonian festival, when the whole city would be given up to drinking and reveling. The fifth chapter of Daniel refers to this celebration as the feast of Belshazzar. It was on the night of this feast, in the midst of their drunken revel, that the king and his lords were paralyzed with fear at the handwriting on the wall. It was on this night that Babylon fell into the hands of the Medes and the Persians.

One hundred seventy-five years before this time, the prophet Isaiah had foretold that Babylon would fall on a night when the people would be given up to drinking and reveling. (Isaiah 21:5.) He declared that the night of their pleasure would be turned into a paralyzing fear. (Verses 3, 4.) Jeremiah had foretold how they would come to their end in the midst of a drunken stupor. (Jeremiah 51:57, 59.)

Jeremiah had also pointed out that the enemy soldiers would crawl in like caterpillars (Jeremiah 51:14); that the street passages at the river would be seized first, and the city taken at one end (verses 31, 32); how the men would be massacred in the streets (verses 3, 4;

50:30); that those drunken revelers would be able to make no resistance (Jeremiah 51:30; 50:35-37; 51:58), and how Babylon would go down to rise no more (Jeremiah 51:63, 64).

Capture of the City

On the night of this feast day, Cyrus detailed three bodies of soldiers, the first, to turn the river at a given hour into a large artificial lake a short distance above the city; the second, to take their station at the point where the river entered the city; the third, to take a position fifteen miles below, where the river emerged from the city; and these two latter parties were instructed to enter the channel as soon as they found the river fordable. In the darkness of the night they were to explore their ways beneath the walls, meet at the palace, slay the guards, and capture or slay the king. When the water was turned into this prepared lake, the river soon became fordable, and the Persian soldiers followed its channel into the very heart of Babylon.

In the British Museum there is an ancient inscription on a stone, which was dug up in the East and which contains a record of these times written by the priests of Babylon at the capture of Babylon. This record says: "On the 16th day; Gobryas, Pasha of the land of Gutium, and the troops of Cyrus without a battle entered Babylon." They did not have to fight their way into Babylon. The river gates being left open, on the night when the Babylonians were given over to drunkenness and revelry, the army of Cyrus just marched in and took possession. Thus this ancient heathen inscription in stone confirms the exact fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy.

One hundred seventy-five years before this, God had said that the gates would not be shut, and that this very thing would give Cyrus success in the capture of Babylon. "Thus said the Lord to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held, 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." Isaiah 45:1.

The Persian soldiers soon made known their presence in the city by falling upon the royal guards in the very vestibule of the palace of the king. Belshazzar soon became aware of the cause of the disturbance, and died vainly fighting for his worthless life. Thus ended the Babylonian Empire. The Bible description of the feast of Belshazzar closes with the simple record, "In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain. And Darius the Median took the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old."

The exact and striking fulfillment of all these prophecies is a positive proof of the truthfulness and reliability of the Holy Scriptures. There is also a lesson here for us today. The same Bible that foretold these details regarding the fall of Babylon has also marked out in clear language the impending downfall of the world as now constituted. These later predictions are just as sure to come to pass as the former already have become history. We should carefully heed those Bible predictions that pertain to our day, that we may be prepared for what is coming upon the earth in this time.

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