

CHAPTER 5  
**BELSHAZZAK'S IMPIODS FEAST, AND OVERTHROW OF BABYLON**  
THE WORLD-SYSTEM, IN TYPE

We are now to be occupied with the closing up of the history of the Babylonian empire, the last solemn scenes in connection with the downfall of the head of gold. We shall find in it, as in the previous two chapters, a typical picture; in this instance setting forth the over throw of Gentile power, especially in its religious character as Babylon the Great, in the Time of the End. The account given of the fall of mystical Babylon in the 17th and 18th chapters of Revelation is evidently based upon, and intimately connected with, what we have here.

And first, it is proper to remark that while the account given by Daniel of the destruction of the proud capital on the Euphrates tallies in large measure with what has been left on record by Herodotus, the so-called "Father of History," and by other ancient writers, yet the scripture record is nevertheless challenged by a certain class of modern critics as unreliable, because of alleged discrepancies between the biblical account and the inscriptions on some of the lately deciphered monuments. The chief points in question are, the title given to Belshazzar, son of Nabonidus, and as to the identity of Darius the Median. But Belshazzar was reigning jointly with his father at this time, and certainly was "king of Babylon," or "king of the Chaldeans," in the sense of being prince-regent, with his seat in the imperial city. The title "king" was not applied solely to the supreme monarch in that age; nor is it necessarily so used now. It will be noticed that in chapter 2, when Daniel was honored by Nebuchadnezzar, the great king made him *second* ruler in the kingdom. But in this chapter Belshazzar appoints him to the position of *third* ruler, as he himself was clearly the second. So, there is no discrepancy here, but rather that exactness which is ever found in Holy Scripture.

As to Darius the Median, his name certainly does not appear in the monuments, and Herodotus tells us that Cyrus was in command of the armies that conquered Babylon. But the name Darius need present no real difficulty, as ancient kings are often known by a number of different names. In fact, no two lists of the later Median kings, as given by the old historians, agree with each other; and the monuments seem to differ from them all. The last king of the Medians was Cyaxares II., who formed an alliance with Cyrus his nephew, and led a part of the armies of the confederate kingdoms to battle. His age, as given by Herodotus, agrees with that of Darius, as given in this chapter. The two may therefore be identical. On the other hand, some suppose Darius to be the same as Gobryas, who, according to ancient records, conducted the siege of Babylon as representative of the allied kings. The discrepancy in names is no greater than that in the case of Cambyzes and Atrodates, both names being applied to the same monarch; the one, by Xenophon; the other, by Nicolas of Damascus; while it is a well-known fact that the lists of Median kings given by Ctesias and Herodotus differ in every instance, and the chronologies are hopelessly confusing and contradictory. Yet the rationalist eagerly seizes upon any apparent discrepancy between the records left by untrustworthy, and often positively dishonest, chroniclers and the account given in the word of God. The Christian need not fear that history will ever disprove what we have recorded in our Bibles. In this case, Daniel was an eye-witness. He wrote the facts as he saw and knew them. His testimony, apart from the question of divine inspiration, is surely more to be relied upon than that of fawning courtiers, or hearsay historians, whose professed facts are often untrustworthy, highly colored, and opposed to each other.

What especially comes before us in this chapter is the impiety of Gentile power as represented in this rule of Belshazzar, rising to its full height in the desecration of the vessels that had been carried away from the temple of Jehovah at Jerusalem. God had committed government to the nations, giving the supreme dominion to Nebuchadnezzar; but we find that from the beginning they failed to render to Him the honor and allegiance that were His due; and though Nebuchadnezzar himself was humbled later, his successors, Evil-Merodach, Nabonidus, and his impious son, fail utterly to profit by the lesson their illustrious ancestor had learned at so great a cost to himself.

In all this it is easy to see pictured the whole course of government as entrusted to man. Proud, haughty rulers delight to make capital out of the fact that "the powers that be are ordained of God"; but it is generally with no thought of seeking His glory or of acting as His representatives upon the earth, but rather to establish and augment their own power by deducing therefrom the doctrine of "the divine right of kings."

A little before our chapter opens, Cyrus the Great, king of Persia, had entered into an alliance with Cyaxares II., his aged uncle; and the combined kingdoms had subdued various nations to the north and south. They now determined to annex the fast-decaying Babylonian empire to their dominions. In this, Cyrus was evidently the leading spirit, though while Cyaxares lived, he was given precedence. Cyrus, though knowing it not, was "the scourge of the Lord," as Nebuchadnezzar had been before him. When Israel offended, God used the Chaldeans as His rod of chastening upon them. Now God would use the Medo-Persians for the punishment of the Chaldeans, who had shown themselves insensible to all His mercies to them.

Babylon was at this time the most magnificent and luxurious city in the world, devoted to every vice, and the center and mother of idolatry. From the days of Nimrod and the tower of Babel, till it was blotted out from under heaven, Babylon was the headquarters for the heathen mysteries. Its walls, supposedly impregnable, *(1. Not to be stormed, or taken by assault; that cannot be reduced by force; able to resist attack; as an impregnable fortress. 2. Not to be moved, impressed or shaken; invincible. The man's affection remains wholly unconcerned and impregnable)* were so broad that several chariots could drive abreast upon them. The Euphrates ran right through the city, passing under the walls; and, of course, upon that river the people depended for their support: yet it was destined to become their enemy; for after an unsuccessful siege of many months, the Medo-Persian armies concluded that the only way to force an entrance would be through the river-bed. Accordingly, a new channel was dug around the city without the Babylonians being aware of it. This channel connected with a near-by lake. On that very night, when the work of turning the waters of the river out of their course would be finished and the final assault be made, Belshazzar, utterly unconscious of the danger in which the city stood, was keeping an impious feast, with a thousand of his lords, in honor of the heathen deities. It was not merely a feast that manifested the pride of his heart; it bore a far worse character than this; for, in insult to Jehovah, Belshazzar orders the golden vessels of the temple in Jerusalem, which had been carried down to Babylon, to be brought for use in their heathen, impious feast. Thus, they drank, and praised the gods of silver and gold, of brass and of stone, and forgot altogether, or blasphemed utterly, the God of Heaven. On this crowning act of impiety, their cup of iniquity being full, God's sudden and sore judgment falls. God never strikes, when He is dealing with nations in judgment, until that moment. He could not allow the people of Israel to take possession of the land of Canaan before the days of Moses because "the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full." And so in Babylon's case; he

lingered long, and permitted His people to be slaves to Nebuchadnezzar, his son, and his son's son, as foretold by Jeremiah, till the wickedness of the Chaldeans had reached its height.

At last the fateful moment had struck; and at the very time that Belshazzar stood before his lords with one of the cups from Jerusalem's destroyed temple in his hand, praising his own vile demon gods, there came forth, in the full sight of all that multitude, the fingers of a man's hand, which wrote in letters of fire upon the plaster the words of doom, "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHASIN." Doubtless every noble present could decipher the strange words; but none could give their meaning or connection. When it says they could not read the words, it means they could not read them understanding. God had written them in their own language; but who could make sense of four apparently unrelated terms: "NUMBERED, NUMBERED, WEIGHED, DIVIDING"? All instinctively recognized them as a message from the other world; but who could interpret the decree?

I think I see Belshazzar as he stands there with the wine-cup in his hand. I think I see the awful look of terror that comes over his countenance, the deadly pallor that overspreads his face. I see the cup fall from his nerveless hand; I note the way in which he clings to the pillar to support his trembling limbs. The word of God says "his knees smote one against another."

He called in vain, with hollow voice, for the astrologers, the soothsayers, and those learned in Chaldean lore, to explain this dreadful portent; but "they could not read the writing, nor make known to the king the interpretation thereof." While they were in fearful consternation, *(noun [Latin, to throw or strike down.] Astonishment; amazement or horror that confounds the faculties, and incapacitates a person for consultation and execution; excessive terror, wonder or surprise.)* the queen-mother came in. She seems to have occupied a place apart from all the wickedness and revelry of that great company. Almost like the representative of another world, she appears to inform the king of one who can, she is certain, read the writing and give the interpretation of it. She says, "There is a man in thy kingdom in whom is the spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of thy father light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, was found in him; whom the king Nebuchadnezzar thy father, the king, I say, thy father, made master of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers; forasmuch as an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, interpreting of dreams, and showing of hard sentences, and dissolving of doubts, were found in the same Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar: now let Daniel be called, and he will show the interpretation."

Belshazzar had been utterly indifferent to the man whom God had used in the days of his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar; but Daniel had gone on in a quiet, humble way, seeking the approbation of the One who is higher than the highest. Sent for in haste, he came in to rebuke by his very presence that godless multitude. Belshazzar addressed him in flattering terms, and promised him great honors if he would read the writing and show the interpretation of the thing. He should be clothed in scarlet, and have a chain of gold about his neck, and be the third ruler in the kingdom.

Poor, misguided monarch! of how little value would all his honors be on the morrow! How little would it mean to hold a fief *(A fee; a feud; an estate held of a superior on condition of military service.)* from him as third ruler in the kingdom, when the sun should rise the next day! Belshazzar little knew that while these momentous events were taking place in the palace, the waters of the river had been turned aside into the new channel, and the armies of the allied kings, a mighty horde, were

coming in underneath the walls in the dry river-bed, unnoticed and undetected, because the very watchmen of the city, Herodotus tells us, were all drunk. In the streets, as in the palace, myriads of revelers were spending the night in godless amusement; unclean orgies were being perpetrated in honor of the pagan gods; and the Persian army was upon them ere they were aware of their danger.

And Daniel, I suppose, knew nothing of this either; but it makes his words to Belshazzar all the more solemn and serious. " Then Daniel answered and said before the king, Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation. O thou king, the most-high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, . . . and for the majesty that he gave him, all people, nations and languages trembled and feared before him: whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down. But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him: and he was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses: they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; till he knew that the most-high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that He appointed over it whomsoever He will. "And now note the fearful indictment of the wretched monarch before whom he stood," And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thy heart, *though thou knewest all this*, but hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of His house before thee, and thou and thy lords, thy wives and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know; and THE GOD IN WHOSE HAND THY BREATH IS, AND WHOSE ARE ALL THY WAYS, HAST THOU NOT GLORIFIED: then was the part of the hand sent from Him; and this writing was written."

Daniel did not speak to Belshazzar as he had before spoken to Nebuchadnezzar. he could not have the same respect for him that he entertained for his grandfather. You will remember, when Nebuchadnezzar told his dream of the great tree, that Daniel grieved to think of the suffering that he had to pass through, and said, " The dream be to them that hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies." Tenderly and affectionately, he besought him to repent of his evil ways. But he did not talk like that to Belshazzar. He knew *his* doom was sealed, *his* day of mercy had gone by. He saw in him only a wretched, impious degenerate, who had sinned against light and knowledge, and deserved neither sympathy nor compassion. He realized that Belshazzar had gone steadily on in defiance of the God of heaven until the hour of his judgment had struck. Nothing now could avert the richly-deserved wrath of the Holy One. Faithfully the prophet proceeded to press home upon the guilty king his sinfulness and impiety; and then he solemnly went on to read and interpret the message sent from heaven. Even while he was speaking, the invading hosts were drawing nearer and nearer to the palace gates; but the guilty king, and his lords surrounding- him, were altogether unaware of what had taken place down by the river.

The meaning of the words is thus explained: **MENE**, "*numbered*"—" God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it." Belshazzar's days of probation were passed and gone. The day of his sentence had come.

**TEKEL**, "*weighed*"—"Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. "He who had exalted himself in his pride and folly was found to be "altogether lighter than vanity."

And then, note, Daniel says, PERES, "*divided*," a form of the same word UPHARSIN which he read from the wall, but implying that the division had already taken place; for instead of saying, "God is dividing thy kingdom," he declares, "Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians." It was as much as to say the blow had already fallen: it was not that God was about to do this, but it had already been accomplished. While Daniel was interpreting, the kingdom had passed to other hands.

But the foolish and unrepentant king, despite all this, seems to fancy he is still secure. He offers Daniel the worthless honors he had promised, attempting to carry out the pledges made to him, as though still in the zenith of his glory. But the awful chronicle of the Holy Spirit is: "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. Thus had the history of the head of gold come to a close, and the silver breast and arms had come upon the scene. God's word had been fulfilled, and that night Babylon fell, to rise no more forever. In that destruction, as already intimated, we may see prefigured the overthrow of all Gentile power and dominion in the Time of the End; and especially of that evil system designated in the book of the Revelation "Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth." This is the world-religious system that will be destroyed just prior to the return of the Lord from heaven.

There are those who teach that sometime in the future, literal Babylon is going to be restored, to be again destroyed; but a careful reading of Jer. 50 and 51 will make it very clear, I think, to any spiritual mind that her destruction is to be perpetual. The city is never to be revived. The Most High has visited His judgment upon it. But mystical Babylon will have reached its climax after the Church has been caught away to be with the Lord, when the papacy and all her daughters will form one great apostate organization, the refuge of all the various portions of Bible-rejecting Christendom. In *this* Babylon we see that of which the Babylon of history was a picture.

Ancient Babylon, as we have seen, was the city of idolatry, and the expression of the pride of man's heart, combining religion with self-seeking. Idolatry, properly speaking, began there. That was the place where the great tower was made, where men said, "Let us make us a name." It was no thought of building a tower to escape another possible flood that filled their minds. But they wished a center around which to rally, that they might make themselves a great name upon the earth. God had told them to scatter abroad; but they were determined not to obey Him. Unsubjects in will, they turned from Him to the worship of demons. That was the beginning of heathenism; there they commenced to worship and serve the creature more than the Creator; and every idolatrous system in the world is simply an off-shoot of that first parent stem.

And so, we find, in the mystic Babylon of the last days, the union of all human churches, only to be superseded by the worship of the Antichrist. It speaks of a glory yet to be enjoyed by the professing Church, after the Body of Christ has been caught, away to heaven, for a brief season, upon the formation of the ten-Kingdom empire, ere the kings and nations of the earth sicken of the contemptible sham, and, becoming utterly atheist, burn the harlot's flesh with fire, destroying forever the great world-church, who says in her heart, "I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow."

Some may be asking, "Do you not think that Babylon the Great is already in existence?" Surely: Babylon's description in Rev. 17 coincides too exactly with history's record of the papal church to warrant any denial of her identity. What other church has sat upon the seven hills of that great

city which ruleth over the kings of the earth? What other church has been for long centuries "drunk with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus"? What other church possessed the power and wealth ascribed to her? And where else shall we find a religious organization so delighting in names of blasphemy as she?

But the Roman communion does not alone constitute great Babylon. The harlot has daughters who, like herself, profess to be pledged to a heavenly Bridegroom while committing fornication with the world that rejected Him. "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?" Spiritual fornication is, at large, the union of the church and the state; individually, of the Christian with the world, an unhallowed alliance, opposed to the whole teaching of the New Testament. So, if Rome be emphatically the great harlot, the state-churches are her offspring; and "As is the mother, so are her daughters."

Soon the daughters will be wending their way homeward, back to the arms of their evil mother. We hear much in our times of "the reunion of Christendom"; and we need not think of it as the dream of impractical religious enthusiasts. Christendom will be reunited undoubtedly. Everything points to such an issue, and no serious student of the prophetic scriptures can question it for a moment. But when it comes to pass, it will be a Christless reunion; for it will not take place till the Body of Christ has been translated, and all who are left will have thrown off allegiance to the Word and Spirit of God, and to the Lord Jesus Christ. The apostasy must take place first. Then the man of sin will be revealed.

Christendom's sin is the rejection of the Holy Spirit; and with that necessarily comes the rejection of the Scriptures given by the Spirit's moving upon the hearts and minds of "holy men of God." But, coupled with this, comes the desire for recognition as a power in the world, lording it over men's consciences. So, when the true Church is caught away, all the professing systems will doubtless come together in one, and proudly exclaim, "Is not this great Babylon that we have built?" They will rejoice in a united Christendom, united in rejecting Christ, doing despite to the Holy Spirit, and throwing dishonor upon the word of God! All will be on a carnal and Satanic basis, and will last but for a brief season were being overthrown with indignation by the nations, who will resent any religious obligations when the Spirit of life has departed.

This is where we see everything drifting. Babylon's pride and *hauteur*, (*noun Pride, haughtiness; insolent manner or spirit.*) will become so insufferable that men will say, as in France, Spain, and other Latin dominions, lately: "We do not want any church at all; we will destroy the whole thing, and get along without it." This is the openly-advocated doctrine of many Socialists, and is clearly what that vaunted system of economics is leading up to, little as so-called Christian Socialists may realize it.

God will "put it into their hearts to fulfil His will." He can use one evil thing to destroy another, as He has often done in the past. He used Persia to destroy Babylon, and yet the Persians were a sinful nation too, in due time to be overthrown by another power. And so, in the time of the end, a godless government will be used to destroy a Christless church, "for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her. Her doom will be as sudden and as overwhelming as was that which fell on the Babylon of Belshazzar." Thus, with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown, down, and shall be found no more at all. And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no craftsmen, of whatsoever craft he be, shall be found any more in thee; and the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in

thee; and the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee: for thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived. And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth" (Rev. 18:21-24).

Ere that hour of the vengeance of God has been reached, the message goes forth, "Come out of her, My people, that ye be not partaker of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. "He who would be faithful to the Lord is called upon to walk apart from all that bears the impress of Babylon; remembering the word, "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." In the first chapter of Genesis, we read of God creating a division, dividing the light from the darkness. This division he would ever have maintained. The devil has been busy ever since, seeking to mix up the light and the darkness. The man of God is called to walk apart from the darkness, as a child of light and of the day. May it be so with us, for His name's sake!

And now, are closing this solemn subject, I would address a word of warning to the unsaved. Belshazzar's great offence was this: Though he knew of God's dealings with Nebuchadnezzar, he sinned right on, going against light and knowledge. None are so guilty as those who so act. And to all such the word comes with awful force, "He that being often reproveth hardeneth his neck shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." Oh, be warned, I beseech you, if you have been for years familiar with these things; and do not longer dare to defy God to His face by casting His word behind your back.

You little know how near you may be to the end of God's patience with you. He lingers in grace, but He may soon strike in judgment. Your "MENE" may very soon be written on the wall your days *numbered*, your life *finished*! "TEKEL, "for you, may even now be true, *weighed*, and found wanting!

    Weighed in the balance, and wanting,  
    Weighed, but no Saviour is there,  
    Weighed, but thy soul has been trifling,  
    Weighed, and found lighter than air."

And then "PERES" shall seal your doom, and your opportunities of mercy be forever gone; your body a corpse, and your soul in hell! Divided, separated from all that is good, from all that is holy, to be lost forever, shut up to a Christless eternity.

O heed now the word of warning, I entreat you, and flee for your life to the city of refuge, which is Christ Jesus Himself, who says, "Him that cometh unto Me, I will in nowise cast out.