

Daniel
When Empires Fall (Part 2)
Daniel 5
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Well I invite you to take in your Bibles and turn to Daniel chapter 5. More than 100 years before the events of Daniel 5, the prophets, specifically the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, prophesied about Babylon. They prophesied that God would use Babylon to judge His people. In fact Jeremiah even tells us exactly how long that Babylonian captivity would last. But then both of the prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah also predicted in many places, so many places I can't begin to take you to all of them tonight, that the time would come when God would judge Babylon for her sins. Keep your finger in Daniel 5 and turn back for a moment to one passage Isaiah 46. Isaiah 46 as again remember now we're reading now from a passage that was written in the early 700's B.C., and the events of Daniel 5 are unfolding in the year 539 B.C. So we're talking a long spread before it happened and here's what Isaiah writes in Isaiah 46:1. "Bel," these are Babylon's idols, "Bel has bowed down, Nebo stoops over; their images are consigned to the beasts and the cattle." In other words when Babylon is captured her idols will be captured too and will have to be carted off, that's how worthless they are. "the things that you carry are burdensome, and load for the weary best. They stooped over, they have bowed down together; they could not rescue the burden, but have themselves gone into captivity." That's ironic; the idols have been taken away and carted off. "Listen to Me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, you who have been borne by Me from birth." You see the irony? The idols of Babylon had to be carried, but Israel's God carried them.

"You have been borne by Me from birth and have been carried from the womb; Even to your old age I will be the same, and even to your graying years I will bear you! I have done it, and I will carry you; and I will bear you and I will deliver you. To whom would you liken Me and make Me equal and compare Me, that we should be alike?"

And then he goes on to describe the absolute futility of idolatry in the verses that follow. Verse 8, "Remember this, and be assured; recall it to mind, your transgressors. Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me." And then he says, "Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that have not yet been done, saying, 'My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure'"

God says here is a mark of the true God, not only do I carry My people, rather than them having to carry Me. But I am identified as the true God because I tell you long before what's going to happen. And then he says this in verse 11, this is a reference to Cyrus and the Medes and the

Persians. “Calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of My purpose from a far country, truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it.” And then in chapter 47 you see a lament over Babylon itself, “Come down and sit in the dust, o virgin daughter of Babylon;” Babylon is treated like a young woman who is a virgin, but she is completely oblivious to her fate, she becomes a slave verse 2, “Take the millstones and grind meal, remove your veil, strip off the skirt, uncover the leg, cross the rivers.” You’ve become like a beast of burden

“Your nakedness will be uncovered, your shame also will be exposed; I will take vengeance and will not spare a man. Our Redeemer, the Lord of hosts is His name, the Holy One of Israel. Sit silently, and go into darkness, o daughter of the Chaldeans, for you will no longer be called the queen of kingdoms.”

And here God says it.

“I was angry with My people (Israel), I profaned My heritage and gave them into your hand. You did not show mercy to them, on the aged you made your yoke very heavy. Yet you said, ‘I will be queen forever.’ These things you did not consider nor remember the outcome of them. Now, then, hear this, you sensual one, who dwells securely, who says in your heart, I am, and there is no one besides me.”

This is Babylon talking, “I will not sit as a widow, I won’t know the loss of children.” I’m too powerful, “But these two things will come on you suddenly in one day;” This is remember now 150 years before the events of Daniel 5. “These two things will come on you suddenly in one day; loss of children and widowhood. They will come on you in full measure.” In other words, you’re going to cease to exist. You’re going to become a widow with no children. It’s the end. Babylon is done. “You felt secure” Verse 10,

“in your wickedness and said, ‘No one sees me.’ Your wisdom and your knowledge, they have deluded you; for you have said in your heart, ‘I am, and there is no one besides me.’ But evil will come on you which you will not know how to charm away; and disaster will fall on you for which you cannot atone; and destruction about which you do not know will come on you suddenly.”

And notice how this chapter ends, “and there is none to save you.” This is the word of our God. This is what He promised He would do. He used Babylon as a tool in His hand, but He held Babylon accountable for her sins and said her day would come. That’s what we’re reading about in Daniel chapter 5. Turn there with me. Daniel chapter 5, Daniel shows us in this chapter powerfully how those prophecies and many others were fulfilled and accomplished. Here in chapter 5 we learn that God is completely sovereign over the rise and fall of the empires of men.

Through Daniel's own experience we see how this timeless principle of God's sovereignty fleshed itself out in the life of a powerful king and one of history's greatest empires. And God had planted His man right in the middle so that we get a bird's eye view. Now in this incredible account in Daniel 5 we discover four crucial lessons about God's sovereign control of political leaders and their kingdoms.

Let me just say that if you missed part one then you're going to be suffering a bit from a disadvantage, I'm going to try to just really briefly summarize what we covered then but I would encourage you to go back and catch up because it would make what we cover tonight even richer in terms of your understanding of it. But here are the four crucial lessons, let me remind you of a couple that we've already looked at. First of all the defiance of Yahweh and here's the lesson – no government no matter how defiant is beyond God's sovereignty. We see this lesson in the first four verses of Daniel 5, read it with me, follow along.

“Belshazzar the king held a great feast for a thousand of his nobles, and he was drinking wine in the presence of the thousand. When Belshazzar tasted the wine, he gave orders to bring the gold and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God which was in Jerusalem; and the king and his nobles his wives and his concubines drank from them. They drank the wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone.”

As I noted for you last time this was no ordinary feast. The date of these events was October 12th the year 539 B.C. Two days before this on October 10th, Cyrus had badly beaten the Babylon's army under the leadership of Belshazzar's father Nabonidus, at a place called Sippar. The night of this feast, two days later, Nabonidus had fled, he was the real king of Babylon, his son Belshazzar was a co-regent sitting on the throne. Belshazzar and his forces had withdrawn within the great city of Babylon and the city was actually at this very moment was under siege by one of Cyrus's generals. So what was the purpose of this feast? This is important to understand. There were several of them; first of all it was partly just to celebrate a normal annual festival that was held in the country of Babylon, in the empire of Babylon.

But Belshazzar had a couple of specific purposes for this specific celebration as well. Another one was to build morale for his people and to show contempt for the Persian army outside the wall. Babylon was considered to be an impregnable city. They had stored up rations for 20 years of siege. They didn't believe the walls could be breached. And so this was a party to essentially thumb their noses at the Persians who were outside the wall. The city of Babylon simply cannot be taken. There was a third possible reason and that was to celebrate his own

coronation. Some historians believe after his father Nabonidus' defeat two days before at Sippar, about fifty miles north of Babylon, Belshazzar took the opportunity to proclaim himself king of the empire. So, this annual festival also became an occasion to potentially to celebrate his own coronation. But his purposes in the end were far more sinister than those. Because there's a fourth reason for this festival and that was to personally challenge Yahweh, Israel's God who had predicted that Babylon would fall to the Persians.

I mean think about this why out of all of the great nations that Babylon had conquered did he choose the vessels from the temple of Israel that night? According to verses 22-24 which we'll see tonight it was deliberate. And it was deliberate because in the third year of Belshazzar's reign, this is according to Daniel 8; Daniel had prophesied that Babylon would fall to the Persians. Belshazzar had undoubtedly heard about that prophecy, and so he ordered the goblets from the temple of Yahweh brought as a deliberate act of defiance against Israel's God. It was his way to say, it's not going to happen. That's the defiance of Yahweh. And the lesson is listen it doesn't matter how defiant a government may be, it's not beyond God's sovereignty. That's what we're going to see unfold.

Secondly you have the writing on the wall, and this is where we ended last time, and the lesson in this section from verses 5-16 is simply this, no empire no matter how powerful or protected is beyond God's reach. At the height of Belshazzar's drunkenness and immorality and blasphemy, this party that was nothing more than a drunken orgy suddenly the band stopped playing and the party stopped and a man's fingers appeared on the wall. Look at verse 5. "Suddenly the fingers of a man's hand emerged and began writing opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, and the king saw the back of the hand that did the writing." Out of the wall apparently comes this hand and there near the king in an area well-lit in the palace, in this banquet hall is a hand and it's writing. Verse 6. "Then the king's face grew pale and his thoughts alarmed him." This man is terrified, so much so that he loses control, "his hip joints went slack and his knees began knocking together." This sobered him up. "The king called aloud to bring in the conjurers, the Chaldeans and the diviners. The king spoke and said to the wise men of Babylon, 'Any man who can read this inscription and explain its interpretation to me shall be clothed with purple and have a necklace of gold around his neck, and have authority as third ruler in the kingdom.'"

He'll be number three in the kingdom. My father Nabonidus number one, I number two and this man will be number three.

"Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the inscription or make known its interpretation to the king. Then King Belshazzar was (even more alarmed) greatly alarmed, his face grew even paler, and his nobles were perplexed."

Into the scene comes the queen mother, in verses 10-12

“The queen entered the banquet hall because of the words of the king and his nobles; the queen spoke and said, “O king, live forever! Do not let your thoughts alarm you or your face be pale. There is a man in your kingdom in whom is a spirit of the holy gods; (or perhaps the spirit of the Holy God) and in the days of your father illumination, insight and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods were found in him. And King Nebuchadnezzar, your father, (that is your ancestor, specifically here your grandfather because of Nabonidus’ marrying King Nebuchadnezzar’s daughter, he becomes his grandfather) your father the king appointed him chief of the magicians, conjurers, Chaldeans and diviners. This was because an extraordinary spirit, knowledge and insight, interpretation of dreams, explanation of enigmas and solving of difficult problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar. Let Daniel now be summoned and he will declare the interpretation.”

As I said this was either Belshazzar’s grandmother, the wife of Nebuchadnezzar or this was Belshazzar’s mother, the wife of Nabonidus and probably Nebuchadnezzar’s daughter. That’s the more likely connection. So this is his mother. Having heard from his mother then the king gives a charge in verses 13-16.

“Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king spoke and said to Daniel, ‘Are you that Daniel who is one of the exiles from Judah, whom my father the king brought from Judah? Now I have heard about you that a spirit of the gods is in you, and that illumination, insight and extraordinary wisdom have been found in you. Just now the wise men and the conjurers were brought in before me that they might read this inscription and make its interpretation known to me, but they could not declare the interpretation of the message. But I personally have heard about you, that you are able to give interpretations and solve difficult problems. Now if you are able to read the inscription and make its interpretation known to me, you will be clothed with purple and wear a necklace of gold around your neck and you will have authority as the third ruler in the kingdom.”

That brings us tonight to the third crucial lesson about God’s sovereignty over this world’s rulers and empires. It’s the words of the prophet. This is verses 17-28. And the lesson in this section is this – no ruler no matter how wicked is beyond God’s verdict. God sits in judgement on every human ruler and no matter how wicked, how powerful, how seemingly protected God watches and issues His verdict.

Now picture the scene here. As Daniel is brought in the crowds was hushed and all eyes are on this old prophet as he was ushered into the room. He's now about 80 years old. He's been in Babylon for some 66 years. Probably retired or semi-retired, out of pocket as Belshazzar has brought in his new younger administration and has taken a different direction. He's probably prayed for such an opportunity for years. And so you have first Daniel's introduction in verse 17. "Then Daniel answered and said before the king, 'Keep your gifts for yourself or give your rewards to someone else;'" Daniel's not being rude here, he's simply making a very important point, he's saying listen I just want you know that my gifts and my prophecies are not for sale. After he delivers his message, he accepts these gifts but he will not allow personal gain to change or alter his message or even give the appearance of that. Verse 17 goes on to say, "however, I will read the inscription to the king and make the interpretation known to him." Notice Daniel had no doubt of his ability to read and interpret the writing. God may very well have already revealed this message to him.

Now at this point Daniel had a captive audience, a captive audience of the king, all the king's wives and concubines, the queen mother, and the thousand most important and influential people in the empire of Babylon, more than that before he can explain the writing, he needs to explain the reason why. And so like any good prophet, he preaches a sermon. He began by recounting the story of Nebuchadnezzar that's recorded in full in chapter 4. Nebuchadnezzar's story beginning in verse 18, "O king, the Most High God granted sovereignty, grandeur, glory and majesty to Nebuchadnezzar your father." Again, your grandfather, your ancestor. It was Yahweh, notice, the Most High God, Israel's God who had given Nebuchadnezzar his power, authority, wealth and honor. It was not the gods of Babylon; it was the only true and living God. Verse 19, "Because of the grandeur which Yahweh bestowed on Nebuchadnezzar, all the peoples, nations, and men of every language feared and trembled before him; whomever he wished he killed and whomever he wished he spared alive; and whomever he wished he elevated and whomever he wished he humbled." Now these words are not necessarily to give us the idea that Nebuchadnezzar was just an impulsive capricious man. That's not the point here. The point of this verse is to say that Nebuchadnezzar was such a powerful king that he exercised absolute, unhampered, unrestrained power. He was not bound by a constitution or a congress or a supreme court. He had no political handlers, no focus groups. He didn't look at the latest survey to decide what he ought to do. He was absolute in his power.

Now this description alone emphasized the folly of Belshazzar's actions. Remember Belshazzar is a co-regent with his father. The great Nebuchadnezzar had submitted to Yahweh's sovereignty yet Belshazzar who hardly deserved to be mentioned in the same breath had not. Verse 20, "But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit became so proud that he behaved arrogantly, he was deposed from his royal throne and his glory was taken away from him." Literally the Aramaic says, his heart was lifted up and his spirit was hardened so that he acted proudly. That's the idea. In other words, because his heart was hard toward God, he acted

proudly. And what were the consequences of this arrogance? Verse 21 and we went through this story in detail and here's the summary of it. "He was driven away from mankind, and his heart was made like that of beasts, and his dwelling place" and this is by the way, the only time in Daniel this fact was mentioned. "his dwelling place was with the wild donkeys." As one commentator said, "God can take an arrogant ruler and essentially make an ass out of him." It goes on to say in verse 21, "He was given grass to eat like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until he recognized that the Most High God is ruler over the realm of mankind and that He sets over it whomever He wishes." There's the story and it's a story that Belshazzar knew, because next Daniel moves on to Belshazzar's sin.

Verse 22, "Yet you, his son, Belshazzar," in Aramaic just as you see in English the emphasis is on you. In contrast to Nebuchadnezzar, you have behaved differently. Notice the charges against Belshazzar, there are three of them. The first charge is willful disobedience, verse 22, "Yet you, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this." By the way that Aramaic expression 'even though' occurs several times in the book. It occurs in chapter 2:8, chapter 2:41, chapter 2:45 and in all of those times it's translated because. Let's read it that way, "Yet you, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, because you knew all of this." Now the events of chapter 4 that have just been recounted to us from Nebuchadnezzar's life had occurred about 30 years before. Belshazzar would have been about 14 years old when Nebuchadnezzar died. So he would have been an early teenager when all of these events unfolded. There's evidence that he served as a chief officer in the administration of Neriglissar, just two years after Nebuchadnezzar's death. In addition, Belshazzar, his father Nabonidus was an official in Nebuchadnezzar's administration. You see what that means? That means Belshazzar would have grown up in the city of Babylon. And no doubt through his association with the royal court because his father worked there, he would have heard about these events at the very least and it's very likely that he witnessed them first hand. You see the problem with Belshazzar, and this is really important to understand, was not a lack of knowledge, but rebellion. You knew all this. You didn't humble your heart because you knew all this.

Dale Ralph Davis reminds us that this is such an important reminder for our time, "Having clear information does not guarantee the right response." You see we live in a day where the social elite assure us that the information fallacy is true. If there's a problem with human behavior, it's because there's a lack of education. Popular culture is built on this one basic assumption; education produces transformation. It goes like this, you know if our elementary kids knew more about sex that would solve the problem of sexual diseases. Having clear information does not guarantee the right response. And we see this even connected to the church. Sadly evangelical churches are filled with people who have plenty of knowledge, plenty of information, but who consistently fail to act on it, in fact act the opposite of what they know.

Dale Ralph Davis writes this, “When truth does not humble us or lead us to worship, we are simply Belshazzar clones.” Deliberate willful disobedience.

The second charge is deliberate defiance of the true God, verse 23. If the first charge is willful disobedience in spite of the fact of what he knew he still didn’t humble his heart. The second charge is deliberate defiance, verse 23, “but you have exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines have been drinking wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which do not see, hear or understand.” By the way, think about what’s happening here. Daniel is talking to the king of the greatest empire on the planet and he says to him, let me tell you something, your gods are stupid, they don’t even exist. They can’t hear, they can’t respond, they’re nothing. And you Belshazzar are challenging the real God, the Most High God.

The third charge is arrogant disrespect of God. He goes on in verse 23 to say, “But the God in whose hand are your life-breath and your ways, you have not glorified.” The very God in whose hand are your life-breath, and your ways, that is your life’s course, you have failed to glorify. You haven’t honored Him; you disrespect the God who keeps you breathing, who keeps your heart beating. You know I don’t think most people on this planet, maybe even most of us in this room really appreciate the fact that every single breath we take, every beat of our hearts is solely the result of God’s common grace. In spite of firsthand knowledge of the existence and power of Yahweh, Belshazzar deliberately chose to worship the gods of Babylon. He saw what happened with Nebuchadnezzar, he saw Nebuchadnezzar’s conversion to worship the God of Israel, and he said not for me, not for me. Verse 24, “Then the hand was sent from Him and this inscription was written out.” According to verse 24, the hand was sent because of Belshazzar’s blasphemous, defiant actions against the God of heaven. I can’t help when I read this but to think of Fitzgerald’s translation of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam which says this,

“Ah fill the cup: what boots it to repeat. How time is slipping underneath our feet:
Unborn To-morrow, and dead yesterday, why fret about them if To-day be sweet!
The Moving Finger writes and having writ, moves on: Nor all thy piety nor wit
shall lure it back to cancel half a line, nor all thy tears wash out a word of it.”

This is Belshazzar’s sin. Daniel concludes with God’s verdict, verses 25-28. In verse 25 he finally gets to the interpretation of the handwriting. This is the heart of his message. Verse 25 “Now this is the inscription that was written out: ‘MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.’” The message comes in three brief Aramaic words. The first repeated, ‘Mene, Mene, Tekel, and Upharsin’ is the word and in Aramaic, ‘Pharsin’. Now why didn’t anyone else understand these words? Well first of all Aramaic like Hebrew was written without vowels. This may have made this very short inscription hopelessly ambiguous, even though the wise men of Babylon knew

Aramaic. Now you get this if you've ever watched the Wheel of Fortune, and are willing to admit it, you've experienced this. A couple of times I've come across that program, first of all I'm left thinking about the woman who touches the letters, now there's a woman who earns her paycheck. Undoubtedly though as the wise men stared hopelessly at these Aramaic consonants, they wished that she was there and they could buy a couple of vowels. But if they recognized the words, at first glance they appeared to be nouns describing various units of weight. Something similar in English would be this, ounce, ounce, pound a hundred weight. Making sense of that and its meaning would have been nearly impossible.

Now while those Aramaic words are nouns representing various units of weight, Daniel interprets them as passive participles of the verbs from which they are formed. And so here's his interpretation, verse 26, "This is the interpretation of the message: 'MENE-God has numbered your kingdom and put an end to it.'" This word is repeated twice to stress its certainty. And it means numbered. Literally God has numbered your kingdom and caused it to be completed. If I could put it in the vernacular, God says to Belshazzar, 'your numbers up, your numbers up' Belshazzar's evil rule and life would soon be over. Verse 27, "'TEKEL'-you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient." Tekel means weighed. God had placed Belshazzar on the balances to see if he conformed to the divine standard, so on one side is Belshazzar and on the other side is the divine standard, and He found him to be seriously lacking. In fact one variation of this word means to be light. He was so light he didn't even move the scale. As one commentator describes it that God's moral laws were placed on one side of the scales and the king's wicked life on the other, Belshazzar did not measure up to God's standard of righteousness and the proud king had never repented of his sins and humbled himself before God and asked for salvation.

This is a great reminder by the way. This is part of what it means to be God. Do you understand that God does this with every single person? He weighs the life, He weighs the heart. First Samuel 2:3, "the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed." Listen God knows everything about you and me. He knows every thought you have ever had, every attitude you have ever entertained. He knows every wicked thing that has passed through your mind. He knows every word you have spoken. He knows every act you have ever committed. By Him actions are weighed. Proverbs 21:2, "Every man's way is right in his own eyes," There's the real problem, we often don't even think we are sinning, we think we are doing what's right. "But the Lord weighs the hearts." He knows what's going on inside. Motives. Proverbs 24:12, "If you say, 'See we did not know this,'" we didn't know "Does He not consider it who weighs the hearts? And does He not know it who keeps your soul? And will He not render to man according to his work?" You know what the proverb is saying? Don't think you can pull a fast one on God. It's not going to happen, it's never happened, you're not going to be the first. He knows. And He will render to each according to his work. Belshazzar you have been weighed on God's scales and you are really light.

Verse 28, “‘PERES’-your kingdom has been divided and given over to the Medes and Persians.” This final word Peres is the singular form of the earlier word ‘pharsin’. It means to be divided. But don’t think like divided into pieces, in the sense of the Medes get half and the Persians get half. That’s not the idea of this divided. This word divided means divided in the sense of destroyed, dissolved. Belshazzar’s kingdom, the great Babylon would be destroyed and parceled out. By the way the word ‘peres’ is also a word play in Aramaic because ‘peres’ has the same consonants as the Aramaic word for Persians. The kingdom would be destroyed and divided by the Persians who are at that very moment outside the walls. Can you imagine what it was like in that banquet hall when Daniel finished those words?

The fourth lesson that we find in this chapter is, I’ll call the revolution of history. Verses 29 to 31 and here’s the lesson. No empire no matter how improbable rises or falls apart from God’s decree. However improbable its fall, however powerful it may be, however unlikely that it will come down to the dust, or however improbable its rise none of that happens apart from God’s decree. God is on His throne. This section begins with Daniel rewarded after he’s given the interpretation, verse 29, “Then Belshazzar gave orders and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a necklace of gold around his neck, and issued a proclamation concerning him that he now had authority as the third ruler in the kingdom.” You know I’ve gone back and forth on why Belshazzar would have done this. He doesn’t appear to be an honorable man, so it’s possible he really is just keeping his word, and that is where many of the commentators land, but my sort of suspicious, skeptical mind wonders if he isn’t thinking, okay well fine if that’s what’s going to happen then I’m going to make you the third ruler, so when they come in the gates in a little bit you’re going to die like I’m going to die. I don’t know but regardless, it’s interesting that like Nebuchadnezzar Belshazzar honors Daniel, but unlike Nebuchadnezzar he doesn’t honor Daniel’s God.

Obviously the fact that he conferred these promised gifts on Daniel shows that he believed the interpretation that he received. And this is an indirect acknowledgment of God’s power and God’s reality and yet there is no evidence that Belshazzar ever repented of his sins and called out to God. Think about that, given this solemn warning as we know just hours before his death, he still remained in silent rebellion toward God. But there were no more warnings for Belshazzar. Scripture says, God is slow to anger but it doesn’t say God never gets angry. God’s patience can be tested and it will not last forever. His Spirit will not always strive with man. Proverbs 29:1 says, “A man who hardens his neck after much reproof (that was Belshazzar) will be suddenly broken beyond remedy.”

The second part of this lesson after Daniel is rewarded is that Babylon itself falls. Verse 30, “That same night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain.” With that one brief sentence Daniel documents one of history’s greatest events. The fall of the Babylonian Empire and the beginning

of the Medo-Persian Empire. Now again, remember how unlikely this was, let me just remind you of what the city of Babylon was like. I've already walked you through this, I'm not going to go through all the details, I'm just going to remind you that it was protected by a massive miles long double walled system that was absolutely impregnable. The reconstructions, the renderings we have from the descriptions that were given show it to be an absolutely magnificent city. The main entrance way from the Ishtar gate leading through the city was this huge thoroughfare. Mammoth buildings, great temples, impregnable walls. It was also surrounded by the River Euphrates. And in fact, the river ran through the city providing it water and around the city part of it was diverted to form a kind of moat, around this magnificent city. So how did it fall? How did this happen? Well Daniel doesn't tell us, but the Greek historians Herodotus who wrote in the fifth century B.C. around, or shortly after this time, and Xenophon who wrote in the 400's and late 300's give us a number of specific details about that night. Let me give them to you because they just add some insight to what went on here.

Xenophon describes exactly how the Persians penetrated Babylon's defenses. They deliberately chose the night of the annual feast, knowing that the people would be drunk and distracted. They had dug upstream, think of up the Euphrates, they had dug a canal upstream and at just the right time on that night they diverted the Euphrates River in to a marsh, the river that flowed through the river^[BF1]. The water level of the river fell rapidly and the Medes and the Persians waded in under the walls, including where the water ran into the city proper providing water.

Undoubtedly this had begun even as Daniel was interpreting the writing to Belshazzar.

Amazingly once the Persians waded into the city and got inside that magnificent city they found that the bronze gates that led into the inner city that were its internal defenses were open. Many historians believe it was treason on the part of some of the Babylonians who had tired of their absent king and his pathetic son Belshazzar. How in the world could that happen? How could a city like Babylon fall? In a night? Well, there's a compelling explanation for the victory of the Persians. 150 years before the events of that fateful night the prophet Isaiah explained exactly how it would happen. Go back to Isaiah again and look at Isaiah chapter 44. Now remember this is 150 years before. Isaiah 44:24 "Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, and the One who formed you from the womb, I am Yahweh, the maker of all things, stretching out the heavens by Myself and spreading out the earth all alone, causing the omens of boasters to fail, making fools out of diviners." He's talking about Babylon, "causing wise men to draw back and turning their knowledge into foolishness, confirming the word of His servant and performing the purpose of His messengers. It is I, (God says) who says of Jerusalem, 'She shall be inhabited!'" This is going to happen under Cyrus, "and of the cities of Judah, 'They will be built.' And I will raise up her ruins again. It is I who says to the depth of the sea, 'Be dried up!' and I will make your rivers dry." Now watch verse 28, remember 150 years before, Cyrus hasn't been born.

"It is I who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd! And he will perform all My desire.'
And he declares of Jerusalem, 'She will be built.' And of the temple, 'Your

foundation will be laid.’ Thus, says the Lord to Cyrus His anointed, whom I have taken by the right hand, to subdue nations before him and to loose the loins of kings;”

We just read about that, now watch this,

“to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut: I will go before you and make the rough places smooth; I will shatter the doors of bronze and cut through their iron bars. I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden wealth of secret places, so that you may know that it is I, Yahweh, the God of Israel, who calls you by your name.”

And why have I done this?

“For the sake of Jacob My servant, and Israel My chosen one, I have also called you by your name; I have given you a title of honor though you have not known Me. I am Yahweh, and there is no other; besides Me there is no God. I will gird you, though you have not known Me; that men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun that there is no one besides Me. I am Yahweh, and there is no other. The One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity; I am Yahweh who does all these.”

That is an incredible prophecy. And that’s exactly what happened. Why were those bronze gates open? How in the world did the Persians penetrate the inner defenses of that magnificent city? The answer is because God says, “I will shatter gates of bronze.” They’ll be open before you, because I did it.

Shortly after the Persian’s entered the city Belshazzar the Babylonian king was executed. Xenophon also told us that the Persian soldiers were directed to the palace of Belshazzar by one of Nabonidus’, his father’s former officials. This is an interesting back story. The man who led them into the palace to find Belshazzar was a man named Gobryas, who’s only son Belshazzar had murdered in a fit of jealousy during a royal hunting expedition. It was Gobryas who led the Persian soldiers into the palace where they found Belshazzar with a dagger in his hand about to take his own life, they overpowered him and his attendants, they took his dagger and then they executed him. Xenophon the Greek historian writes this, ‘they avenged themselves upon the wicked king.’ Even a Greek historian describes Belshazzar as the wicked king.

So what’s the main point of this chapter? I don’t want you to miss this. Remember the overarching theme of Daniel is God’s sovereignty over all the affairs of human history particularly its rulers and its nations and its empires. And here’s the point of this chapter and

how it fits into that theme. There are days in the life of every person, nation and empire a few days that changed the entire course of life and of history. October 12th 539 B.C. was one of those days. And Daniel wants us to know that on a day when the world literally turned upside down, one day when the world's greatest city was under siege. When the world's most powerful ruler was executed, when one empire crumbled into the dust and another took its place, even on a day like this our great and sovereign God was on His throne and not only was He on His throne, but He was accomplishing His perfect and all wise plan. Always in complete control. God put Daniel in the middle of one of the greatest days in human history with a front row bird's eye seat so that he could tell us God was there and He always is.

The last part of this chapter is verse 31, its Medo-Persia rises. Verse 31 says, "So Darius the Mede received the kingdom at about the age of sixty-two." Now the Hebrew text attaches this verse to chapter six, which is where we'll consider it in more detail. So understand then that here Daniel assures us that history with all its nations and its empires is under the absolute control of a sovereign God and He directs it as He pleases. No government no matter how defiant is beyond God's sovereignty. No empire no matter how powerful or protected is beyond God's reach. No ruler no matter how wicked is beyond God's verdict. And no empire no matter how improbable rises or falls apart from God's decree.

What are some additional implications of this chapter just very briefly? Here are some lessons specifically for us as we think about it and apply it. Number one, it should comfort your heart. This chapter should comfort your heart in the midst of war and political unrest. Listen if we were to find ourselves as a nation under attack, under siege as we have been at points in our history, think World War 2, think December 7th, 1941, think other occasions, even 9/11. If that were to happen and it likely will in the days ahead in some way or another, understand that God is on His throne. The nations rage but the universe's throne is still occupied.

Number two; it should shape your view of politics, local, national, and international. Remember the power behind the politics. Every time you read or hear the news, remember, remember Christian, Christians have such a hard time with this; remember that you are not on a runaway train to an uncertain and unplanned future. God has a sweeping plan for history and He is working every single detail of that plan. Not one ruler, not one nation, not one kingdom is out of His control.

Number three; it should remind all who are not in Christ of the inevitability of divine judgment. Listen don't presume on God's patience. The story of Belshazzar reminds us that you even in this life can go far enough in your sin and rebellion that you invite God's immediate temporal judgment on yourself. Sometimes God brings that judgment in this life, but it always happens after this life. Hebrews 9:27, "It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment."

Number four; this chapter should direct your response to God. You should humble yourself, recognize God's sovereignty over your life-breath and your ways and acknowledge your total dependence on Him. Listen there is an arrogance that goes with unbelief and God will not stand for it. You need to humble yourself before God.

Number five; this chapter should encourage you never to put your earthly hopes in any nation or kingdom. No earthly empire let me say it again, no earthly empire, no great world power including ours will endure. There's only one that endures. Daniel 2:44, "In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put to an end all these kingdoms but it will itself endure forever." Folks, our hope is not in human government however strong, however well matched to us it might be. Hebrews 12 puts it this way. "We receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken." And it's the only one that counts. Put your trust in God and His kingdom. Not in the kingdom of men. Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for this magnificent chapter. Thank You that in Your providence You orchestrated all of history so that Your prophet would be right there in the middle, in the banquet hall to see this drama unfold and to tell us about it so that we could learn that not only on that day but on every other day and in every other throne room in every other oval office, You are in control. Father I pray that You would help us to worship You. Thank You that we are part of an unshakable kingdom now, a spiritual kingdom in which our Lord rules. And thank You that someday He will return to this world and will establish a kingdom here that will never be destroyed. Here for a thousand years and then in a new earth forever. Father we bless You and thank You, help us to think like Christians. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.