

March 12th

Pride comes before a fall. For 87 years the Babylonians totally dominated the Middle East from 626 BC to 539 BC. Their capital was Babylon on the Euphrates River, what we now think of as Iraq. They had a slick method of keeping themselves dominant. When they conquered a territory, they took the learned, the artisans and skilled people back to Babylon, leaving the poor people of an area under a governor. Nebuchadnezzar took the important Jews to Babylon. By 539 BC Nabonidus and his son Belshazzar, had succeeded Nebuchadnezzar. Beyond the Tigris-Euphrates valley were barbarians, the Medes and Persians. But the Persians were curious about how things worked, employed Greeks and picked up a lot of expertise from Babylon.

Nabonidus was in charge of the army while Belshazzar was in charge of the city. The Greek historian Herodotus wrote that the Babylonians lost a battle to the mounted Persians, but didn't worry about it very much. They retreated to a fortified line that included the mighty Euphrates River where they had a lot of provisions laid up. They were casual about the siege; Belshazzar called for a big banquet for a thousand of his nobles and advisors. Things got boozy and Belshazzar brought out the gold and silver cups from the Temple in Jerusalem. Suddenly a human hand's image appeared on the palace wall writing 4 words. The king turned pale with fear (Daniel 5:1-4). The Queen Mother told him "Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means." Daniel was a Jewish young man with linguistic abilities and was said to be able to interpret dreams.

Daniel said, "This is the message that is written" Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin. This is what the words mean: Mene means 'numbered'—God has numbered the days of your reign and has brought it to an end. Tekel means 'weighed'. You have been weighed on the balance and have failed the test. Parsin means 'divided'—your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and Persians." (Daniel 5:25-28)

The stunned king would have probably killed Daniel forthwith, but that very night the Medo-Persians had hatched a plot. Behind their army that camped across the river from the Babylonians, Greek and Persian engineers with a host of laborers had dug a huge canal to divert much of the river water. Thus with a shallow Euphrates, during the night, the Persian army launched a surprise attack across the river against the lax and arrogant Babylonian defenders. They captured the palace and killed Belshazzar within hours (Daniel 5:30). Overnight, Cyrus II, king of Medes and Persians captured the empire intact. It was one of the greatest upset victories of world history, ranking with Adrianople, Salamis, Marathon pass, Spanish Armada and San Jacinto.