

LESSON 18

Last week we ended by reading 5:25-28 and discussing the words on the wall: Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin. These words can also be translated to mean three different measures of weights. This ambiguity may also explain why the king's advisors were unable to tell the king to what the words referred. For example, does the word "pound" refer to a weight or to a monetary value? You need to know the context.

Liberals have latched onto this possible meaning and have suggested that instead of being written by God, the words were really written by a waiter at the feast who was just trying to remember how much food to serve. (This sort of crazy theory would be funny if it were not so sad. Maybe some day those liberals will also see the writing on the wall!)

Other commentators have also stressed the connection of these words with measures of weight — even though Daniel gives an interpretation in verses 26-28 that does *not* deal with measures of weight. We know what the words meant because Daniel tells us, and he did not say that they meant different measurements of weight. Nevertheless, some commentators have created elaborate theories based on these words meaning measures of weight.

For example, some argue that mene refers to mena, which equalled 50 shekels, and that upharsin (half a mena) equalled 25 shekels. They also say that tekem refers to shekel. Thus, the four words would then have stood for: mena, 50 shekels; mena, 50 shekels; tekem, 1 shekel; upharsin, 25 shekels. If you add that up you get 126 shekels. We are also told that a shekel can be divided up into 20 gerahs (Ezekiel 45:12). That would mean that the 126 shekels of Daniel 5:25 is equivalent to 2520 gerahs. Where

have we seen 2520 before? That was the number of years that the Jehovah's Witnesses counted from their (incorrect) date for the destruction of the temple to arrive at 1914 as the year the kingdom was established! (Recall that seven years of Nebuchadnezzar's madness times 360 days in a year gave us 2520.) So does this prophecy relate to something 2520 years away? No, both the text and history tell us that the prophecy was fulfilled within *hours* of when it was given. Also, Daniel gave us the meaning of the terms in verses 26-28, and he did not interpret them to mean various numbers of shekels.

Yes, numbers are used figuratively in the Bible. We will see some used that way in later chapters of this book. But when numbers are used figuratively in the Bible — we are given the numbers! The numbers are in the text! Here there are no numbers — not in the words on the wall, and not in the interpretation of the words on the wall. Once we start making up numbers, or assigning numeric codes to non-numeric words in the Bible, there is no end to what we could come up with. The first step to determining what a number in the Bible means is to actually have a number in the Bible — and we don't get past that first step here.

This is a good lesson for us as we approach some of the more difficult chapters in this book. Context is crucial, and we need to pay very close attention to what the text itself tells us about the visions that will be described.

You can “prove” just about anything with letters and numbers if you are willing to disregard context and common sense. You may have seen the books that purport to find secret codes embedded in the letters of the Bible when they are shifted and counted in certain ways.

The number 2520 coming up twice must mean something, right? Wrong. How old was William Shakespeare in 1611 when the King James Version was published? He was 46. What is the 46th word in Psalm 46? “Shake.” What is the 46th word counting backward from the end of Psalm 46 (ignoring the word “Selah” at the end)? “Spear.” Therefore William Shakespeare wrote Psalm 46. Right? Wrong! If you

think that is about the silliest theory you have ever heard about the Bible, then you should read more Daniel commentaries!

Daniel 5:29

29 Then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

Belshazzar was true to his word even though Daniel had given him very bad news. He made Daniel “king for the day” — literally!

One might have thought that Belshazzar would have had Daniel killed on the spot for his effrontery. Why didn't he? He may not have wanted to appear untrue to his word in front of his guests. But if the king had survived the night, Daniel might not have fared very well after the guests were gone. The king may also have thought that Daniel's God would change his mind and spare him if he bestowed gifts on Daniel and made him his prime minister.

Why did Daniel *accept* the king's gifts in verse 29 after he had *refused* them in verse 17? First, verse 29 doesn't make it sound like Daniel had much choice in the matter. Second, as we have said, the gifts were meaningless. What good was it to be proclaimed (to the people in the room, not throughout the empire) the third ruler in an empire that would collapse in only a few hours?

Daniel 5:30-31

30 In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain. 31 And Darius the Median took the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old.

With its typical understatement of world events, the Bible uses only a few words to report one of the most significant events in world history, the fall of the Babylonian Empire and the beginning of the Medo-Persian Empire. That night the city fell and with it the last remnants of Babylonian dominance. Belshazzar was executed only a few hours later.

According to the Nabonidus Chronicle, the date was the sixteenth of the month Tishri, which most scholars agree would have been October 12, 539 BC. The banquet would then have been held on the night before, October 11, 539 BC.

The Greek historians Herodotus (484-425 BC) and Xenophon (434-355 BC) tell us how the Medes and the Persians took the city. The walls surrounding the city of Babylon were huge — there were two sets of double walls extending for miles (the outermost system being 17 miles in length). The outer walls were approximately 25 feet wide and rose to a height of at least 40 feet. These fortifications were too difficult to challenge, and so according to Herodotus and Xenophon, the Medo-Persian army diverted water from the Euphrates River (which ran under the walls of Babylon) into a marsh. With the level of the water lowered, the soldiers were able to wade the river under the walls and enter the city. Xenophon confirms what we see here in Chapter 5. He wrote that “the whole city that night seemed to be given up to revelry.” He also said that the king was killed the night the city was taken.

Here is how Herodotus, writing about 80 years after these events, explained what happened on that night:

Hereupon the Persians who had been left for the purpose at Babylon by the river-side, entered the stream, which had now sunk so as to reach about midway up a man's thigh, and thus got into the town. 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 took the city. Owing to vast size of the place, the inhabitants of the central parts (as the residents at Babylon declare), long after the outer portions of the town were taken, knew nothing about what had chanced, but as they were engaged in a festival, continued dancing and revelling until they learnt the capture but too certainly.

Xenophon tells us that Gobryas, commander under Cyrus, led his soldiers into the palace, where they found the king holding a dagger, evidently with which to take his own life. According to Xenophon, the king and his attendants were overpowered, and the invaders "avenged themselves upon the wicked king," which obviously means that they executed him.

The Nabonidus Chronicle tells of Cyrus' invasion of Babylonia and the subsequent flight of Nabonidus after Sippar was taken on the fourteenth of Tishri (October 10, 539 BC). On the sixteenth day of Tishri (October 12, 539 BC), Cyrus' commander (Ugbaru) and the Medo-Persian army entered Babylon without a battle. Cyrus was welcomed by the city's inhabitants when he arrived on the third day of the month Arahshamnu (October 29, 539 BC).

The Cyrus Cylinder also records that Babylon was captured without a battle and that the citizens received Cyrus warmly.

Xenophon says that Gobryas was originally one of Nabonidus' governors and that he defected to Cyrus partly because the son of Nabonidus (Belshazzar) killed his only son in a fit of jealousy during a royal hunt. One of the ancient tablets says that the city yielded to Gobryas—Cyrus not appearing for several weeks—and that Gobryas was made governor and appointed other governors.

We see in these verses the fulfillment of prophecies from Isaiah 21 and Jeremiah 51 about the fall of Babylon.

Isaiah 21:9 — *And, behold, here cometh a chariot of men, with a couple of horsemen. And he answered and said, Babylon is fallen, is fallen; and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground.*

Jeremiah 51:52-55 — *Wherefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will do judgment upon her graven images: and through all her land the wounded shall groan. Though Babylon should mount up to heaven, and though she should fortify the height of her strength, yet from me shall spoilers come unto her, saith the Lord. A sound of a cry cometh from Babylon, and great destruction from the land of the Chaldeans: Because the Lord hath spoiled Babylon, and destroyed out of her the great voice; when her waves do roar like great waters, a noise of their voice is uttered.*

Was all of this good news or bad news for God's people? It would have been possible for the next kingdom to be worse than the first, but not in this case. Though not related by the book of Daniel, the Medo-Persian kingdom's rise to power led quickly to the Decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1-4), which allowed the return of the Jewish people to Palestine.

Verse 30 tells us that Belshazzar was killed that very night, and verse 31 tells us that Darius the Mede took over after Belshazzar.

Darius the Mede

Who was Darius the Mede? We also looked at this question in our introductory lessons. One commentator has written:

The references to Darius the Mede in the Book of Daniel have long been recognized as providing the most serious historical problem of the book. ... The claim of the Book of Daniel to be a work of history, written by a well-informed contemporary, is shattered beyond repair by this fiction of Darius the Mede.

So does that mean this commentator rejected the message of Daniel? Not at all! Here is what else he said:

[The book of Daniel's] very historical mistakes add to the fulness of its religious message to our hearts, for the God Who maketh the wrath of men to praise Him can also convert the mistakes of His servants, whose hearts are consecrated to His service, to rich use.

That commentator is wrong on both counts. If the book of Daniel has no historical reliability, then the book of Daniel has no religious message at all. You cannot separate the two!

What does Jesus think about the historical reliability of Daniel? In Matthew 24 and Mark 13, Jesus used the prophecies of Daniel to provide warnings for his disciples to escape the coming destruction of Jerusalem.

So was that commentator correct that Darius was just a fictional character from Daniel's imagination? Not at all.

First, it is interesting to note that Daniel gives far more information about the personal background of Darius than he does about Belshazzar or even about Nebuchadnezzar.

- Daniel 5:30 says that Darius was 62 when he began to reign. (This use of a very particular detail does not sound like a vague recollection about a forgotten or imagined king.)
- Daniel 5:30 also tells us his nationality — Darius was a Mede.
- Daniel 9:1 says that Darius was the son of Ahasuerus.

Thus, unlike even Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel tells us the age, the nationality, and the parentage of Darius.

Second, just because the name “Darius the Mede” has not been found in any ancient inscriptions does not mean that he did not exist. The critics made similar claims about Belshazzar, and archaeology later proved them wrong. (We wait in vain for their apology.)

Who then was Darius? We suggested in our introductory comments that Darius the Mede may have been an early governor of Babylon under Cyrus. The references to Darius in Daniel do not say that he ruled the Persian empire — only that he took control of the conquered Chaldean empire. It was a well-known practice of Cyrus to appoint Medes to high positions to foster goodwill and loyalty.

Which governor was he? John Whitcomb in his book *Darius the Mede* wrote the following:

Gubaru the Governor of Babylon fits the Biblical description of Darius the Mede so remarkably that the writer believes he will be recognized in due time as the monarch who played such an important role in the life of Daniel and the fall of Babylon.

So far we have mentioned three names of people who were governors or generals under Cyrus: Ugbaru (Cyrus’ general from the Nabonidus Chronicles), Gubaru

(Cyrus' governor from the same source), and Gobryas (the defector from Xenophon). How are these three people related?

As it turns out, that is a very difficult question to answer. Gobryas is the Greek form of both Ugbaru and Gubaru, and so the use of that name by Xenophon could refer to either person (and he seems to have confused the two).

Xenophon tells us that Gobryas was well advanced in years, and Ugbaru died three weeks after the city fell, so many equate the two on the basis of that clue, but others argue that Gobryas refers instead to Gubaru.

Should it concern us that Xenophon said that Gobryas was an Assyrian? No, because he referred to all Babylonians as Assyrians. Also, Gobryas could have been both a Babylonian and a Mede — just as Daniel was both a Babylonian (as a citizen of Babylon) and a Jew.

Still others argue that Ugbaru and Gubaru are the same person, just with different names in the Nabonidus Chronicles. This is unlikely because Ugbaru died soon after the city fell, whereas Gubaru did not.

In short, we know that Cyrus put generals in charge of his conquered territories, and we know that either one or two such men were very likely placed in that role here — either Ugbaru or Gubaru, who may be the same person. If not the same person, then Gubaru was likely placed in charge after the death of Ugbaru, which occurred only three weeks after the city fell. Either person could be the Gobryas we read about in Xenophon. If two people are involved, I think Gubaru is the best candidate because Ugbaru died so soon after the city fell.

What is the evidence for equating Darius with Gubaru? Ancient records reveal that Gubaru did govern Babylon during the period in question. For example, the Nabonidus Chronicles relate that Cyrus appointed Gubaru as the governor of Babylon immediately after the city was conquered. He may have continued in that position for 14 years.

The Nabonidus Chronicles reveal that Gubaru installed subgovernors in Babylon, and Daniel 6:1-2 tells us that Darius the Mede appointed subordinates to rule the kingdom.

Daniel 5:31 literally reads, “Darius the Mede received the kingdom.” That may mean that Darius (Gubaru) “received the kingdom” from a superior, namely, Cyrus. Likewise the declaration in Daniel 9:1 that Darius “was made ruler” may suggest that a superior (Cyrus) gave Darius his authority.

Concerning the designation of Darius as “king,” a governor could loosely be spoken of in this manner. He represented the royal authority after the king’s departure.

According to Daniel 5:31, Darius’ age was 62 years, and Xenophon reported that Gobryas was “a man well advanced in years.” (But this point assumes that Gobryas is Gubaru.)

If two people are involved, then Ugbaru is another possibility. But how could the Darius of Daniel be the Ugbaru of the Nabonidus Chronicles if the latter died only three weeks after the fall of Babylon?

At first glance, we only have to account for a few days of activity. We have the events in Chapter 6, which some commentaries suggest took about a week, and we have the visions in Chapters 9 and 11, which likely occurred during a single day or two. But Chapter 6 tells us that Darius set up 120 princes and three presidents, which must have taken some time, and it seems to me likely took more than just a week (but maybe not).

And, in fact, we have to account for something else as well. Darius knew about Daniel in Chapter 6, and he cared deeply about what happened to him. That relationship must have taken some time to develop, certainly more than three weeks.

An insurmountable problem for Ugbaru? Not necessarily. If Ugbaru is the Gobryas of Xenophon, then he had been a Babylonian general who defected to Cyrus. That means he could have known Daniel prior to the fall of the city.

Are there any other possibilities for Darius? Yes, there is one other strong possibility that we briefly considered in our introductory lessons, but dismissed. Having studied the issue some more, I now think we may have dismissed that possibility too quickly. Darius may have been none other than King Cyrus himself.

What is the evidence for equating Darius with Cyrus? Dual titles were not uncommon, and Cyrus and Darius were both titles. Since he was king of both Median and Persian territories, it might be expected that Cyrus the Persian would have had another title, such as Darius the Mede, that pertained particularly to the Medes. Herodotus recorded that Cyrus sometimes was referred to as the “king of the Medes” even after the fall of Babylon.

Dual Median and Persian titles also would accurately reflect Cyrus’ ancestry. The title “Darius the Mede” (5:31) indicates that Darius was of Median lineage, and later in the book the author specifically states that Darius was “a Mede by descent” (9:1). How can this be explained if Cyrus was a Persian? Cyrus’ father was a Persian, but his mother was the daughter of Astyages, the king of Media, and thus Cyrus was half Median. The Jews viewed a child of a mixed marriage according to the maternal descent. So perhaps Daniel followed a common Jewish practice in emphasizing the king’s maternal (Median) ancestry.

Daniel may have preferred the title “Darius the Mede” because it had particular significance for the Jews. Jeremiah (51:11, 28) had predicted the downfall of Babylon to the Medes, and Daniel may have employed the title to emphasize the fulfillment of those prophecies.

Two titles for the Medo-Persian king would not be out of place in the Book of Daniel. The prophecy was written in two languages, and Daniel and his three friends each had two names.

Cyrus’ age would conform to known historical data. Cicero reported Cyrus’ age as 70 when he died and cuneiform texts relate that Cyrus reigned nine years after he

conquered Babylon. Thus, in 539 BC, Cyrus would have been about 62 years of age, the same figure given by Daniel.

Babylon was Cyrus' winter residence, according to Xenophon, which would agree with Daniel's reports concerning his presence in the city.

But what about Daniel 6:28 ("So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian")? That verse could be translated as: "Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, even the reign of Cyrus the Persian." That is, verse 28 may be explaining that Darius and Cyrus were the same person. A close parallel is found in 1 Chronicles 5:26, which reads, "So the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria, even the spirit of Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria." Assyrian records identify Tiglath-Pileser and Pul as one and the same person.

In Daniel 9:1, Darius is designated "son of Xerxes" (literally, "Ahasuerus"). Xerxes (Ahasuerus) was certainly a royal title (it was used by other kings) and here may refer either to Cyrus' father, Cambyses, or to Cyrus' grandfather, Astyages, the king of the Medes.

Ancient Jewish sources lend support to the supposition that Darius the Mede was Cyrus the Persian. In Daniel 11:1 both the Septuagint and Theodotion read Cyrus rather than the Masoretic Text's Darius the Mede. Baldwin asserts: "This suggests that the Greek translator knew of the double name, and preferred to use the one that was better known to avoid confusing his readers." The Jewish author of *Bel and the Dragon* preserved the name Cyrus as the king who cast Daniel in the den of lions.

The visions in Chapter 7 and 8 occurred during the reign of Belshazzar. The visions of Chapters 9 and 11 occurred during the reign of Darius, while Chapter 11 occurred during the reign of Cyrus.

Again, we have evidence for an *early* date. Daniel mentions Cyrus by name in 6:28, and the Bible mentions Cyrus elsewhere — so if this book had been written centuries after these events as the liberals suggest, then wouldn't we expect it to have

Nabonidus ruling in Chapter 5 and Cyrus ruling in Chapter 6? That instead we see Belshazzar and Darius shows that the book was written at the time these events occurred. No one trying to create a forgery would have used those two names.

The theory that Darius was a fictional creation of the author of Daniel must be rejected. The return from captivity was one of the most significant events in Jewish history. To suggest that any even semi-educated Jew of the Maccabean period could be ignorant of the fact that it was Cyrus the Persian who conquered the Babylonian Empire and allowed the Jewish captives to return to their homeland is not reasonable. The Book of Ezra, which undoubtedly would have been at the writer's disposal if the book had been written during the Maccabean period, specifically declares that Cyrus released the Jews from captivity in Babylon. Ezra also understands that Darius I (not Darius the Mede) ruled Persia long after Cyrus (Ezra 4-5).

If Daniel had been written during the Maccabean period, Chapter 5 would have mentioned only Nabonidus, and Chapter 6 would have mentioned only Cyrus.

CHAPTER 6

Daniel 6:1-3

1 It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom; 2 And over these three presidents; of whom Daniel was first: that the princes might give accounts unto them, and the

king should have no damage. 3 Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm.

The theme of Chapter 6 will be the same theme we have seen in the prior chapters: Despite all appearances to the contrary, God is in control.

But what do we mean when we say that God is in control? Do we mean that God was in control of Daniel — that Daniel had no choice but to obey? No, it can't mean that. We know that Daniel, like us, had free will, and he could choose to obey or disobey. God can't give us free will and simultaneously control us like a puppet.

Do we mean that God was in control of these pagan kings — that God forced them to take the actions they did, so that they were not personally responsible? No, it can't mean that. God held them responsible for their bad decisions. He often turned their evil into something good for his people, but that they were held accountable for their deeds tells us that they were not puppets.

What then does it mean when we say that God is in control? We mean exactly what we see happening here in Daniel. That God has a plan for his people, and that plan was going to occur — and no one or no nation could do anything to stop it. We mean the same thing Paul meant:

Romans 8:38-39 — *For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Paul was not far from his own death at the hand of the Romans when he wrote that. Do you think Paul ever doubted that God was in control — even as Paul was being executed by Nero?

God is in control. Yes, men have free will, and yes, the situation may at times look bleak. But God loves his people and has a plan for his people, and that plan has happened, is happening, and will happen exactly as God intends — God is in control! That is the message of Daniel 6, just as it has been the message of the prior chapters.