

Daniel Chapter 5

Last time in Chapter 4 we saw King Nebuchadnezzar humbled by God, becoming like a beast, and eating grass for 7 years. God successfully dealt with Nebuchadnezzar's pride, and he learnt that "the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses." (v 32)

Now in Chapter 5 we see a sad story of his grandson Belshazzar who also had a problem with pride, but he refused to humble himself, despite knowing what had happened to Nebuchadnezzar. He also exalted himself above the the one true God by using the gold and silver cups from the temple in Jerusalem to worship the gods of wood and stone. It is from here that we get the phrase, "the writing is on the wall."

Daniel rebukes him in:

Daniel 6:22-23a - ²² "But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this. ²³ And you have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven."

The year is 539 b.c. and Nebuchadnezzar has been dead and gone for twenty years. When he died, he turned the kingdom over to his son-in-law, Nabonidus. Often away from the city engaged in military conflicts, Nabonidus turned the day-to-day operation of the kingdom over to his son, Belshazzar.

Babylon was thought to be absolutely invincible. It was surrounded by high double walls. Inside, the city held supplies that could withstand a twenty-year siege.

At this point in time, the Medes and Persians are attacking, but it seems that Belshazzar is so confident in his walled city, that he decides to party.

Belshazzar's Feast

5 Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in the presence of the thousand. ² While he tasted the wine, Belshazzar gave the command to bring the gold and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple which *had been* in Jerusalem, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. ³ Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken from the temple of the house of God which *had been* in Jerusalem; and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. ⁴ They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone.

⁵ In the same hour the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. ⁶ Then the king's countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other. ⁷ The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. The king spoke, saying to the wise *men* of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing, and tells me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and *have* a chain of gold around his neck; and he shall be the third ruler in the kingdom." ⁸ Now all the king's wise *men* came, but they could not read the writing, or make known to the king its interpretation. ⁹ Then King Belshazzar was greatly troubled, his countenance was changed, and his lords were astonished.

¹⁰ The queen, because of the words of the king and his lords, came to the banquet hall. The queen spoke, saying, “O king, live forever! Do not let your thoughts trouble you, nor let your countenance change. ¹¹ There is a man in your kingdom in whom *is* the Spirit of the Holy God. And in the days of your father, light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, were found in him; and King Nebuchadnezzar your father—your father the king—made him chief of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, *and* soothsayers. ¹² Inasmuch as an excellent spirit, knowledge, understanding, interpreting dreams, solving riddles, and explaining enigmas were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar, now let Daniel be called, and he will give the interpretation.”

The Writing on the Wall Explained

¹³ Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king spoke, and said to Daniel, “*Are* you that Daniel who is one of the captives from Judah, whom my father the king brought from Judah? ¹⁴ I have heard of you, that the Spirit of God *is* in you, and *that* light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you. ¹⁵ Now the wise *men*, the astrologers, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing and make known to me its interpretation, but they could not give the interpretation of the thing. ¹⁶ And I have heard of you, that you can give interpretations and explain enigmas. Now if you can read the writing and make known to me its interpretation, you shall be clothed with purple and *have* a chain of gold around your neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.”

¹⁷ Then Daniel answered, and said before the king, “Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another; yet I will read the writing to the king, and make known to him the interpretation. ¹⁸ O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father a kingdom and majesty, glory and honor. ¹⁹ And because of the majesty that He gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whomever he wished, he executed; whomever he wished, he kept alive; whomever he wished, he set up; and whomever he wished, he put down. ²⁰ But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him. ²¹ Then he was driven from the sons of men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling *was* with the wild donkeys. 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 rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses.

²² “But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this. ²³ And you have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven. They have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your lords, your wives and your concubines, have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know; and the God who *holds* your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified. ²⁴ Then the fingers of the hand were sent from Him, and this writing was written.

²⁵ “And this is the inscription that was written:

MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN

²⁶ This *is* the interpretation of *each* word. Mene: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it; ²⁷ Tekel: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; ²⁸ Peres: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.” ²⁹ Then Belshazzar gave the command, and they clothed Daniel with purple and *put* a chain of gold around his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

Belshazzar's Fall

³⁰ That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. ³¹ And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, *being* about sixty-two years old.

Chapter 5

In Daniel 5, we see the story of fingers appearing mysteriously and writing a message to the king of Babylon. During the reign of Belshazzar in the year 539 b.c., the Medes and the Persians formed a military alliance. Audaciously thinking they could overthrow Babylon, they launched an invasion...

Daniel 5:1

Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in the presence of the thousand.

Belshazzar threw a party for his leaders in an apparent show of strength to the Medes and Persians who were beginning to surround the city. "We don't need to fight or fast in fear," he said, "Let's feast!"

Daniel 5:2a

While he tasted the wine, Belshazzar gave the command to bring the gold and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple which had been in Jerusalem...

Years earlier, after conquering the city of Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar brought back holy vessels taken from the temple of Jehovah.

Which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple: Nebuchadnezzar was not the direct father of Belshazzar. Either Nebuchadnezzar was his grandfather through his mother's side, or he was Belshazzar's father in the sense of having previously occupied the throne Belshazzar now sat on. Either usage of the term **father** was accepted in ancient times.

Daniel 5:2b-4

... that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. ³ Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken from the temple of the house of God which had been in Jerusalem; and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. ⁴ They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone.

The only reason women would be in attendance at a party like this would be for immoral purposes. That's the problem with worldly parties. More often than not, the results are immorality and blasphemy, with people doing and saying things they regret the next day.

Belshazzar the king: When we come to Daniel 5, Nebuchadnezzar is no longer the king of Babylon. How did it pass from Nebuchadnezzar to **Belshazzar**? The ancient historian Berosus gives us the following order of events:

- Nebuchadnezzar died after a 43-year reign.
- His son, Evil-Merodach (described in 2 Kings 25:27–30 and Jeremiah 52:31–34), ruled for only two years when he was assassinated by his brother-in-law Neriglassar, because his rule was arbitrary and licentious.
- Neriglassar (mentioned as Nergalsharezer in Jeremiah 39:3,13), ruled for four years until he died a natural death.
- His son, Laborosoarchod, only a child and of diminished mental capacity, ruled for only nine months when he was beaten to death by a gang of conspirators.
- The conspirators appointed Nabonidus, one of their gang, to be king. He ruled until Cyrus the Persian conquered Babylon.

It sounds like what is happening in politics all over the world today. Nothing has changed, there is nothing new under the sun.

Now for those bible critics...

Belshazzar the king: For a long time, historians and archaeologists knew that Nabonidus was said to be the last king of Babylon, not **Belshazzar** (who was Nabonidus' eldest son). The solution to this so-called discrepancy was apparent when evidence was uncovered indicating not only Belshazzar's association with Nabonidus on the throne, but also demonstrating that during the last part of his reign Nabonidus lived in Arabia and left the conduct of the Kingdom of Babylon to his eldest son **Belshazzar**.

The evidence, the *Nabonidus Cylinder* was discovered last century. It is now displayed in the British Museum.

- ii. According to Babylonian records, Belshazzar became co-regent in the third year of Nabonidus' reign (553 b.c.) and continued in that capacity till the fall of Babylon (539 b.c.).
- iii. It is most likely that at the time of Daniel 5, Nabonidus had gone out to fight the Medo-Persian army and had been already captured. Those armies now surrounded Babylon and were looking for a way into the strongly defended city.

Made a great feast for a thousand of his lords: Belshazzar was not afraid of the siege surrounding the city. He was confident because of Babylon's impressive defences and his vast supplies.

Conservative calculations set the dimensions of the ancient city of Babylon like this:

- The outer walls were 17 miles (27 kilometers) long.
- These walls were 22 feet (7 meters) thick and 90 feet (28 meters) high.
- The outer walls also had guard towers another 100 feet (30 meters) high.
- The city gates were made of bronze.
- A system of inner and outer walls and moats made the city very secure.

They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone: The scene of partying, while a hostile army surrounded the city, reminds me of people today. They laugh at God because they think that they have strong defences — money, power, fame, good health, wisdom, knowledge etc. Instead of seeking God, they seek pleasure. But no defence can keep God out. When it's time for judgement, watch out! Remember that pride comes before a fall.

Proverbs 16:18 - Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall.

There is an application for us today.

Ephesians 5:17-18 - ¹⁷ Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸ And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,

Dissipation - behaviour which shows lack of concern or thought for the consequences of an action— senseless deeds, reckless deeds, recklessness.

Anything that is not done in the fear or reverence of the Lord, or according to the will of the Lord, is reckless or senseless. It is stupidity.

Proverbs 14:12 - There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death. If you want to find life, you need to find God. All other ways lead to death.

They brought the gold vessels that had been taken from the temple of the house of God which had been in Jerusalem: Belshazzar was foolish enough to not only lose all semblance of self-control at this party, but also to openly mock God. He committed the sin of *sacrilege*, something few people are concerned with today.

Now, why do you think he did this?

- i. Gathering the vessels from the Jewish temple served the purpose of reminding the partiers of a previous victory, and Belshazzar most likely hoped it would boost morale. However, this was blasphemy in a high degree, and therefore presently punished by God.
- ii. In Babylon, a large court — 56 by 170 feet — has been unearthed, decorated with Greek columns. This is probably where the feast of Daniel 5 took place.

Daniel 5:5, 6

In the same hour the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. ⁶ Then the king's countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other.

When Belshazzar suddenly saw a man's hand writing on the wall of his palace, he didn't need coffee to become sober.

This, of course, is where we get the proverbial phrase *the writing on the wall*. It refers to judgement. Your time is up... you're toast! For the unbeliever, the writing is on the wall today. Just like Noah warned the people for 120 years before the flood came and destroyed them all, so the Church is, or should be, warning the world that Jesus is coming back, but this time not as a suffering servant, but as the Righteous Judge. For those who refuse to repent, the Lake of Fire awaits them for eternity simply because they have refused God's gift of forgiveness and redemption. Jesus paid everyone's fine when He died for the sins of the whole world, so that we could be declared innocent before the

Father — all our sins dealt with, paid in full — so that it's like we have never sinned. However, this is a gift that must be received by believing and repenting.

If you truly believe that there is a bomb on the road in front of you, then you won't go down the road. So you see that repentance is the evidence of true belief when we believe what Jesus says about what leads to life and what leads to death, or what is good or what is evil.

Notice how shallow is the world's joy. It turns into despair and fear in an instant. Happy one moment, wetting yourself in fear the next. Underneath the apparent ease and happiness of those who belong to this world is a guilty conscience — the undeniable knowledge that they will have to face God on judgement day. Contrast this with the joy that Jesus gives:

John 16:22 - Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, **and your joy no one will take from you.**

Why can't the Christian's joy be taken from them? Because it's not from here, it's not of this world. Anything we get from this world is temporary, including any happiness we get from it. It is all passing away. 1 John 2:17

For those who are born again the story is a lot different.

Jesus rose from the grave, defeating death, and now we have a joy that no one can take away. Why? Because it's a heavenly joy — its source is Jesus. We, as Christians, are the most secure people on the planet. We have everything and fear nothing, not even death.

As Romans 8:31-39 says:

³¹ What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? ³² Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else? ³³ Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one—for God himself has given us right standing with himself. ³⁴ Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honour at God's right hand, pleading for us.

³⁵ Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? ³⁶ (As the Scriptures say, "For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.") ³⁷ No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.

³⁸ And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. ³⁹ No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The world looks to shallow things, temporary things, anything that will numb the pain of emptiness and hopelessness. The world looks to circumstances to change the way it feels, but circumstances change so quickly. But for us as Christians, we don't care about circumstances because we see the big picture. We know what is coming, and we are secure. We are loved, we are cared for, no matter what happens to us down here on

earth. In fact, we can have joy in difficult circumstances because we know that they are working for our good. (Romans 8:28)

Daniel 5:7

The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. The king spoke, saying to the wise men of Babylon, “Whoever reads this writing, and tells me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around his neck; and he shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.”

Nabonidus was the first ruler, Belshazzar the second. The man who could interpret the writing on the wall would be right behind them.

Daniel 5:8–12

⁸ Now all the king’s wise men came, but they could not read the writing, or make known to the king its interpretation. ⁹ Then King Belshazzar was greatly troubled, his countenance was changed, and his lords were astonished.

¹⁰ The queen, because of the words of the king and his lords, came to the banquet hall. The queen spoke, saying, “O king, live forever! Do not let your thoughts trouble you, nor let your countenance change. ¹¹ There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God. And in the days of your father, light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, were found in him; and King Nebuchadnezzar your father—your father the king—made him chief of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers. ¹² Inasmuch as an excellent spirit, knowledge, understanding, interpreting dreams, solving riddles, and explaining enigmas were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar, now let Daniel be called, and he will give the interpretation.”

This queen is not Belshazzar’s wife but most likely his mother, the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar. Evidently, when Nebuchadnezzar was converted, she was as well. Thus she told her son about Daniel. Notice also that she wasn’t at the drunken party.

This Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar: The queen referred to Daniel by his Jewish name, thus showing respect for his faith and background. At this point, Daniel had been out of the public eye for twenty years. Approximately eighty-five years old, he had not been in a position of prominence since Nebuchadnezzar died. Sometimes if God hasn’t used us today, this week, or this month, we panic. How much better it is to realise that we’re simply tools in the Lord’s toolbox, and He can pull us out whenever He wants to accomplish whatever He desires. Our job is simply to be ready, available, open. It might not be twenty years until the Lord uses you in the significant way you desire. That’s okay. Just say, “Lord, I’m available whenever You want to use me.” That was Daniel’s mindset. He was off the scene for twenty years — and suddenly, he was summoned.

Daniel 5:13–17

¹³ Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king spoke, and said to Daniel, “Are you that Daniel who is one of the captives from Judah, whom my father the king brought from Judah? ¹⁴ I have heard of you, that the Spirit of God is in you, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you. ¹⁵ Now the wise

men, the astrologers, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing and make known to me its interpretation, but they could not give the interpretation of the thing. ¹⁶ And I have heard of you, that you can give interpretations and explain enigmas. Now if you can read the writing and make known to me its interpretation, you shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around your neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.”

¹⁷ Then Daniel answered, and said before the king, “Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another; yet I will read the writing to the king, and make known to him the interpretation.

Hearing of the reward, Daniel said, “I’m not in this for the money, so keep your gifts. But I will tell you the meaning of this handwriting.” This should be our attitude toward the things of this world... they should have no hold on us as Christians, no pull, no sway.

Then Daniel was brought in before the king: When everything seems great—when the party is going non-stop—God and His servants are mocked, neglected, and hidden away. But when the hand of heaven wrote a sobering message, panic-stricken worldlings cried out for the one who had the Spirit of God.

The world mocks us, but when things go wrong, they need us or at least look to us for answers. We need, like Daniel to be ready to give an answer for the hope that is within us.

Daniel 5:18–23

¹⁸ O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father a kingdom and majesty, glory and honour. ¹⁹ And because of the majesty that He gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whomever he wished, he executed; whomever he wished, he kept alive; whomever he wished, he set up; and whomever he wished, he put down. ²⁰ But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him. ²¹ Then he was driven from the sons of men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. 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 rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses.

²² “But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this. ²³ And you have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven. They have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your lords, your wives and your concubines, have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know; and the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified.

Seeing what had been written, Daniel first gave a warning to Belshazzar. “You have been rebellious, idolatrous, and blasphemous,” he said. “You didn’t learn the lessons of Nebuchadnezzar, your grandfather. He had to learn the hard way, becoming like a beast for seven years, eating grass in the field, acting like an animal until he cried out in humility to God. But you didn’t learn anything from his experience.” Therefore, God has written this against you:

“If God held Belshazzar responsible, my friend, for the ray of light which shone across *his* pathway, what will He say to men living in the blaze of light which illuminates the world today? Every unconverted man in this country has more light than Belshazzar had.” (Talbot)

Daniel 5:24

Then the fingers of the hand were sent from Him, and this writing was written.

In John 8:1-11, the religious leaders caught a woman in the very act of adultery and brought her before the Rabbi of Galilee—not because they cared about her, but so they might entrap Him.

“Master, the law declares that she should be stoned. What do You say?” they taunted.

If He said, “Free her,” they would accuse Him of being a lawbreaker. If He said, “Stone her,” He would no longer be a friend of sinners.

But we read that Jesus stooped down and, with His finger—the same finger that wrote Thou shalt not commit adultery, the same finger that wrote on Belshazzar’s wall—in the ground. When the woman’s accusers asked Him again if the woman should be stoned, He said, “He who is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone.”

And one by one, they left.

What did Jesus write on the ground that caused them to drop their rocks and go their way? Based on the original text, I believe He was writing the sins of those who held the rocks. I, too, have violated all of God’s laws either directly or in spirit. Therefore, there is a long list of sins written against me. But this list was nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14), and was rubbed out by the blood of the same hand that was pinned thereon, the same hand that wrote on a plaster wall in Babylon and in the dry dust of Jerusalem.

The very hand that wrote against you was pinned to a cross for you. If you believe it, like the woman in John 8, you are free to go your way and sin no more.

Daniel 5:25

And this is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN

Written in Aramaic as Belshazzar, his thousand men, their wives and concubines, and his mother watched, they wondered what the words meant.

Daniel 5:26

This is the interpretation of each word. Mene: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it;

In other words, “Belshazzar, your number is up.” Belshazzar should have known that his number would be coming up because sixty years earlier, the Lord had warned him through Jeremiah...

Jeremiah 27:5–7 - ⁵ I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are on the ground by My great power and by My outstretched arm, and have given it to whom it seemed proper to Me. ⁶ And now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant; and the beasts of the field I have also given him to serve him. ⁷ So all nations shall serve him and his son and his son’s son, until the time of his land comes; and then many nations and great kings shall make him serve them. “I have given Nebuchadnezzar his empire,” the Lord declared. “But in his son’s son’s day, it will end.”

Daniel 5:27

Tekel: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting;

Not only was Belshazzar's number up, but his weight was down. He weighed in and he came up short. He'd been given so much but had done so little.

Daniel 5:28

Peres: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.”

Belshazzar's kingdom would be given to the ones surrounding the city that very evening.

Weighed in the balances, and found wanting: A mighty army and brilliant tactics overcame the Babylonian Empire, yet it still *fell from within*. The armies of the Medes and Persians could only conquer because Belshazzar and his kingdom were found lacking in spiritual and moral values.

This has happened again and again throughout history. Nations or cultures become so depraved and evil that they are judged by God and are destroyed.

Daniel 5:29

Then Belshazzar gave the command, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a chain of gold around his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

That he should be the third ruler in the kingdom: Daniel held this post for only a few hours. This shows how temporary the awards and accolades of this world are. In the kingdom that succeeded Belshazzar, Daniel was also promoted, but that was due to God, not to Belshazzar.

People chase promotions, money, cars, fame etc, but none will last.

Daniel 5:30-31

³⁰ That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. ³¹ And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.

a. **That very night:** The word was fulfilled just as Daniel said. God's Word is always reliable and true.

b. **Darius the Mede received the kingdom:** Darius was a sub-king under Cyrus the Persian. He is referred to in secular history as Gubaru.

That night, an incredible thing happened. One of the greatest upsets of military history was about to unfold—as prophesied by Isaiah two hundred years earlier...

Isaiah 45:1–4

¹ “Thus says the Lord to His anointed,
To Cyrus, whose right hand I have held—
To subdue nations before him
And loose the armor of kings,
To open before him the double doors,

So that the gates will not be shut:

- 2 'I will go before you
And make the crooked places straight;
I will break in pieces the gates of bronze
And cut the bars of iron.
- 3 I will give you the treasures of darkness
And hidden riches of secret places,
That you may know that I, the Lord,
Who call *you* by your name,
Am the God of Israel.
- 4 For Jacob My servant's sake,
And Israel My elect,
I have even called you by your name;
I have named you, though you have not known Me.

The general leading the Medo-Persian troops was a man named Cyrus. Although Cyrus wouldn't come until two hundred years after Isaiah penned his prophecy, he was the Lord's anointed, the one who would open the gates and plunder the treasures of an empire thought to be impenetrable. In that sense he is a picture of Jesus.

Given to the Medes and Persians: this is yet another amazing fulfilment of prophecy.

The ancient Greek historian Herodotus relates that the Persian King Cyrus conquered Babylon by diverting the flow of the Euphrates into a nearby swamp. This lowered the level of the river so his troops marched through the water and under the river-gates. They still would not have been able to enter *had not the bronze gates of the inner walls been left inexplicably unlocked*. This was exactly what God predicted in Isaiah 44:28–45:7 and Jeremiah 51:57–58. *God opened the gates of the city of Babylon for Cyrus*, and put it in writing 200 years before it happened. This was even before Babylon was a world empire.

This is also a picture of end times as well, as spoken of in revelation chapters 17, 18 and 19.

The fall of mystery Babylon will be like the fall of real Babylon—sudden, sure, and in the midst of her worst blasphemies.

Quote: “Empires do not stand by human might, man-made machines and missiles. There is not a wall high enough nor thick enough to prevent a nation from falling when God pronounces that nation's doom.” (Strauss)

The application for us today

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 NLT - ¹⁶ That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. ¹⁷ For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! ¹⁸ So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, **we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen**. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.

Belshazzar though he had it all, but ended up dead. His bubble burst, his light went out, his hope evaporated, and he ended up with nothing to show for his life.

Instead, fix your eyes on Jesus, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace.

Will this be easy? No. But we have a great example to follow.

Hebrews 12:1-4 NLT ¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. ² We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honour beside God's throne. ³ **Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won't become weary and give up.** ⁴ After all, you have not yet given your lives **in your struggle against sin.**

Always remember that God's gift of salvation is free, but it will cost you everything. It is difficult to let go of the things of the world. We need faith to persevere.