

## Medes and Persians Study Notes

Isa 45:1 Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and to loose the belts of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed:

Isa 45:2 "I will go before you and level the exalted places, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron,

Isa 45:3 I will give you the treasures of darkness and the hoards in secret places, that you may know that it is I, the LORD, the God of Israel, who call you by your name.

Isa 45:4 For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I name you, though you do not know me.

Isa 45:5 I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me,

Isa 45:6 that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other.

- Isaiah's prophecy that names Cyrus as the Lord's instrument occurs somewhere near 700 BC and the Medes captured Babylon October 12, 539 BC or approximately 160 years before.
- God has sovereignly chosen non-Jewish people to perform His will throughout history and 1 Kings 19:15-16 is another example of a pagan king chosen for a purpose (Elijah to anoint Hazael king of Syria).

### **Prominent Mede/Persian Rulers in Scripture:**

- Darius the Mede — 539–538 BC (*Daniel 5–6; 9:1*)
- Cyrus the Great — 539–530 BC (*Isaiah 44–45; Ezra 1; Daniel 10:1*)
- Cambyses II — 530–522 BC (*Ezra 4:5–6?*)
- Darius I (the Great) — 522–486 BC (*Ezra 4–6; Haggai; Zechariah*)
- Xerxes I (Ahasuerus of Esther) — 486–465 BC (*Esther*)
- Artaxerxes I — 465–424 BC (*Ezra 7; Nehemiah*)

Dan 5:1 King Belshazzar made a great feast for a thousand of his lords and drank wine in front of the thousand.

Dan 5:2 Belshazzar, when he tasted the wine, commanded that the vessels of gold and of

silver that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple in Jerusalem be brought, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them.

Dan 5:3 Then they brought in the golden vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them.

Dan 5:4 They drank wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

Dan 5:5 Immediately the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, opposite the lampstand. And the king saw the hand as it wrote.

Dan 5:6 Then the king's color changed, and his thoughts alarmed him; his limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together.

Dan 5:7 The king called loudly to bring in the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers. The king declared to the wise men of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing, and shows me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around his neck and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom."

Dan 5:8 Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or make known to the king the interpretation.

Dan 5:9 Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, and his color changed, and his lords were perplexed.

Dan 5:10 The queen, because of the words of the king and his lords, came into the banqueting hall, and the queen declared, "O king, live forever! Let not your thoughts alarm you or your color change.

Dan 5:11 There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the spirit of the holy gods. 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, enchanters, Chaldeans, and astrologers,

Dan 5:12 because an excellent spirit, knowledge, and understanding to interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Beltshazzar. Now let Daniel be called, and he will show the interpretation."

## 1) The Night Babylon Fell (Daniel 5)

### Belshazzar's Feast

Text: Daniel 5:1–4

Babylon's king Belshazzar held a massive feast while the Medo-Persian army surrounded the city.

- Babylon's walls were considered impregnable
- The Euphrates River flowed under the walls, supplying water
- The city felt completely secure

Belshazzar:

- Drank wine from vessels stolen from the Temple in Jerusalem
- Praised pagan gods of gold, silver, and stone
- Mocked the God of Israel

### The Handwriting on the Wall

Text: Daniel 5:5–28

A mysterious hand wrote:

MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN

Daniel interpreted:

- MENE – God has numbered your kingdom and finished it
- TEKEL – You have been weighed and found wanting
- PERES – Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians

### Babylon Captured That Same Night

Text: Daniel 5:30–31

*“That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain.  
And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.”*

So Scripture states:

- Babylon fell suddenly
- Belshazzar was killed
- Darius the Mede immediately took control

## 2) How the City Was Actually Taken

This is where biblical prophecy and secular history converge remarkably.

### Diversion of the Euphrates River

Greek historians Herodotus and Xenophon record that Cyrus' forces:

- Dug canals to divert the Euphrates upstream
- Lowered the river level inside Babylon
- Marched troops into the city through the riverbed
- Entered under the walls via the river gates

### The Gates Were Left Open

Because of the feast:

- Inner river gates were negligently left open
- Persian troops entered without a major battle
- Key officials were killed
- The palace complex was seized

This fulfills Isaiah's prophecy:

*"I will open before him the double doors,  
so that the gates will not be shut."*

— Isaiah 45:1

### 3) Who Actually Led the Attack?

#### Cyrus the Great — Supreme Commander

- Strategist behind the campaign
- Overall ruler of the Medo-Persian forces
- Entered Babylon later to formalize rule

#### Darius the Mede — Local Ruler Installed Over Babylon

Daniel 5:31; 9:1

*"Darius the Mede received the kingdom..."*

Darius:

- Was about 62 years old
- Took immediate administrative control of Babylon
- Appointed 120 satraps (Daniel 6:1)
- Functioned as king of Babylon under Cyrus' higher imperial authority

Most likely identity:

- Gubaru (Gobryas) — Median governor appointed by Cyrus
- Or a Median noble ruling as regent-king

#### 4) Sequence of Events (Step-by-Step)

1. Medo-Persian army besieges Babylon
2. Belshazzar holds a drunken feast
3. Handwriting appears on the wall
4. Daniel interprets judgment
5. Euphrates is diverted
6. Persian troops enter through river gates
7. Palace is seized
8. Belshazzar is killed
9. Darius the Mede takes the throne that night
10. Cyrus formally assumes imperial control later

#### 5) Why Daniel Attributes the Capture to Darius

Daniel consistently distinguishes:

- Darius the Mede — immediate ruler of Babylon
- Cyrus the Persian — emperor of the empire

Daniel 6:28:

*“So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.”*

This implies overlapping authority, not contradiction.

#### 6) Prophetic Fulfillments Involved

Isaiah (c. 700 BC)

- Named Cyrus explicitly (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1)
- Predicted:
  - Gates left open
  - Nations subdued
  - Restoration of Jerusalem

Jeremiah (c. 600 BC)

- Predicted Babylon's sudden fall (Jeremiah 50–51)
- Spoke of drying up her waters (Jeremiah 50:38; 51:36)

Daniel (c. 550 BC)

- Predicted Medo-Persian takeover (Daniel 2; 7; 8)
- Personally witnessed Babylon's fall (Daniel 5)

## 7) Summary

Babylon fell in one night (539 BC) when Medo-Persian forces:

- Diverted the Euphrates
- Entered through open river gates
- Took the city during Belshazzar's feast
- Killed Belshazzar
- Installed Darius the Mede as ruler over Babylon

Cyrus remained the supreme emperor.