

## God's Way Out

"For Us and For Our Little Ones"

"Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance."

Ezra 8:21.

### Lesson 16/17. Young King Chooses Way of Pride

Oppressor nations have often seemed to have their captives hopelessly fast. They have seemed to mock at the thought of God's intervention. But read in this chapter how God's agents smashed the tyrant's power in one night.

BELSHAZZAR was a real prince of flesh and blood, a wicked, conceited young Oriental ruler. Largely through his blasphemous attitude toward God, the mighty city of Babylon. "The Golden City," fell in a single night. Five hundred tablets-clay documents-bearing his name, have been dug out of the ruins of Babylon's ancient stronghold near the River Euphrates. [1] Hundreds, yes, thousands of such tablets tell the story of his times. [2]

His mother, the queen, was the clever daughter of Nebuchadnezzar. [3] His father, King Nabonadius, had held an important office of state before being crowned king. [4] Belshazzar had at least two sisters. One was named Inaesa-gilar-emat. The other was probably Ukabu'-shai'-na. There also seem to have been two other younger brothers in the family. [5] Yes, there is plenty of information available regarding this young prince.

One of the old documents even tells us that Belshazzar's secretary was Nebo-yukin-aklii, who leased a house from Neboakhi-iddin. One can imagine the secretary grumbling to Nebotsabit, the steward, that one and a half pounds of silver was too much to pay for a house which he was forbidden to sub-let. But here he had taken it on a three-year lease (until 551 BC), and had undertaken to keep the house in repair and to plant trees around it. [6] And now we in our day dig up the document and read it for ourselves. Yes, there is plenty of information to be had about Belshazzar. You can even see his rotary seal in the British Museum.

#### ***Babylon's Rulers Were Degenerating***

If anyone had reminded the youthful Belshazzar that his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed that Babylon would pass away, the young king would probably have laughed and contemptuously said, "Stuff and nonsense" or its Babylonian equivalent. [7]

Someone of a more thoughtful turn of mind might have answered differently. If Babylon's future power was conditional on its moral strength, it boded ill for the country that its rulers had been so vile and weak since Nebuchadnezzar died. After the old king had gone, his son Evil-Merodach had put on the royal robes. "Evil" by name, and evil by nature, he was such a vicious and profligate ruler that his own relatives killed him after only two years' reign.

One of the conspirators, the dead king's brother-in-law, Neriglissar, thus became king, with one of Nebuchadnezzar's daughters as queen. [8] But two of the most powerful provinces revolted—Media and Persia—and Neriglissar was killed in battle with them after four years' reign. His son succeeded him, but after nine months he too was assassinated by disgusted and angry relatives. It looked ominous! "Nabonadius shall be king," the cry went up. So Nabonadius ascended the throne with another of Nebuchadnezzar's daughters as queen. But he offended the revolted Medes and Persians at the very beginning of his reign by allying himself with fabulously rich Croesus, king of Lydia, their enemy. A serious war faced him. What would the end be?

### ***Father and Son Reign Together***

Nabonadius organized Babylon to meet the dangers, and when Belshazzar, his son, was yet in his teens, his father appointed him to reign conjointly with himself. And so it came to pass that when the war trumpets sounded in earnest, Belshazzar commanded the troops within the walls of Babylon, while his father led an army to attack these fierce Medes and Persians.

But, alas for Nabonadius! His army suffered defeat within sight of the watchmen on the towers of Babylon. He was put to flight, and hastily retreated to Borsippa, an important city to the south-west. [9]

Most of the survivors, however, fled to the shelter of Babylon. "Behind these mighty brick walls we shall surely be safe from this mysteriously victorious army," they thought. They would be safe, too, from that strange figure who led the Medo-Persians. There was something uncanny about that inscrutable general, Cyrus. His constant successes were enough to make any Babylonian fearful and superstitious. Was some mighty Persian god leading him?

No need to be too dejected, however. When Cyrus saw those three-hundred-foot walls surrounding the city he had reason to be thoughtful. Here was a giant mass of brickwork and a deep and wide moat to be passed before he could put a foot within the capital. And inside was a confident and energetic young king defending it, with a wise queen-mother, daughter of the redoubtable Nebuchadnezzar, to advise him.

But a nation's real bulwarks are loyalty to the commandments of God, [10] and contentment and happiness among its subjects. Babylon lacked both. What cared Belshazzar about the commandments of God or the contentment of the people Babylon had conquered! Ask the exiled mothers of Judah who mourned their murdered children and pined for their native land. [11] Ask the Medes and Persians. Belshazzar, however, plumed himself that Babylon could never be taken. He felt that he and his lords could rejoice and drink with never a thought of fear. They could celebrate their idolatrous feasts with as much carousing and dancing as ever.

"Is not the feast of Tammuz drawing near? It shall be celebrated with more wine and mirth and abandon than ever," he resolved. "Again we shall celebrate the wedding of our god Tammuz to his lovely bride Ishtar! And we shall laugh at Cyrus and his army!" Strangely enough, outside the city, Cyrus also was thinking: "Is not the feast of Tammuz drawing near? It will be celebrated with mirth and wine and drunken abandon, as ever. It may provide my opportunity to take the City." [12]

And the watchers on the walls of Babylon might have noticed that Cyrus was withdrawing some of his non-fighting forces up the river. What was his plan? On the fourteenth day of the month Tammuz, 538 BC, the great feast took place in Belshazzar's palace in Babylon. "The Feast of the Fearless King" possibly that was what the swaggering young monarch thought it might be called.

A thousand of his lords were invited; the women were present; the young king's wives and concubines were there. There was feasting and dancing. Wine flowed freely and the guests drank without restraint. Men of genius and education, beautiful women, and great statesmen came under the influence of alcohol, and soon the palace was a scene of unbridled license and hilarity. [13] "With reason dethroned through shameless intoxication, and with lower impulses and passions now in the ascendancy, the king himself took the lead in the riotous orgy." [14]

### ***The Boastful Blasphemer***

"Bring us the golden and silver vessels of Judah," he ordered, when the wine had clouded his judgment. "The vessels which my father brought from the temple of God at Jerusalem. We will drink to the gods of Babylon in the vessels of the God of heaven. Mightier far than the God of Judah is Bel, the god of Babylon."

Did a shudder pass through some of the guests at the blasphemy? Did the queen-mother tremble as she saw the messengers hurrying across to the treasure-house of Bel's temple to fetch the holy vessels? Did her breath come fearfully as she remembered how Judah's God taught her father Nebuchadnezzar stern lessons which her son Belshazzar had never learned?

Possibly messenger Igubu paused a second with the vessels he was carrying. "Hush! What was that? Was that screaming and shouting from the street near the river?"

"No! only more drunken revelers," answered his yawning companion. "The whole city is following the example of the palace this night. There is nothing to fear. See how peacefully the stars of night shine down."

The messengers crossed the palace threshold with those sacred vessels of gold and silver--and Belshazzar crossed the line which separates God's patience from His wrath. Babylon was doomed! If only the drunken guards had bolted the river gates before they feasted, the catastrophe might have been averted. Even now, had they but looked into the dark bed of the Euphrates they might have given a shout of alarm which would have roused and saved the city. Had they looked down with their fuddled eyes they might have gasped in bewilderment. "Is it a bad dream? Or has the river really ceased to flow?"

"What is that?" they would have gasped. "Are those shadowy forms stealing stealthily along the river bed? Or is it a nightmare? O Bel, save us! They are dressed like Persian soldiers." But they did not look--until it was too late. How should they suspect that Cyrus had dug another channel for the Euphrates and diverted its waters so that his soldiers could wade into the city along the river bed?

Up in the palace the arrival of the five thousand gold and silver vessels [15] was probably greeted with sacrilegious laughter, joking, and ribald song. The king and his princes, his wives and his concubines, drank in them. "Drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone." "Great is Bel! Mighty is Tammuz! Lovely is Ishtar!" they declared.

"Spirit of Babylon, hear us call!  
Thou shall be young, when we grow old."

Suddenly there was a piercing cry of terror. It was heard above all the boisterous merriment, and was followed by another and another. The king's face grew pallid as ashes, and those near him saw his body trembling and his knees convulsively knocking together in fright. "See! There, up there! The wall, the hand!" voices gasped.

There, up on the wall was a bloodless hand slowly tracing out letters and words of gleaming fire on the plaster. Strange, terrifying, incomprehensible words. "Letters of judgment and doom!" Came the terrible conviction to the drunken king. "Ah, God! Ah, God!" The hand departed, but the mysterious, fiery, condemning words remained. The terrified guests felt they were in the presence of the great Judge of the earth. "Oh, for a guiltless heart now!"

### ***What Do the Fiery Letters Mean?***

"Bring in the astrologers!" shouted the king, almost crazy with fear. "Bring in the Chaldeans and the soothsayers. Hasten! Hasten!" Babylon's wise men were hurried in before the king. Alas, for those who turn to the astrologers and forget the living God! "Whoever-shall read-this writing-and show me-the interpretation thereof" - the king tried to steady his trembling voice - "shall be clothed with scarlet, and have a--a chain of gold around his neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom." But none of the wise men could read the gleaming, fearsome characters on the wall. The king was almost distracted. His young face was charged with despair and terror.

In every age, for long years, the hand of God writes with love and compassion on the walls of nations "His compassion fail not." In the Scriptures, too, He has written a thousand promises to tell of His love and mercy for sinners. "He delights to pardon." He invites us in tender love through the voices of our fathers and mothers and by His ministers. Let us welcome the hand that writes in love, so that God may never need to write to us in severity and judgment as on that dread night of Belshazzar's feast.

Could no one read the writing? It was agony, this helpless suspense. Just then the queen-mother remembered Daniel. Daniel! Why had he been forgotten? She hurried to the king. "O king, live for ever!" she exclaimed. "Let not thy thoughts trouble thee. There is a man in thy kingdom, in whom is the spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of thy father, wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, was found in him; and Nebuchadnezzar the king, thy grandfather made him master of the magicians." So spoke the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar to her trembling son.

She continued to extol Daniel: He was just the right man. "An excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, interpreting of dreams, and explanations of hard sentences, were found in the same Daniel. Let Daniel be called!" the queen urged confidently, "and he will show the interpretation" of these fiery words on the wall. "Yes, bring Daniel! Let Daniel be called," commanded the king in answer. And possibly he wished with anguish that it might be said of himself, also, that he was "a man in whom the spirit of the holy gods is."

### ***The Old Prime Minister Before the Young King***

Daniel came in and stood calmly before the king. His was a grave and solemn figure, now old in years but quiet and calm in the sea of emotion and fear around him. "Art thou Daniel?" the king asked. "I have even heard that the spirit of the gods is in thee, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom is found in thee."

"And now the wise men, the astrologers, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing, and make known unto me the interpretation thereof: but they could not show the interpretation of the thing.

"Now if thou can," the king said earnestly, "thou shall be clothed in scarlet, and have a chain of gold about thy neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom." Solemnly the old prophet addressed him. He reminded him that God had given Nebuchadnezzar kingly power over the earth. But that great king became lifted up with pride. He forgot that kings are to be like good shepherds caring for the flock. He forgot that he owed all to God.

"When his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne," the prophet continued. Nebuchadnezzar's reason departed. The proud king imagined himself an animal and ate grass like an ox for seven years, until he knew 'That the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and that He appoints over it whomsoever He will.'" [16]

Sternly now the prophet spoke: "And thou his son, O Belshazzar, has not humbled your heart, though thou knew all this; but has lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of His house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them."

"And" the prophet speaks now with withering scorn and disgust – "thou has praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know. And the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, has thou not glorified!"

"Then was the part of the hand sent from Him - the great God" and this writing," pointing up to the wall, "was written." Belshazzar listened in conscience-stricken fear. Intent on the prophet's words he probably scarcely noticed sounds of commotion outside in the city; took no heed to shouts coming from the palace gate. "This is the writing," said Daniel: "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN."

"This is the interpretation of the thing," he went on, with the solemnity of a judge pronouncing the death sentence: "MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it!" The shouting in the city grows louder and louder. God's executioners are coming.

"TEKEL" the prophet proceeds, with terrible distinctness. "Thou art weighed in the balances, and found wanting." Messengers are hurrying with terrible news. They say they must see the king at once.

“PERES” - Daniel's voice tolls out the knell of doom. “Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.”

“Given to the Medes and Persians! O God! I poured contempt on the God of heaven. O God! And I thought all was safe. Lost! Lost!” fearfully gasps the young king to himself. Then, endeavoring to pull himself together: “Clothe Daniel with scarlet. Hang the gold chain around his neck. Proclaim him third ruler in the kingdom.”

“Yes, let the messenger come in now,” he commands. “Your majesty! Save yourself! The Medes and Persians have broken into the city. They are rushing toward the palace!”

“What! Medes and Persians in the city--How?” he moaned. “How? O God, the writing on the wall has come true! ‘Given to the Medes and Persians.’ “

There is a noise of battling men at the very door of the palace. Exultant Persians fight against drink-stupefied Babylonian guards. The soldiers of Cyrus have diverted the river; they have waded along its bed. They have found the river gates open and the watchers off guard. They have rushed along the streets and now they are in the palace itself.

“In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain. And Darius the Mede took the kingdom.” The young king who so wantonly set God at naught a few hours before, lies dead in Babylon's palace.

Over many a country today the divine fingers are writing, “Mene, Mene, Tekel.’, The days of every cruel, godless nation and every God-forgetting man are numbered. Nations and individuals are weighed in the balance of the great Judge of the earth. He will intervene and put an end to those who so cruelly ill-treat their fellow men, and spurn the gracious invitations of mercy which come through the mouths of His prophets. But He will save from the tyrant's power every man and woman, every boy and girl, who trusts in His name.

“Babylon shall become heaps.” What a daring thing for a prophet to say when Babylon seemed so prosperous and secure! But see those heaps-wreckage of Belshazzar's palace and Bel's ancient temple-near the meandering river Euphrates now. “It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation,” declared the prophet Isaiah. Probably the Babylonian crowds in Moon-god Street laughed at the words. But Moon-god Street has lain under the desert sands without habitation for many a long century now. The prophecy came true.

"Weighed in the balances" solemn words to every listener. "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil," and "the wage of sin is death."

But "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." [17] When "weighed in the balances," "Jesus our Redeemer was treated as we deserve that we might be treated as He deserves!" He took our nature's penalty that we might have His nature and its reward.

"Behold," He says to you, 'I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me.'" [18] Those words are His own. Open your heart's door and believe that He enters. He will gladly do this and give His own nature right now to every man and woman and every boy and girl who sincerely invites Him in. Believe His words, and He will do as He has promised for you. "He that hears My word, and believes on Him that sent Me," says Jesus, "hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." [19]

"For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved." [20] "And him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out." [21]

Oh, what a Savior that He died for me!  
From condemnation He hath made me free;  
"He that believes on the Son," said He,  
"Hath everlasting life."

"Verily, verily, I say unto you";  
Verily, verily," message ever new!  
He that believes on the Son"- is true!  
Has everlasting life!"

All my iniquities on Him were laid,  
All my indebtedness by Him was paid;  
All who believe on Him, the Lord hath said,  
"Have everlasting life."

Though poor and needy, I can trust my Lord;  
Though weak and sinful I believe His Word;  
Oh, glad message! Every child of God



"Hath everlasting life."

Though all unworthy, yet I will not doubt;  
For him that comes He will not cast out:  
"He that believes Oh the good news shout!  
"Hath everlasting life!"  
From Alexander's Hymns Number 3.

### **God Spoke - and It Came to Pass**

Just as mighty Nineveh had come to an end because of her sin, so God's prophets, looking into the future, saw Babylon in ruins--as it is today, out in the Mesopotamian desert. God's prophets foretold the fall of Babylon when that kingdom was the mightiest on earth and her capital city the most strongly defended. While Babylon was in her prime, the nations which should besiege her were named. God's prophets foretold the drunken feast, the drying up of the Euphrates, the terror of Belshazzar, and the capture of the city "without fighting." Isaiah named the victorious general a century before he was born!

Read the prophets' stirring utterances:-

"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, said the Lord." Jeremiah 51:53.

"For, lo, I will raise and cause to come up against Babylon an assembly of great nations from the north country: and they shall set themselves in array against her; from thence she shall be taken: their arrows shall be as of a mighty expert man. None shall return in vain!" Jeremiah 50:9.

"Behold, a people shall come from the north, and a great nation, and many kings shall be raised up from the coasts of the earth." Jeremiah 50:41.

"For out of the north there comes up a nation against her which shall make her land desolate, and none shall dwell therein: they shall remove, they shall depart, both man and beast." Jeremiah 50:3.

"When thou has made an end of reading this book thou shall bind a stone to it, and cast it into the midst of Euphrates: and thou shall say, Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise from the evil that I will bring, upon her." Jeremiah 51:63,64.

"Make bright the arrows; gather the shields: the Lord hath raised up the spirit of the kings of the Medes: for His device is against Babylon, to destroy it; because it is the vengeance of the Lord, the vengeance of His temple." Jeremiah 51:11.

"A grievous vision is declared unto me: the treacherous dealer deals treacherously, and the spoiler spoiled. Go up, O Elam: Besiege, O Media; all the sighing thereof have I made to cease." Isaiah 21:2.

"The Lord of hosts hath sworn by Himself, saying, Surely I will fill thee with men as with caterpillars; and they shall lift up a shout against thee." Jeremiah 51:14.

"A drought is upon her waters; and they shall be dried up: for it is, the land of graven images, and they are mad upon their idols." Jeremiah 50:38.

"And I will make drunk her princes, and her wise men, her captains, and her rulers, and her mighty men: and they shall sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake, said the King, whose name is the Lord of hosts." Jeremiah 51:57.

"My heart panted, fearfulness affrighted me: the night of my pleasure hath He turned into fear unto me." Isaiah 21:4.

"A sword is upon their horses, and upon their chariots, and upon all the mingled people that are in the midst of her; and they shall become as women: a sword is upon her treasures; and they shall be robbed." Jeremiah 50:37.

"The mighty men of Babylon have forborne to fight, they have remained in their holds: their might hath failed; they became as women: they have burned her dwelling-places; her bars are broken." Jeremiah 51:30.

"One post shall run to meet another, and one messenger to meet another, to show the king of Babylon that his city is taken at one end." Jeremiah 51:31.

"And that the passages are stopped, and the reeds they have burned with fire, and the men of war are affrighted." Jeremiah 51:32.

"The king of Babylon hath heard the report of them, and his hands waxed feeble: anguish took hold of him, and pangs of a woman in travail." Jeremiah 50:43.

"The voice of them that flee and escape out of the land of Babylon, to declare in Zion the vengeance of the Lord our God, the vengeance of His temple." Jeremiah 50:28.

"Cyrus, he is My shepherd." "I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two-hinged gates; and the gates shall not be shut; I will go before thee, I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron. I have surnamed thee, though thou has not known Me." Isaiah 44:28; 45:1-4.

"And, behold, here comes 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." Isaiah 21:9.

"As God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and the neighbor cities thereof, said the Lord; so shall no man abide there, neither shall any son of man dwell therein." Jeremiah 50:40.

"It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there." Isaiah 13:20.

"And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces: and her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged." Isaiah 13:22.

"And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah." Isaiah 13:19.

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