

Lesson 13

Last week we looked at most of Chapter 5, which recounts one of the most remarkable single days in human history - the very day that the Medo-Persian empire conquered the ancient city of Babylon and the Chaldean kingdom.

And we saw that Babylon exited the same way that it entered - with confusion about words. In this case, the words had to be interpreted by Daniel, who told the king that his days had been counted, that he had been weighed and found wanting, and that his kingdom would be separated from him. And all of that happened on that very same day.

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.

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 rise of the Medo-Persian Empire in its place. That night the city fell, the final shreds of the Babylonian kingdom came to an end, and Belshazzar was executed only a few hours later.

If we are keeping track of the kingdoms in Daniel 2, it was on this day that we moved from the head of gold to the breast and arms of silver.

According to the Nabonidus Chronicle, the date on which this occurred 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."

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, that Cyrus did not appear 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 could have been bad news because it would have been possible for the next kingdom to be worse than Babylon, but that is not what happened in this case. In Ezra 1:1-4 we learn about the Decree of Cyrus, which allowed the return of the Jewish people to Palestine to rebuild their city and their temple.

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

Who was Darius the Mede?

The liberal critics claim that Darius the Mede never actually existed but was instead a confused reflection of a later Persian ruler, Darius I (Hystaspes), by someone writing hundreds of years after the actual time frame of the book.

We have already looked extensively at the question of when the book was written, and we have seen that the evidence points to the book having been written at the same time as the events it records occurred.

Also, in Matthew 24 and Mark 13, Jesus used a prophecy of Daniel to provide a warning sign for his disciples to escape the coming destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Jesus tells us that Daniel was a **prophet**, and that fact alone tells us when the book of Daniel was written. And, I might add, also tells us with certainty that the fourth kingdom from Daniel 2 is Rome.

But even so, we need to respond to the allegation that Darius the Mede is a fictional creation. One commentator writes:

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 rejects the message of Daniel? Not at all! Here is what else that

same commentator wrote:

[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! If the word of God cannot be trusted to tell us the truth about the things we can see, how can we trust it to tell us the truth about the things we cannot see?

But let's examine the most serious charge from that commentator and from many others - that Darius the Mede never existed and that Daniel 5:31 contains a glaring historical error.

And before we begin, we might pause to note that the same allegations were once made against another person in Chapter 5, Belshazzar, but those allegations were proved wrong by the discovery of an ancient inscription. And before that, the critics argued that Sargon of Assyria mentioned in Isaiah 20:1 never existed, which was also proved wrong by archaeology. So the liberal critics' track record is not very good, but **so far** we have no ancient inscriptions that mention Darius the Mede (at least not by that name).

Any, I think, even the liberal critics would have to agree that Darius does not seem fictional in the book of Daniel. In fact, Daniel gives far more information about the background of Darius than he does about Belshazzar or even about Nebuchadnezzar.

- Daniel 5:30 says that King Darius was 62 when he began to reign.
- Daniel 5:30 also tells us his nationality - Darius was a Mede.
- Daniel 9:1 says that Darius was the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans.
- And, perhaps most importantly for our question here, Daniel repeatedly refers to Darius as king and never refers to him otherwise, which means that we might not expect Darius the Mede to be an obscure character.

So, unlike even the great Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel tells us the age, the nationality, and the parentage

of Darius. That sort of detail does not sound like someone just being made up out of thin air.

So let's ask two questions - did Darius the Mede exist, and, if so, who was Darius the Mede? The first question is easy; the second question is not.

Let's start with the easy question - did Darius the Mede exist?

Why is that an easy question? Because we believe the Bible. Because we trust the Bible. Because we have faith in the word of God.

But, some might say, that's all well and good, but where is your evidence? Our evidence is the book of Daniel itself.

We have already looked at evidence showing that the book of Daniel is an eye witness account of the events it records. What that means is that the book of Daniel is the best evidence we have of the events that transpired with the fall of Babylon to the Persians.

Here is how one commentator describes the situation:

Among the sources available to describe the transition of power from Babylon to MedoPersia, the most objective and best informed is undoubtedly Daniel. Herodotus and Xenophon were reporting stories second hand, long after the events. Daniel described events that he had witnessed and participated in as a high official in the royal courts of both Babylon and MedoPersia.

Why the most objective? Because the leaders of that day (much like the leaders of our own day) used propaganda to placate the crowds and glorify themselves. And because the Greek historians writing centuries later likewise often had their own separate agendas. Daniel, on the other hand, was not political. He wrote what he saw. He reported on what happened. His only agenda was to show the power of God in the pagan world, and that agenda required a completely accurate historical record.

So we can believe that Darius the Mede existed both because the Bible says that he existed and because the evidence supports the Biblical record.

So now let's move to the difficult question: who was Darius the Mede?

A very popular view (and a view that I once favored) is that Darius the Mede was an early governor of

Babylon under Cyrus.

If so, which governor was he? If we are looking for a governor, we have at least three possibilities: Ugbaru (Cyrus' general from the Nabonidus Chronicles), Gubaru (Cyrus' governor from the same source), and Gobryas (the defector mentioned by 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 even he seems to have confused the two). Some argue that Gobryas and Ugbaru were the same person, while others argue that Gobryas and Gubaru were the same person. Still others argue that Ugbaru and Gubaru were the same person.

Rather than wade into all of that, let's back up a step and look at this first theory from a different angle. If Darius the Mede was just a governor, then why does Daniel refer to him as a king, not once, not twice, but over thirty times?

But Daniel 5:31 literally reads, "Darius the Mede **received** the kingdom," and some say that means Darius "received the kingdom" from some other ruler, such as Cyrus. Likewise, some argue that the declaration in Daniel 9:1 that Darius "was made ruler" suggests that Cyrus gave Darius his authority.

But does that fit with the theme of this book - a theme that we saw repeated three times in the prior chapter? "The most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will." If Darius received a kingdom and was made a ruler, was it due to Cyrus? Or was it due to God? Nebuchadnezzar knew the answer to that question at the end of Chapter 4, and we do as well.

And as for Daniel calling Darius king, some argue that a governor could loosely be spoken of as king because he represented the royal authority when the king was away. But does that make sense? How do we think a king would react if he learned that people were referring to his governor as king when he was out of town? Don't you think that might make the king a bit nervous and might drastically lower the life expectancy of that governor?

Daniel knew the difference between a king and a governor, and when I read the descriptions of Darius the Mede in the book of Daniel, I see a king.

So if we limit our search to kings, are there any other possibilities for Darius? Yes, there are at least two, and perhaps **only** two.

First, Darius may have been none other than King Cyrus himself.

At first glance, this seems like a strange explanation. After all, Cyrus and Darius are both mentioned by name in this book. We saw Cyrus all the way back in Daniel 1:21, where we are told that "Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus."

Why would Daniel use two names for the same person?

We could ask that same question of Daniel himself, who is called both Daniel and Belteshazzar in this book. Or we could also ask Shadrach, who is also called Hananiah. Or we could also ask Meshach, who is also called Mishael. Or we could also ask Abednego, who is also called Azariah.

Rather than seeming strange that Cyrus would have two names, in this book it might seem strange if Cyrus had only one name!

In any event, it is not great argument to say that Daniel would not have used two different names for the same person given the number of times that he does that in this book.

But is there any evidence for saying that Darius and Cyrus are the same person? Yes, there is some.

Dual titles were not uncommon, and Cyrus and Darius were both titles. Since Cyrus 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 was specific to the Medes. Herodotus says that Cyrus was sometimes called the "king of the Medes" even after the fall of Babylon.

But the title "Darius the Mede" (5:31) suggests that Darius was of Median lineage, and later Daniel specifically states that Darius was "a Mede by descent" (9:1). How can that 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 so Cyrus was half Median.

Also, Daniel may have preferred the title "Darius the Mede" for Cyrus 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 used the title "Darius the Mede" to emphasize the fulfillment of those prophecies.

And having 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.

There is some evidence that Cyrus was in his forties rather than in his sixties when Babylon fell, but there is also some evidence to the contrary. Cicero reports Cyrus' age as 70 when he died and cuneiform texts tell us that Cyrus reigned nine years after he conquered Babylon. What that means is that in 539 BC, Cyrus would have been about 62 years of age, the same age given by Daniel for Darius the Mede.

But what about Daniel 6:28, which reads: "So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian"? How do we explain that verse if Cyrus and Darius are the same person?

The answer is that 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 actually be where Daniel explains to the reader 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"). How do we explain that if Cyrus and Darius are the same person? Xerxes was a royal title, and here it could refer either to Cyrus' father, Cambyses, or to Cyrus' grandfather, Astyages, the king of the Medes.

So maybe King Cyrus and King Darius were the same person.

But are there any other possibilities? Or have we run out of kings? The answer is that, depending on whom you ask, we have not run out of kings, and there is another possibility.

What do I mean by it depends on who you ask? What I mean is that we can ask Herodotus or we can ask Xenophon. I have mentioned those two Greek historians several times, and they each give an account of the fall of Babylon to Medo-Persia. But their accounts do not always agree.

And one place where their historical accounts disagree relates specifically to the question we are considering here - the identity of Darius the Mede.

The book of Daniel describes Medo-Persia as what it was - a unified kingdom. And we know that eventually Persia became the dominant partner in that unified kingdom, but that was not always the case. In fact, the Bible shows the Medes as the primary partner at the time of Babylon's fall.

Daniel refers four times in Daniel 5-6 to "the Medes and the Persians." Later, the book of Esther reverses that order to instead be "the Persians and the Medes." Also, the vision of the ram in Daniel 8 indicates that the Medes were initially dominant when the Medo-Persian Empire began, but that the Persians subsequently became dominant. That is further shown by Isaiah 13:17 and Jeremiah 51:11, 28, where God says that he will bring the Medes against Babylon.

So perhaps Cyrus the Persian was not the highest ranking person around at this time, but was perhaps outranked by a Median king. If so, who was that king?

This is where we get back to the disagreement between Herodotus and Xenophon. Herodotus tells us that Cyrus was the only king at this time, but Xenophon tells us that there was also a Median king at this time. And, as we just saw, Xenophon seems at times to be closer to the Biblical record than does Herodotus.

So, if we ask Xenophon, then who was this other king, and what role was Cyrus playing when Babylon fell?

That other king is Cyaxares II, who according to Xenophon was reigning as the head of the Medo-Persian confederation at the time of Babylon's fall. Darius would have been his throne name. Cyrus would have been his coregent, the hereditary king of Persia, the crown prince of Media, and the commander of the Medo-Persian army.

So which theory do I favor?

I favor the second theory - that Darius the Mede was the king of Media who reigned over Medo-Persia before Cyrus, who was at that time the hereditary king of Persia and the crown prince of Medo-Persia. In other words I think Xenophon's view is the correct view.

If Herodotus is correct instead, then I think Darius the Mede is most likely just another name for Cyrus.

Yes, there are some ancient inscriptions that disagree with Xenophon, but that does not mean Xenophon is wrong. Ancient inscriptions sometimes, and perhaps often, were created to spread

propaganda, and once King Cyrus came to power he very likely started to rewrite history about how he came to power. It seems much easier to explain why Herodotus omitted Cyaxares than to explain why Xenophon would have made him up.

Also, and most importantly, Xenophon is much closer to the Biblical record. For example, while Xenophon does not mention Belshazzar by name, he does refer to Nabonidus as "the king who then was, the father of the one who now is" at the time of Babylon's fall.

Again, we have evidence for an early date. 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 who was trying to create a forgery would have used those two names.

Chapter 6

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 happen - 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.

#daniel