

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA

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Dearest grandchild,

Today's letter will deal with the ancient city of Babylon. At one time Babylon was the strongest and most impregnable city in the world. Its walls and hanging gardens were both originally mentioned in Antipater's list of the Seven Wonders of the World. Around the 8th century A.D., however, the walls of Babylon were replaced in the list by the lighthouse of Alexandria. This avoided having two wonders in the same city. According to the historian Herodotus the walls of Babylon were 56 miles long, 80 ft. thick, and 320 ft. tall. At the time there was no siege technology that could breach these walls. The walls completely circled the city, even over the Euphrates River, which ran through the center of the city. There were large metal gates, however, positioned at the point where the river ran into and out of the city to prevent anyone from sneaking into the city by way of the river.

Belshazzar, the arrogant king of Babylon, knew an invading army of the Medes and Persians was camped outside. He was confident, however, that they were powerless to conquer his great city. In fact, he was so confident that he gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles. These proud officials drank wine and praised their gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone. Belshazzar even gave orders to desecrate the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar had stolen from the Temple of Jehovah in Jerusalem. Then, in the midst of their revelry, **“Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lamp stand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote. His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way” (Dan. 5:5-6).**

As you may know, the prophet Daniel interpreted those words on the wall. They signified that Belshazzar's kingdom was coming to an end. He had been weighed in the balance and found wanting. Furthermore, Belshazzar was going to die and his great kingdom was going to be given to the Medes and the Persians (Dan. 5:26-28). **“That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom at the age of sixty-two” (Dan. 5:30).**

It was common in those days to take years to conquer a walled city. For example, it took the great Roman army three years to conquer a little city like Jerusalem. How then was it possible to conquer the great city of Babylon in a single night?

The answer involves a prophecy made by Isaiah 200 years before. Cyrus the Great was the king of the Medes and Persians when they conquered Babylon. Cyrus reigned from 559 B.C. until his death in 530 B.C. He conquered Babylon in 539 B.C. As we have said, some 200 years before Cyrus was born Isaiah predicted his reign and wrote: **“This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their honor, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut” (Is. 45:1).** Cyrus is the only gentile called the Lord's “anointed”. The prophecies about Cyrus are among the most remarkable in the Bible.

In order to defeat Babylon Cyrus divided his army into three groups. One group was stationed where the Euphrates River entered the city. Another group was stationed where the river exited the city. The third group went upstream and diverted the waters of the Euphrates into a marsh. This lowered the waters enough for the invaders to penetrate the metal gates and advance into the river bed.

Herodotus, the historian, describes what happened next in Herodotus 1:191: *“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 so took the city . . .”*

As Isaiah predicted God opened doors before Cyrus and the gates were not shut. While the whole city of Babylon brazenly celebrated their “safety”, the drunken guards carelessly left the gates open that gave upon the river. The invading army entered those open gates and pretended to join the drunken revelers. As a result they went straight to the palace of Belshazzar without opposition. This is how the prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled and Babylon was conquered in a single night.

According to J. B. Payne in *The Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy*, about 27% of the Bible is predictive. Some estimate the Jesus Himself fulfilled 365 prophecies. When these predictions come true, it is powerful evidence that the Scriptures are inspired by God. Isaiah wrote about God’s unique ability to know the future: **“Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God and there is none like me. I make know the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come” (Is. 46:9-10).**

Here is another amazing prophecy that deserves our attention. When Jesus ascended into heaven two men dressed in white stood by the apostles and said: **“Men of Galilee . . why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).**

JESUS COULD COME TODAY! PLEASE BE READY TO MEET HIM!

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce