

that the waters in the Euphrates were steadily diminishing. The besieging army of Cyrus, which had long been held at bay by the massive walls, was eagerly watching the river. The river had been turned from its course, and as soon as the water had sufficiently subsided to allow the men a passage in the bed of the river, they entered from opposite sides of the city. In their reckless feeling of security, the Babylonians had left open the gates in the walls which lined the river-banks inside the city. So the Persians, once in the river-bed, easily entered the city through the open gates. (SDP 74.2).

Soon one post was running to "meet another, and one messenger to meet another, to show the king of Babylon that his city is taken at one end." But the news was received too late to save the king. God had numbered and finished his kingdom. The enemy made a mad rush for the palace. The pen of inspiration describes the overthrow of the kingdom more vividly than any human historian. Of those guests at the banquet of Belshazzar it is said:

"In their heat I will make their feasts, and I will make them drunken, that they may rejoice, and sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake, saith the LORD. I will bring them down like lambs to the slaughter." (Jeremiah 51:39, 40).

Fire raged through the streets, and as the people realized that destruction was upon them, a cry reached heaven. It was a hand-to-hand fight with fire and sword until men grew weary and gave up the struggle. (SDP 74.3).

"In that night was Belshazzar slain," and the kingdom was given to Darius, the aged king of the Medes. Thus came to an end one of the proudest monarchies that has ever been upon the earth. When an individual or a nation fills up the cup of iniquity, and passes the limit of God's mercy, they are quickly humbled in the dust. (SDP 75.1).

The question naturally arises, Why did not the conquering army destroy Daniel, who was the third ruler in the kingdom, at this critical moment? The answer is simple and natural. When the kingdom was taken and Belshazzar slain, Nabonadius, the first ruler, at the head of an army, was surrounded by the enemy in another part of the kingdom. This left Daniel sole ruler in Babylon. He knowing that over one hundred years before, Isaiah had prophesied that Cyrus should take the kingdom, was ready to welcome him whom God had said should build the house of the Lord at Jerusalem. (SDP 75.20).

There is also good reason to believe that Daniel and Cyrus were not strangers. When excluded from the council of Bel-

shazzar, Daniel had spent a portion of his time at Shushan, the capital of Elam. Elam had revolted from Babylon, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Jeremiah. Daniel may have formed an acquaintance with Cyrus, and showed to him, as the high priest did to Alexander on a certain occasion, the prophecy that pertained to himself, and also revealed to him the way God had said he should enter Babylon. It is evident from the wording of the decree given in the first chapter of Ezra, that Cyrus was familiar with these prophecies. (SDP 75.4).

God gives continual opportunities for his people to prepare the way for blessings to come to them, when they are walking in the light. God is never taken by surprise, but his Word is a lamp to the feet and a guide to the life. This illustrates the importance of God's people's "knowing the time" in which they live from the light of prophecy. There is a Witness in every scene of sacrilegious mirth, and the recording angel writes:

"Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting." This same Witness is with us wherever we are. Although we may feel that we have liberty to follow the promptings of the natural heart, and indulge in lightness and trifling, yet an account must be rendered for these things. As we sow, so shall we reap. (SDP 76.1).

Nations to-day are repeating the history of the last years of the kingdom of Babylon. Medo-Persia was the instrument in the Lord's hands to punish Babylon. The next great overthrow of governments will usher in the kingdom of our Lord. For the final battle, nations are now mustering their forces. The cry has gone forth, "Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and deliver every man his soul; be not cut off in her iniquity; for this is the time of the Lord's vengeance." (SDP 76.2).

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The writing on the wall Mene, Tekel, Peres

God has numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Mede and Persians.

“Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand...Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God which was at Jerusalem; and the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, drank in them. They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone.” (Dan. 5: 1, 3, 4).

THE WRITING ON THE WALL

“In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaister of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another.” (Dan. 5:5-6).

The loud laughter ceased, and the music died away. Terror-stricken, a thousand guests looked from the face of the king to the writing on the wall. The Chaldean astrologers and soothsayers were called, but the writing was meaningless to them. They who taught all earthly languages failed to recognize the language of heaven. The four strange characters remained as at first seen, emblazoned in letters of fire on the wall. (SDP 69.1).

As the Chaldeans were unable to read the writing on the wall, the king's terror increased. He knew that this was a rebuke of his sacrilegious feast, and yet he could not learn the exact meaning. Then the queen-mother remembered Daniel, who had "the Spirit of the holy God," and who had been made master of the wise men in the days of Nebuchadnezzar as the result of interpreting the king's dream. Daniel, the prophet of God, was called to the banquet room. As he came before Belshazzar, the monarch promised to make him third ruler in the kingdom if he would interpret the writing. The prophet, with the quiet dignity of a servant of the Most High God, stood before the gorgeous, terror-stricken throng that bore evidence of intemperate feasting and wicked revelry. (SDP 70.3).

In Israel, children were named under the inspiration of the Spirit, and the name was an expression of character. When God changed a name, as in the case of Abraham, Jacob, or Peter, it was because of a change of character in the individual. True to the name given him by his mother, Daniel-God's judge-again appears to vindicate the truth. Nebuchadnezzar had called him Belteshazzar, in honor of the Babylonian god Bel, but to the last this Hebrew, who knew the Lord, remained true to his God-given name, as shown in the

twelfth verse of this chapter. He did not speak with flattering words, as the professedly wise men of the kingdom had done, but he spoke the truth of God. It was a moment of intensity, for there was but a single hour in which to make known the future. Daniel was now an old man, but he sternly disclaimed all desire for rewards or honor, and proceeded to review the history of Nebuchadnezzar, and the Lord's dealings with that ruler-his dominion and glory, his punishment for pride of heart, and his subsequent acknowledgment of the mercy and power of the God who created the heavens and the earth. (SDP 70.4).

“And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this. But hast 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 thou hast 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, hast thou not glorified.” (Dan. 5:22, 23)

Belshazzar had trodden on sacred ground; he had laid unholy hands on holy things; he had severed the ties which bind heaven and earth together; and there was no way for that life-giving Spirit of God to reach him or his followers. Day by day his breath had been given him, a symbol of the spiritual breath, but he praised and thanked the gods of wood and stone. His every motion had been by virtue of the power of the God of heaven, but he had prostituted that power to an unholy cause.

“Then was the part of the hand sent from him; and this writing was written.” (Dan. 5:24). What he could not see written in his own breath and muscles, what he could not read in his own heart-beats, God wrote in mystic characters on the palace wall, over against the candlestick. (SDP 71.1).

THE INTERPRETATION

The people waited with bated breath as Daniel turned to the writing on the wall, and read the message traced by the angel hand. The hand had been withdrawn, but four terrible words remained.

“This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.” (Dan. 5:26-28). In dealing with men God always uses a language which appeals forcibly to their understanding. This is illustrated in the handwriting on the wall. It is a common belief among idolaters that the gods weigh deeds

in balances, and that if the good deeds outweigh the evil, the individual enters into his reward; if the opposite result is obtained, punishment follows. The language, therefore, was familiar to King Belshazzar. "God hath numbered thy kingdom; . . . thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting." To the magicians who stood within hearing, as Daniel gave the interpretation, the words came with peculiar force because of their familiarity with religious customs. (SDP 72.2).

To the one who knows God, the attitude of the Lord toward the sinner is very different, and still the symbol of the weights and balances is applicable. That this subject might be understood, God had sent an explanation by the prophet Ezekiel. When man sins and dies without repentance, he is cut off from God, because our iniquities separate between us and God, and the man can not be saved. If a man loves Christ and accepts him and his righteousness, Christ's character is written opposite the name of that man in the books of heaven, and so long as a love of the truth is cherished, the man hides in Christ and is known by the character of Christ. God deals with men in the present. We may have been the worst of sinners, but if to-day we are hidden in Christ, heaven takes into account only our present position. (SDP 73.1).

So it was that God dealt with the nations, and this answers the question why Nebuchadnezzar might one day be in favor with God and the next day be in condemnation; why Zedekiah's course of action was condemned once, and then again he was told that it lay in his power to save Jerusalem. (SDP 73.2).

BELSHAZAR SLAIN THE SAME NIGHT

God gave the Babylonian monarchs, and through them the entire kingdom, an abundance of time to accept him. He waited long. The Holy Watcher hovered long near the center of earthly governments; every blessing which Heaven could bestow was given to woo the kingdom to the side of right. But at last the slender cord which connected earth and heaven snapped; there was no channel for the flow of the Holy Spirit; death and death only could result. That there might be no misunderstanding, the last word read, "Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians." (SDP 73.3).

Scarcely had the scarlet robe been placed on Daniel and the golden chain hung about his neck, when the shouts from the invading army rang through the palace. (SDP 74.1).

In the midst of their feasting and rioting, none had noticed