

DANIEL 5 & 6, -- BELSHAZZAR & DARIUS

Daniel 5:1 King Belshaz'zar made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in front of the thousand.

Belshaz'zar's father, Nabonidus, was off with the Babylonian armies expanding the kingdom, and Belshaz'zar was left in charge. Cyrus' generals knew that they could not defeat the walls surrounding Babylon, which were reported to be 40 feet thick at the base, 90 feet tall, and wide enough at the top for chariots to pass each other. However, they conceived diverting the great river Euphrates which ran through Babylon, and thereby starve the city of water. Did Belshaz'zar attempt to raise a new army, or send messengers to effect a rescue? Or did he simply command a feast behind his 90 ft tall walls, and remain oblivious to the consequence of a city without water?

Certainly his nobles perceived their plight, and they acted:

Daniel 5:30 That very night Belshaz'zar the Chalde'an king was slain. ³¹ And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.

Belshaz'zar's replacement was carefully chosen. Darius was a former Median prince (son of Ahasu-e'rus), who might be able to secure some concessions with the King of the Medes & Persians.

Commentator Views

Daniel 6:1 It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom a hundred and twenty satraps, to be throughout the whole kingdom; ² and over them three presidents, of whom Daniel was one, to whom these satraps should give account, so that the king might suffer no loss. ³ Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other presidents and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom.

Historians assert that the Medo/Persian administrative records are complete, but there is no provision for a "King Darius". The commentators errantly presume that because Darius is a Mede, that he must be a Medo/Persian, presumably General Gobryas, who was in charge of the military operation at Babylon. Unfortunately, this contradicts simple logic where any conqueror would either command the existing king to pay homage and taxes, or he might simply have his staff take over the management of the newly captured city. And where Gobryas was never a King, he was only a General and possibly Governor, it doesn't make sense that General Gobryas would plan to appoint an untested castrated Jewish slave "over the whole kingdom".

In addition, where Gobryas died within two weeks of conquering Babylon, one might pause to consider how a Medo/Persian General could develop such a close bond with this Jewish slave, that he was distressed, tried to rescue Daniel, exhorted Daniel, and spent the night fasting and went without sleep. And upon daybreak this purported General Gobryas hastened to Daniel and called to Daniel in anguish to see if he had perished. -- All this for a Jewish slave that he had only known for two weeks?

Historical View

Daniel 6:7 All the presidents of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the counselors and the governors are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an interdict, that whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions.

Collin Sadler

Nebuchadnezzar conceived a brand new empire based upon the Metropolis model in a region where competing pre-Metropolis Median and Persian kingdoms existed. While Cyrus was consolidating the Median and Persian regions, one of the local kings, Ahasuerus, sent his son, Darius, into exile to Babylon to preserve his life. As such, Darius retained his cultural norms where an edict, once signed, cannot be revoked.

Daniel 6:14 Then the king, when he heard these words, was much distressed, and set his mind to deliver Daniel; and he labored till the sun went down to rescue him.

Clearly Darius was the last Babylonian King, and the kingdom was in peril. And because Daniel was the only connection to GOD, Darius' very existence depended upon Daniel. But why no historical account? Simple, the city was surrounded so all records were confined to the city, and when the Medo/Persians captured the city, they would have destroyed them lest the peoples remember the good-old-days, and resist the new leadership. Thus this record of history is lost except to the Bible.

6:28 So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

Exactly how is it that Daniel cites "Cyrus the Persian" (singular) if BOTH Darius and Cyrus are Persians (plural)? -- That is, unless Darius is under the Babylonian Empire, and Cyrus under the Medo/Persian Empire (singular/singular).

-- If this is all correct, then perhaps one more Scripture verse could validate the true historical account:

Daniel 11:1 And as for me, in the first year of Darius the Mede, I stood up to confirm and strengthen him.

When General MacArthur signed the WWII Japanese surrender document on the Battleship U.S.S. Missouri in Tokyo Bay, did he need strengthening? Certainly the Japanese did. After the war ended more than 900 Japanese were executed for war crimes, including Tojo "along with six other top Japanese leaders".¹

Perhaps this last Babylonian King Darius also need strengthening with the prospect of Cyrus at the gate.

¹ This Day In History, "Dec. 23 1948 Japanese War Criminals Hanged In Tokyo", <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/japanese-war-criminals-hanged-in-tokyo>