

# Triennial Torah Study – 3<sup>rd</sup> Year 25/08/2012

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We continue this weekend with our regular Triennial Torah reading which can be found at [https://sightedmoon.com/sightedmoon\\_2015/files/TriennialCycleBeginningAviv.pdf](https://sightedmoon.com/sightedmoon_2015/files/TriennialCycleBeginningAviv.pdf)

<b>Num 16</b>		<b>Daniel 4-6</b>	<b>Romans 6-7</b>
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## **Korah's Rebellion (Numbers 16)**

Korah, a first cousin to Moses, and 250 leaders of the assembly arose in self-exaltation against Moses and Aaron with claims that they were superseding their authority. These men hypocritically accused Moses and Aaron, saying, “You exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord” (verse 3). There is within sinners the proclivity to accuse others of the same sin they are committing (verse 7; Romans 2:1). These men wanted a piece of the action, to appoint themselves as leaders and teachers over the congregation. They took too much upon themselves, speaking evil of things they did not understand (compare Jude 10-11). They were refusing to recognize that God was working in a special way with Moses and Aaron, and they hadn't learned anything from Miriam and Aaron's misjudgment in a similar way regarding Moses.

Moses told Korah and the 250 to bring bronze censers (devices for burning incense, each made of a bowl with a colander on top, swung on a chain). Why? Because besides the contention over judging the nation, these men were also disputing Aaron's position over the priesthood. They were not priests, and the burning of incense was a priestly duty these men were trying to usurp (Numbers 16:40). Again, they had apparently not learned anything from the terrible mistake of Nadab and Abihu, who had died because they offered strange fire before the Lord (3:4; Leviticus 10:1-2).

Because God is the One who put Moses and Aaron in their respective offices, the rebellious action of the men led by Korah was actually against God (Numbers 16:11, 30). Moreover, as the sons of Levi, they had already been appointed to very respected positions in the service of His tabernacle. And yet they weren't satisfied—they wanted the judgeship and priesthood also (verses 9-10). “The men who were seeking a higher position were in fact being contemptuous of the place to which God had appointed them. Moses' response was condescending and scathing: ‘Is it a small thing to you?’ The dissenters should have realized how gracious God had been in giving them the life work He had provided. They were not unlike people who complain about the gifts God has given them” (Nelson Study Bible, note on 16:9-11).

These men rejected Moses' authority, claiming that he was lording authority over them like some worldly prince—which is utterly ridiculous given the humility of Moses and His many intercessions for the Israelites, including his offer to give up His own eternal salvation to save them. Dathan and Abiram, two allies of Korah, even praised Egypt as the land of milk and honey (verse 13), accused Moses of wrongdoing for leading them out of that land, and absurdly blamed him for the fact that the Israelites had been denied entrance to the Promised Land (verse 14). It may be that many were beginning to be swayed by these

accusations, since God once again stands ready to blast the entire nation from existence—though He relents from this course at the intercession of Moses and Aaron. Nevertheless, the principal evildoers come to a dramatic end.

It is easily overlooked here, but, thankfully, not all of Korah's family followed him in this rebellion (26:11). Indeed, Korah's descendants were later prominent among the Levites (see 2 Chronicles 20:19), serving as gatekeepers at the temple (1 Chronicles 26) and as musicians, contributing many psalms for temple worship (see Psalm 42; 44-49; 84-85; 87-88). There is a natural human tendency to support those within our families. But this becomes a problem when the family member being supported is engaging in wrongdoing. There is a similar sin in the supporting of those in leadership positions when they are leading sinful lives (verse 26). The scriptures are clear that God disqualifies leaders who refuse to repent of overt sin in their lives. We can never condone sin. To just say, "I'll put it in God's hands," when we have an obligation to stand up and be counted, is the same as temporarily approving of a sinful situation—and that is always wrong. That's why Moses drew that proverbial "line in the sand," asking people to show where they stood by backing away from the rebels.

The people of the congregation do back away and witness the incredible event of the earth swallowing up the leading rebels with their families and fire consuming the unauthorized incense offerers. But astonishingly, the congregation complains against Moses and Aaron the next day, blaming them for killing God's people. God is understandably infuriated, and again—only the next day!—He tells Moses and Aaron to get out of the way so that He can destroy the nation (verses 44-45). In His wrath God sends a terrible plague. But again, Moses desires to save the people and orders Aaron to quickly make atonement for them. Aaron, as a clear type of Christ—a mediator, a savior, a deliverer—intercedes for the congregation, standing between life and death to stop the plague, which had already slain nearly 15,000 people (verses 48-49).

#### **Nebuchadnezzar's Madness and Restoration (Daniel 4)**

Chapter 4 of Daniel is a most remarkable section of the Bible in that much of it consists of Nebuchadnezzar's own words. Some historians have questioned the authorship, claiming that there is nothing else in Babylonian records to confirm such an incident. They also dispute the king having used such words, as they would have been unacceptable to the Babylonian people who worshiped him as a god. Some who dispute the authorship claim that Daniel probably wrote it. Yet while Daniel could have drafted the declaration just as speechwriters do for today's leaders, the Bible specifically states that it was the word of Nebuchadnezzar.

The declaration comes at the end of an eight-year episode—the dream with its interpretation (verses 4-27), a year of delay or probation (verses 28-29) and the seven-"time" (i.e., seven-year) affliction (verses 25, 30-37; compare Daniel 7:25, where a "time" equals a year, as we will later examine). "The story is set in a time of relative peace after Nebuchadnezzar's major conquests and massive building projects. It best fits after the fall of Jerusalem, during the lengthy siege of Tyre when Babylon launched no other major military operation. Not unexpectedly no record of a lengthy madness has been found in the royal archives, but it could have occurred any time between 582 and 573 B.C." (Lawrence Richards, *The Bible Reader's Companion*, 1991, note on verse 4). This would put Nebuchadnezzar's second dream about 23-24 years from the time of Daniel's captivity in 605 B.C.

The prophet has been serving in a high capacity in the empire for more than two decades. At the beginning of that period the king had the miraculous experience of his first dream and its interpretation. More recently, he witnessed the amazing episode of Daniel's three friends in the fiery furnace. And yet Nebuchadnezzar, while recognizing the Hebrew God as a powerful deity, does not recognize Him as the true and only God.

He says Daniel is called Belteshazzar “according to the name of my god” (verse 8)—his god being Bel-Marduk. And where the NKJV has “Spirit of the Holy God,” it is better rendered “spirit of the holy gods.” Nebuchadnezzar saw that “in contrast to the other soothsayers in his court, Daniel was truly inspired by God (or the gods): ‘The spirit of the holy gods is in him.’ (That this elahin, {‘gods’} is meant as a true plural—rather than a plural of majesty—is shown by the plural form of the adjective qaddisin accompanying it.)” (Expositor’s Bible Commentary, note on verse 8). It should be noted that such language in the declaration does not necessarily mean that the king still thought in these terms after the whole affair was concluded. It may be that he was simply describing the way he understood things at the time of his dream—and that Bel had been his god. (Yet it could also be that He merely came to see and acknowledge the God of Israel as the “Most High” while still believing in and even worshiping lesser gods.)

The dream starts with a huge tree that grows to reach the ends of the earth. The magicians and others either can’t or won’t interpret the dream. Perhaps they can—the symbolism not being unique—but they are fearful of being the bearers of bad news to the king. So the king calls on the prophet of God. Yet “interpreting the dream was no easy assignment for Daniel. He well knew what the dream meant but could hardly bring himself to reveal it to Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel’s loyalty to him—whom he had served so long and well and who had always shown Daniel kindness, even when Judah was being deported from her land of promise—was genuine. His sympathy for Nebuchadnezzar caused Daniel to shrink from announcing the king’s coming degradation. It was a while before he could bring himself to speak (the Aramaic literally says, ‘He was stupified for one hour’—but the word for ‘hour’ {saah} does not necessarily mean anything more definite than ‘a time’). At the king’s insistence, however, Daniel finally began to speak” (Expositor’s, note on verse 19a).

Daniel explains that the tree is Nebuchadnezzar, who will be figuratively cut down to live like a wild animal for seven “times” or years unless he repents. While Nebuchadnezzar has provided food, shelter and comfort for his empire, like many dictators his sins include oppression of his people (verse 27). The Bible doesn’t make clear why there was a delay, but it is another year before he loses his sanity (see verse 29). Perhaps this was to allow the king time to repent prior to the punishment. Whether the king made any needed reforms in his attitude or behavior is not revealed. But, in any case, his overall problem clearly remained—his supreme arrogance with regard to his own power and prestige. As Nebuchadnezzar walked on the roof of his palace, he boasted, “Is this not the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?” (verse 30, NIV). Here was evidence from his own mouth that he had not been humbled by his dream’s revelation and warning. Possibly his pride had even grown.

The king had “made Babylon the greatest city of the world, the ‘queen of Asia.’ [The Greek historian] Herodotus, who saw it one and a half centuries later, declared that there was no other city which could be compared with it. Babylon was built on a plain, on either side of the Euphrates, and had two surrounding walls. The outer wall, which went around the whole city, made a square” (Charles Seignobos, *The World of Babylon*, 1975, p. 69).

Historian Walter Kaiser Jr. writes: “It was a huge square, 480 stadia (55 1/4 miles) in circumference [making it nearly 2/3 the area of New York City], surrounded by a series of walls that made it virtually impregnable. Robert Koldewey, who excavated Babylon for eighteen years, verified how security-conscious Nebuchadnezzar was. The city walls were surrounded, according to Koldewey, with a brick wall 22 1/3 feet thick, with a space outside that wall some 38 1/3 feet wide, then another brick wall 25 feet thick. In the event that this outer wall was breached, the invader would be trapped between two walls. Inside the inner wall was another wall 12 feet thick. Every 160 feet the walls were topped by watchtowers, 360 towers in all, reaching the height probably of some 90 feet, not 300 feet mentioned by Herodotus, and wide enough to accommodate two chariots riding side by side....

“He also constructed the city gates of cedar wood covered with strips of bronze. Numerous gates...were installed in the walls. The most famous of these, the Ishtar Gate [now on display in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin], was fifteen feet wide and its arched passage way was thirty-five feet above the level of the street. This gate led directly into the Processional Way, which was used primarily for the great annual New Year’s Festival. The pavement was 73 1/2 feet wide and was lined with a series of 120 lions in enameled relief at 64-foot intervals.

“Along this Processional Way was the famous ziggurat or staged tower known as E-temen-anki, ‘The House of the Foundation of Heaven and Earth,’ which rose 300 feet high and could be seen for miles around the city. It is estimated that some 58,000,000 bricks were used in the construction of this ziggurat. Atop this seven-staged or terraced tower was a temple of Marduk, the god of Babylon....

“On a mound called Kasr, Nebuchadnezzar built one of his most impressive palaces. Its walls were made of yellow brick and the floors were of white and mottled sandstone. Near this palace were the famed hanging gardens, considered one of the Seven Wonders of the World....

“Babylon was a marvel of city planning. It was laid out in rectangles with wide roads named after the gods of Babylon. A bridge connected the eastern or new city with the western city across the river that flowed through the city. It had stone piers on both shores some 600 feet across the river, with a wooden footpath thirty feet wide that reached from shore to shore. The dwellings of the city often reached three or four stories high with the familiar eastern central courtyard” (A History of Israel, 1988, pp. 415-416).

Yes, Nebuchadnezzar had accomplished great things—but it is God who decides who will rule nations. All the amassed wealth and power of human beings eventually count for nothing (verse 35). The mighty king of Babylon is at last brought to this humbling realization.

It is interesting to note that throughout the seven-year exile, Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom is protected and is ready and waiting for his restored leadership when God heals him. Surely many officials in this large kingdom had greedy ambition, so it seems evident that it was God’s intervention that secured the kingdom for him.

Some historians have compared Nebuchadnezzar’s insanity to the story of the later Babylonian emperor Nabonidus, some even claiming the story in Daniel is misattributed, but there are significant differences. “Some scholars have proposed the thesis that the story of Nebuchadnezzar’s madness in the book of Daniel is a distorted reflection of Nabonidus’s exile in Arabia. It is now clear from the new Haran inscriptions that Nabonidus was in exile for ten years and not for seven as had been thought previously (Daniel 4:32 speaks of ‘seven times’). Among other objections to this theory is the fact that this interpretation was based on Sidney Smith’s rendering of a line in the Persian Verse Account, which is no longer tenable. Nabonidus’s behavior may seem erratic but he was not mad. Unfortunately we have few details about the last thirty years of Nebuchadnezzar’s life. He died soon after October 562 and was succeeded by his son Evil-Merodach” (Edwin Yamauchi, *The New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology*, 1983, p. 334).

One other point that should be made in regard to this section is the possibility of duality in the prophetic dream. A king and his kingdom are often interchangeable in Bible prophecy. Indeed, that is clear from the previous dream of Nebuchadnezzar. The tree of the present dream may represent not only Nebuchadnezzar but the Babylonian Empire as well. Babylon fell in 539 B.C., but we know from the book of Revelation that it is to experience an end-time revival as a powerful European empire dominated by a great false Christian system referred to in Revelation 17 as “Babylon the Great.” Indeed, as the Bible Reading Program comments on Isaiah 13 explained, the ancient Chaldeans and Babylonians eventually relocated to southern Europe. In essence, the “roots” of the tree remained to sprout anew in the future. Considering this, it has

been proposed that the “seven times” could be viewed as seven 360-day prophetic years. The prophetic “day-for-a-year” principle (see Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6) yields 2,520 years (i.e., 360 x 7)—perhaps stretching from the fall of ancient Babylon to the beginnings of its revival in modern times. While we can’t be certain, this does seem possible—particularly as there may be a parallel to this figure of 2,520 in the mysterious inscription of Daniel 5, as we will later examine.

### **The Handwriting on the Wall—and the Fall of Babylon (Daniel 5)**

Nine years have passed since Daniel’s vision of chapter 8. The prophet is now in his early 80s and major events are transforming the region. Eleven years earlier, King Cyrus II of Persia, vassal to his maternal grandfather King Astyages of Media, deposed Astyages and took over the rule of the now-combined Kingdom of the Medes and Persians. Cyrus had initially formed an alliance with the King Nabonidus of the Chaldean Neo-Babylonian Empire—which is part of what had provoked conflict with Astyages. Yet “while Nabonidus spent ten years in Tema [in Arabia], Cyrus was busily occupied in amassing an empire [an empire now known as the Medo-Persian Empire or simply the Persian Empire]. Soon all that was left to incorporate into his vast realm was Babylon, and so he set his sights upon that prize.... Babylonia, because of the absence of Nabonidus, began to deteriorate internally and externally under the incompetent Belshazzar” (Eugene Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, p. 478, 480).

Belshazzar, as we’ve already seen, was the son of Nabonidus, ruling as coregent for him in Babylon. Recall from the Bible Reading Program comments on chapter 7 that Nabonidus was not of royal blood, not being descended from Nebuchadnezzar. Yet notice that Nebuchadnezzar is referred to in chapter 5 as Belshazzar’s father (verses 2, 11, 13, 18) and Belshazzar as Nebuchadnezzar’s son (verse 22). The terminology of “father” and “son” is a common way of denoting “ancestor” and “descendant” in biblical language—especially as Nebuchadnezzar was an important ruler in establishing the dynasty of Babylonian kings. Yet Nabonidus was not of this dynasty. So how could his son Belshazzar be? It seems likely, as mentioned in the prior comments, that Nabonidus had married the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar. “In the account given by [the ancient Greek historian] Herodotus of the capture of Babylon by the Persians under Cyrus [written about 80 years after the event], Labynitus II, son of Labynitus I and Nitocris [daughter of Nebuchadnezzar], is named as the last King of Babylon. Labynitus is commonly held to be a corruption of Nabonidus” (“Baltasar,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02226c.htm>). Thus Nabonidus seems to have married Nebuchadnezzar’s daughter Nitocris, and their son was Nabonidus II, otherwise known as Belshazzar or Balthazar. The “queen” who comes to tell Belshazzar of Daniel (verses 10-12) was either Belshazzar’s mother Nitocris or—if Nitocris was away with Nabonidus—Belshazzar’s grandmother, the wife of Nebuchadnezzar (the latter being the conclusion of the Jewish historian Josephus).

Returning to events, “Many Babylonian provinces such as Elam fell away to Persia, and in 539 [B.C.] Cyrus sent an army under his general Gubaru to invest Babylon itself” (Merrill, p. 480). Indeed, the time had at last come for Babylon to fall. Recall that God had foretold through the prophet Isaiah that Cyrus would act as His servant to overthrow the proud city (see Isaiah 44-45).

The Expositor’s Bible Commentary provides further details of what was happening: “The Nabonidus-Cyrus Chronicle, according to a corrected reading...states: ‘In the month of Tashritu [Tishri], when Cyrus attacked the [Babylonian] army of Akkad in Opis on the Tigris, the inhabitants of Akkad revolted, but he (Nabonidus) massacred the confused inhabitants [for switching allegiance]. The 15th day [October 10], Sippar was seized without battle. Nabonidus fled’” (note on verses 1-4). Nabonidus had returned just in time to witness the downfall of his glorious empire.

“Apparently Nabonidus had commanded the troops in the field, while Belshazzar headed the defense of Babylon itself. Meeting with reverses, Nabonidus retreated south toward his salient at Tema (or Teima),

leaving the Persians free access to the capital. Concerning this same campaign, Herodotus reported (1.190-91): ‘A battle was fought at a short distance from the city [of Babylon] in which the Babylonians were defeated by the Persian king, whereupon they withdrew within their defences. Here they shut themselves up and made light of his siege, having laid in a store of provisions for many years in preparation against this attack’ (Expositor’s, same note). Yet by October 12, just two days after the fall of Sippar, Babylon would fall to Persian hands.

Humanly speaking, this didn’t seem possible. Babylon was the great city of its day—like imperial Rome at its height centuries later. It was the most important trade center and the greatest cultural and tourism center, with its renowned hanging gardens and other remarkable works. The enormous city, with its towering and impregnable thick walls, endless fortifications, great troop strength and vast population besides, seemed unconquerable. Indeed, Babylon had a few years’ store of food within its walls along with an endless supply of water from the mighty Euphrates River, which flowed right through the city. Thus, the people within would, it was supposed, remain well-provisioned and hardy for a long time while an outside army would face great difficulty. Sieges that took years were not uncommon in the ancient world but they were certainly unattractive prospects. As the Medo-Persian army advanced, there was no real concern within the city. Given Babylon’s unparalleled defenses and staggering prosperity, the idea that the city could fall seemed absurd. But the handwriting was soon on the wall (Daniel 5 being the very origin of this popular expression). The impossible was going to happen. Babylon, the greatest national power the world had ever seen, was about to fall. Let this be a lesson to all great nations—including the leading nation on earth today, the United States of America. For when God says it’s over, it’s over.

No doubt informed of the approaching forces, and despite the retreat of his father, King Belshazzar did not fret. He did not convene a war council. He didn’t do anything to prepare for what might be coming. Instead, brimming with confidence in his inviolable security, he proclaimed a feast and descended with thousands of his lords and his harem into a night of drunken debauchery. Bringing the sacred vessels of the Jerusalem temple into this affair was a blasphemous act of sacrilege. Indeed, we later learn that Belshazzar actually knew of the seven-year madness that had befallen his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar to punish him for his unbridled arrogance and bring him to understand the overriding authority of God (verse 22). And yet Belshazzar now defiled the sacred treasures of that God, even using them to toast the pagan gods of Babylon.

God, of course, would not be mocked. As the night wore on, the Persians were implementing a daring invasion plan. Recall from Isaiah 44:27-45:1 that God had hinted at the remarkable way in which Cyrus’ men would enter the city—through draining the Euphrates by diverting it and having the inner gates along the river channel unlocked. The feast served only to distract from what was actually going on.

“Herodotus...mentions that Cyrus, after laying siege to the town, entered it by the bed of the Euphrates, having drained off its waters, and that the capture took place whilst the Babylonians were feasting (Herod., I, 188-191). Xenophon [a Greek historian writing in the 4th century B.C.] also mentions the siege, the draining of the Euphrates, and the feast. He does not state the name of the king, but fastens on him the epithet ‘impious’” (“Baltasar,” Catholic Encyclopedia).

The palace revelry was at last interrupted by the shocking sight of the disembodied hand, suspended in midair, writing something into the plaster of a wall in plain sight of the king. Verse 5 mentions only fingers, but the word translated “fingers” in verse 24 should be “palm” (see NKJV margin). So an entire hand was seen—and it caused quite a stir. With Belshazzar being drunk and terrified, it’s no wonder he was wobbly and his knees were knocking together (verse 6). The king summoned the priests and various occult practitioners to try to discern the message, offering to the one who could give a proper explanation the position of “third ruler in the kingdom.” This phrase gave interpreters trouble for centuries until it was

realized that Belshazzar himself was the second ruler, reigning in Babylon as coregent for his father Nabonidus.

At last the elderly Daniel is brought in. Apparently Belshazzar did not know him—or perhaps he only knew of him but not to any great degree. While Daniel went about the “king’s business” in the third year of Belshazzar (8:1, 27), this must merely have meant that he did work for the state, perhaps as a low-level civil servant—in any case working in a much lower position than the one he held under Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel first gives Belshazzar a short but sobering and piercing sermon, ending powerfully in verse 23 with “the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified.” Daniel then translates and interprets the four words on the wall. In its note on Daniel 5:27-28, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* offers the following explanation:

“The first two were identical: mene, meaning ‘numbered,’ ‘counted out,’ ‘measured’ (passive participle of mena, ‘to number’). This signified that the years of Belshazzar’s reign had been counted out to their very last one, and it was about to terminate (v. 26). Observe that even if the court diviners had been able to make out the three consonants m- n- ‘ correctly, they still would not have known what vowel points to give them. For example, it could have been read as mena or [alternatively] mina—a heavy weight equivalent to sixty Babylonian shekels [or 50, as we will see]. The second word (v. 27) was ‘Tekel’ (teqel, cognate with the Hebrew ‘shekel’ [seqel] and coming from teqal, ‘to weigh’). Following after a m- n- ‘ (which might mean ‘mina’...), ‘Tekel’ would look like ‘shekel’ (a weight of silver or gold slightly over eleven grams). But Daniel explained it as the passive participle teqil (‘weighed’) and applied it to Belshazzar himself. God found him deficient in the scales and therefore rejected him.

“The third word is peres, which is derived from a root peras, meaning ‘to divide.’ Daniel read it as a passive participle (peris, ‘divided’) and interpreted it to mean that Belshazzar’s kingdom, the Babylonian Empire, had been divided or separated from him and given over to the Medes and Persians besieging the city. This word too might have been taken as meaning a monetary weight, like the two words preceding it; for the Akkadian parsu meant ‘half mina,’ and this may have been borrowed into Aramaic with that meaning. But more likely [it is supposed], as...[other commentators] have argued, it means ‘half shekel,’ since the root simply indicates division into two parts; and the usage in each individual language would determine what weight was being halved. In the descending scale of ‘mina,’ ‘shekel,’ the next weight to be expected would be something lighter than a shekel, namely ‘a half shekel.’ If, then, all that the diviners could make out of the strange inscription on the wall was ‘Mina, mina, shekel, and half-shekels [or half mina]’ (reading uparsin), then they might well have concluded that this series of money weights (this was, of course, still prior to the introduction of coined money into the Middle East) made no sense and conveyed no intelligible message. Daniel, however, being inspired of God, was able to make very clear sense of these letters by giving them the passive participle vowel pattern in each case....The same radicals [root consonants] that spell out peres (‘half shekel’) furnish the root for the word ‘has been divided,’ perisat. But furthermore p-r-s also points to the word for ‘Persian,’ Paras”—as the Persians would receive the kingdom.”

This appears a fairly reasonable explanation except that it leaves out the possibility that the particular money weights were also explicitly intended by the words God wrote—i.e., that the words had a double meaning. Recall that Daniel said Babylon had been weighed, like monetary weights in the balance, and was found lacking. Surely it is no mere coincidence that the words, taken together, appeared to read as particular money weights. Considering these weights, it is interesting to note that they can add up to a surprising total. A mina is given above as 60 shekels. Yet the same commentary, in its footnote on Daniel 5:25, clarifies the definition as “a unit of fifty or sixty shekels—the latter was the standard in Babylon” (emphasis added). Fifty was the standard Hebrew—and thus biblical—reckoning. Note also that the favoring of the interpretation of the last unit of weight as a half-shekel is based on the assumption that these coins must

have simply been related in descending order, not considering that they might have some special meaning. Why then, we might ask, is mina repeated?

In any case, if uparsin denotes the Akkadian parsu, “half mina,” as the commentary admits it would seem to, then notice the tally: mina (50 shekels) + mina (50 shekels) + shekel (1) + uparsin (half mina or 25 shekels) = 126 shekels. An interesting number results if we reckon this in the smallest money weight measurement units—gerahs. A shekel was 20 gerahs (Exodus 30:13). So 126 shekels would be 126 x 20 or 2,520 gerahs. Remarkably, this would seem to parallel the proposed explanation of the “seven times” of Daniel 4 as possibly meaning a 2,520-year judgment on Babylon from its ancient fall to modern times. While not certain—as Daniel did not spell this out in his explanation—it could very well be that God intended this additional meaning. It may even be that Daniel himself did not completely understand the meaning, as he is later told that the full meaning of his book was not for him to know, but that it was sealed until the time of the end (see Daniel 12:4).

Somewhat surprisingly, King Belshazzar follows through with the investiture of authority he promised. He must have believed the inspired interpretation Daniel gave or he wouldn't have made him prime minister. Indeed, he might have had him executed for insolence instead. Perhaps Belshazzar thought that his honoring of Daniel would avert the divine judgment. But it was too late for that. The king had gone too far. And the time for Babylonian rule was at an end.

Herodotus recorded: “Hereupon the Persians who had been left for the purpose at Babylon by the riverside, 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 the 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 of what had chanced, but as they were engaged in a festival, continued dancing and revelling until they learnt the capture but too certainly” (1.191).

The city was taken, “without resistance, by Gubaru, governor of Gutium [to the north of Babylon] and commander of the Persian army [under Cyrus]” (Merrill, p. 478). Before the sunrise, Belshazzar was dead. “According to [Xenophon], the king made a brave stand, defending himself with his sword, but was overpowered and slain by Gobryas [Gubaru] and Gادات, the two generals of Cyrus” (“Baltasar,” Catholic Encyclopedia). “This took place on October 12; two weeks later, on October 29, 539, Cyrus himself entered the city in peace. He forbade destruction, appointed Gubaru governor, and left the religious and civil administration of Babylon unchanged” (Merrill, p. 478).

Who Was Darius the Mede? (Daniel 5)

The last verse of chapter 5, verse 31, which the Hebrew Masoretic Text places at the beginning of chapter 6, states that the Babylonian kingdom was received by “Darius the Mede.” There is no mention in the chapter of Cyrus at all, though Daniel does later refer to him in 6:28 and 10:1. The identification of Darius the Mede is not entirely clear, though he is a significant figure in Daniel's book, particularly chapter 6, as we will soon see in our reading. There are other Persian rulers known as Darius—the actual Persian form of the name being Darayavahush—but they don't appear until later in history. A number of people through the years have tried to use this identification problem as a basis for declaring the Bible fraudulent, so it is important that we look at the matter.

Some suggest that Darius the Mede is another name for Cyrus. But there are problems with this identification. Cyrus is identified primarily as a Persian, even in the book of Daniel (see 6:28). However,



Cyrus was indeed part Mede and united the thrones of Persia and Media in himself. Moreover, Isaiah had prophesied the overthrow of Babylon by the Medes, so that would have been a reason for Daniel to stress the Median side of the conqueror. Yet there are other difficulties, such as the wording of Daniel 6:28: “So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.” This would seem to make them two different persons. Still, it must be acknowledged that the word translated “and” could be rendered “even”—which would then make the names synonymous.

Perhaps the biggest obstacle to seeing the two as the same person, though, is Daniel 9:1, where we are given the specific identification: “Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the lineage of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans.” Ahasuerus is also the name of a later Persian emperor to whom Esther was married. The Greek form of this name is Xerxes. Cyrus’ father was not Ahasuerus or Xerxes but Cambyses I. Indeed, in the Achaemenid dynastic line of Persia from which Cyrus sprung there is no Ahasuerus prior to him. Neither is there an Ahasuerus in the Median dynasty leading to Cyrus’ maternal grandfather Astyages—though it has been argued that the name of Astyages’ father, Cyaxeres, could possibly transliterate as such. While it is possible that Ahasuerus was an alternative name for Cyrus’ father or one of his forefathers, this is nowhere stated. Given this fact, it seems more likely that Ahasuerus was the name of a local Median ruler, or that he was an offshoot of the main royal line of Median kings, and that Darius was his son.

Notice that this Darius was made king over “the realm of the Chaldeans.” While this could refer to the entire Chaldean Empire, it could also refer specifically to the area of Babylonia and the rest of southern Mesopotamia. If the latter is meant, perhaps the most likely conclusion is that, as many contend, Darius the Mede should be equated with Cyrus’ general Gubaru (Gobryas in Greek), who was appointed governor over Babylonia.

The Expositor’s Bible Commentary points out that “the name ‘Darius’ may have been a title of honor, somewhat as ‘Caesar’ or ‘Augustus’ became in the Roman Empire. It is apparently related to ‘dara’ (‘king’ in Avestan Persian); thus the Old Persian Darayavahush may have meant ‘The Royal One’” (note on 5:30-31). While this would allow identification with Cyrus, it would also allow identification with lesser rulers.

The International Standard Bible Dictionary has this to say in its entry on Darius the Mede: “Outside of the Book of Daniel there is no mention of Darius the Mede by name, though there are good reasons for identifying him with Gubaru... who is said in the Nabunaid-Cyrus Chronicle to have been appointed by Cyrus as his governor of Babylon after its capture from the Chaldeans. Some reasons for this identification are as follows:

“(a) Gubaru is possibly a translation of Darius. The same radical letters in Arabic mean ‘king,’ ‘compeller,’ ‘restrainer.’ In Hebrew, derivations of the root mean ‘lord,’ ‘mistress,’ ‘queen’; in Aramaic, ‘mighty,’ ‘almighty.’

“(b) Gutium was the designation of the country north of Babylon and was in all possibility in the time of Cyrus a part of the province of Media.

“(c) But even if Gutium were not a part of Media at that time, it was the custom of Persian kings to appoint Medes as well as Persians to satrapies and to the command of armies. Hence, Darius-Gubaru may have been a Mede, even if Gutium were not a part of Media proper.

“(d) Since Daniel never calls Darius the Mede king of Media, or king of Persia, it is immaterial what his title or position may have been before he was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans. Since the realm of the Chaldeans never included either Media or Persia, there is absolutely no evidence in the Book of Daniel that its author ever meant to imply that Darius the Mede ever ruled over either Media or Persia.

“(e) That Gubaru is called governor (pihatu), and Darius the Mede, king, is no objection to this identification; for in ancient as well as modern oriental empires the governors of provinces and cities were often called kings. Moreover, in the Aramaic language, no more appropriate word than ‘king’ can be found to designate the ruler of a sub-kingdom, or province of the empire.

“(f) That Darius is said to have had 120 satraps under him [in Daniel 6] does not conflict with this; for the Persian word ‘satrap’ is indefinite as to the extent of his rule, just like the English word ‘governor.’ Besides, Gubaru is said to have appointed pihatus under himself. If the kingdom of the Chaldeans which he received was as large as that of [the earlier Assyrian emperor] Sargon he may easily have appointed 120 of these sub-rulers; for Sargon names 117 subject cities and countries over which he appointed his prefects and governors.

“(g) The peoples, nations and tongues of chapter 6 are no objection to this identification; for Babylonia itself at this time was inhabited by Babylonians, Chaldeans, Arabians, Arameans and Jews, and the kingdom of the Chaldeans embraced also Assyrians, Elamites, Phoenicians and others within its limits.

“(h) This identification is supported further by the fact that there is no other person known to history that can well be meant” (<http://bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Def.show/RTD/ISBE/Topic/Darius>).

While we cannot be certain, this seems a rather reasonable conclusion.

Regarding Gubaru, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary states: “The Nabonidus Chronicle and other cuneiform texts of that era indicate that he continued on as governor of Babylonia for at least fourteen years, even though Cyrus may have taken over the royal title at a solemn public coronation service two years later. Presumably urgent military necessity drew Cyrus away from his newly subdued territories to face an enemy menacing some other frontier. Until he could get back and assume the Babylonian crown with appropriate pomp and ceremony, it was expedient for him to leave control of Babylonia in the hands of a trusted lieutenant like Gubaru. A.T. Olmstead (The History of the Persian Empire {...1948}, p. 71) puts it thus: ‘In his dealings with his Babylonian subjects, Cyrus was “king of Babylon, king of lands.”...But it was Gobryas the satrap who represented the royal authority after the king’s departure”’ (note on Daniel 5:30-31).

Another possibility for the identity of Darius the Mede that some have argued for is that he was Cyrus’ maternal grandfather, the Median king Astyages son of Cyaxeres—the idea being that Cyrus allowed him to live out his days as a figurehead in Babylon for the sake of holding the empire together. Others argue for a son of Astyages named Cyaxeres mentioned by Xenophon. This would seem to contradict Herodotus’ report that Astyages had no male child, though he could have perhaps have had an intended male heir whom Cyrus saw fit to prop up. For more on these possibilities, see The New John Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible, Dr. William Smith’s Dictionary of the Bible and Hasting’s Bible Dictionary (all quoted at <http://philologos.org/bpr/files/d003.htm>). See also Jamieson, Fausset & Brown’s Commentary (note on Daniel 5:31).

Thus, even if Darius the Mede is not immediately identifiable from history, that is no reason to reject the scriptural account of him as errant and to therefore reckon the book of Daniel as fraudulent and uninspired—particularly as there are several possibilities as to his historical identity. As time has gone on, many biblical figures that scholars once reckoned as fictional characters have proven to be real people. We can be confident that Darius the Mede was likewise a real, historical figure, whether or not we can pinpoint his exact identity some 2,400 years later.

### **Daniel in the Lions’ Den (Daniel 6)**

Once again, we encounter Darius the Mede—here in a rather important context. As noted in the Bible Reading Program comments on Daniel 5:31, various theories have been advanced as to his identity. Most commonly accepted today is that he was either identical with Cyrus or that he was Cyrus’ governor over Babylon, Gubaru.

That Darius passes a decree that no god or man other than him could be petitioned for 30 days and that he wields such other power besides perhaps makes it difficult to our sensitivities to see how this could have been a lesser ruler than Cyrus himself. Yet it is certainly possible that a sub-king such as Gubaru, as the representative of the sovereign, was invested with the full authority of Cyrus in the higher king’s absence. (And the exaltation of the ruler above the gods of the land was probably deemed more to symbolize the dominion of the Persian state than to exalt Darius personally.)

Interestingly, archaeology has revealed that there was great focus on Gubaru’s authority only a few years later. The Expositor’s Bible Commentary states: “As [commentator] Whitcomb (p. 35) points out, the statement in 6:28—‘and the reign of Cyrus the Persian’—may very well imply that both of them [Darius and Cyrus] ruled concurrently, with the one subordinate to the other (i.e., Darius subordinate to Cyrus). It would seem that after he had taken care of more pressing concerns elsewhere, Cyrus himself later returned to Babylon (perhaps a year or two afterward) and formally ascended the throne in an official coronation ceremony. It was in the third year of Cyrus’s reign (presumably as king of Babylon) that Daniel received the revelations in chapters 10-12. Yet it is also evident from the cuneiform records...that Gubaru continued to serve as governor of Babylon even after Cyrus’s decease. The tablets dating from 535 to 525 contained warnings that committing specified offenses would entail ‘the guilt of a sin against Gubaru, the Governor of Babylon and of the District beyond the river {i.e., the regions west of the Euphrates}’ (Whitcomb, p. 23)” (note on Daniel 5:30-31).

Reading chapter 6, we learn that “one of Darius’s first responsibilities was to appoint administrators over the entire territory won from the Babylonians (v. 1). The 120 ‘satraps’ chosen by him must have been of lesser rank than the 20 satraps Herodotus mentioned (3.89-94) in listing major districts composed of several smaller regions (e.g., the fifth satrapy included Phoenicia, Palestine, Syria, and Cyprus). Here in Daniel the *ahasdarpennyaya* (‘satraps’) must have been in charge of all the smaller subdivisions. But over these 120 there were three commissioners (*sarekin*, v. 2), of whom Daniel was chairman (v. 3). In view of Daniel’s successful prediction in Belshazzar’s banquet hall, it was only natural for Darius to select him for so responsible a position, though he was neither a Mede nor a Persian. His long experience and wide acquaintance with Babylonian government made Daniel an exceptionally qualified candidate. But after he had assumed office and turned in a record of exceptional performance, it became obvious that he had superhuman knowledge and skill; and he became a likely choice for prime minister.... [But] just as his three friends had become the target of envy many years before (ch. 3), so Daniel encountered hostility in the new Persian government. Undoubtedly the great majority of his enemies were race-conscious Medes or Persians, and they did not take kindly to the elevation of one of the Jewish captives” (note on verses 1-4). Of course, there is also a natural tendency within administrative structures for people to become jealous when better-qualified individuals among them are promoted above them.

Daniel’s enemies could not dig up any dirt on him. Knowing his reputation for faithfulness to his God, they decided this was the only area they could get him into legal trouble—by making up a law contrary to his religious practice. “The government overseers (v. 6) came to the king ‘as a group’.... As an official delegation, they presented their proposal, falsely implying that Daniel had concurred in their legislation. ‘The royal administrators [of whom Daniel was chief], prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed’ (v. 7)—i.e., in drawing up the decree. Darius should have noticed that Daniel was not there to speak for himself. Yet Darius had no reason to suspect that the other two royal administrators would misrepresent

Daniel's position in this matter, and certainly the reported unanimity of all the lower echelons of government must have stilled any doubts Darius had about the decree. The suggested mode of compelling every subject in the former Babylonian domain to acknowledge the authority of Persia seemed a statesmanlike measure that would contribute to the unification of the Middle and Near East. The time limit of one month seemed reasonable. After it the people could resume their accustomed worship. So, without personally consulting Daniel himself, Darius went ahead and affixed his signature or seal to the decree (v. 9)" (note on verses 6-9).

The new law could not be rescinded (verse 8). "Once a royal decree had been issued, it could not be revoked—even by the king himself. It remained in force until its time of expiration. The practice of creating an unchangeable law may follow from the idea that changing a decree was an admission that it had been faulty" (Nelson Study Bible, note on verse 8).

Despite the severe penalty mandated for disobedience, Daniel would not be deterred from his regular prayers to God. It is interesting to consider that he could have resorted to praying to God in secret. And no doubt he often did anyway, just as all believers. Indeed, it seems that Daniel perhaps prayed in open sight three times a day toward Jerusalem to serve as a continual witness of God to the pagan empire and as an example to the Jews in captivity to be bold in their devotion to God and their faith in His promise of future return to the Holy Land. The morning and evening sacrifice in the Jerusalem temple had been a continual public witness of the true religion in Judah—and as noted in the Bible Reading Program's comments on Daniel 9, there seems to have been a relation to those offerings and Daniel's example of regular prayer. Perhaps Daniel, as the senior Jewish official in the empire, saw it as his duty to continue a form of that witness. Whatever the reason behind his practice, he no doubt felt that to cease from his practice in the face of a contrary religious decree would have been quite a witness of itself—a witness of compromise, godless fear and apparent denial of God. In no way would he, prophet of the Most High God who had humbled Nebuchadnezzar and had later given Babylon into the hands of Persia, cower at this plot against him and attack on his faith. He trusted God to defend His own holy name.

When the conspirators reported Daniel's disobedience, the king was very displeased with himself (verse 14). "For the first time the real reason for the decree dawned on him. He probably realized that he had been manipulated by Daniel's enemies, and he regretted his failure to consult Daniel before putting the decree in writing. Undoubtedly Darius respected Daniel for his consistent piety to his God. Throughout the day he tried his best to save Daniel's life. He may have thought of ways of protecting him from the lions, perhaps by overfeeding them or by covering Daniel with armor. Such schemes would have been interpreted as subterfuges undermining the king's own law. A miracle was Daniel's only hope. Darius undoubtedly respected Daniel's God—the God who had enabled him to interpret the letters on Belshazzar's wall and who had made Daniel the most able administrator in the court. Could it be that this God might save him? In all probability Darius had also heard of the deliverance of Daniel's three comrades from Nebuchadnezzar's furnace. By sunset, therefore, the king had resigned himself to comply with the conspirators' desire; and when they again reminded him of his irrevocable decree (v. 15), he was ready to go ahead with the penalty. Yet to show his personal concern for his cherished minister, Darius went with Daniel to the very mouth of the pit where the lions were kept" (Expositor's, notes on verses 13-17).

And so Daniel was cast into the den of lions and sealed within. People today often imagine a young, vigorous Daniel in the pit with the ferocious beasts. But the prophet was an old man, in his early 80s. All his life God had proved faithful. This night would be no exception.

The king spent the night fasting (verse 18). Whether he just couldn't eat, or refused to as a form of penance, or was actually trying to seek Daniel's God is not clear. But the next morning, he rushed to the lion's den and called out to Daniel, "servant of the living God" (verse 20). And Daniel answered back, "O king, live

forever!” “Though this is a standard way of greeting a king (see 2:4; 3:9; 5:10; 6:6), it is ironic here because Daniel, who has just been made alive by the God whom even Darius confesses as ‘the living God’ (v. 20), blesses the king with the wish that he should live forever. That is literally possible for the king, of course, only if he comes to know Daniel’s God who is the source of life, as the lion’s den episode shows so clearly” (Nelson Study Bible, note on verse 21).

The king then issues a new order. “Without any judicial hearing or trial, King Darius, absolute monarch that he was, ordered Daniel’s accusers to be haled before him and then cast with their families into the pit they had conspired to have Daniel thrown into. Presumably Darius considered them guilty of devising the decree that could have deprived the king of his most able counselor. Furthermore, they had lied to the king when they had averred that ‘all agreed’ (v. 7) to recommend this decree, when Daniel (the foremost of the administrators) had not even been consulted in the matter” (Expositor’s, note on verse 24). Yet what of the families? “What Darius did seems arbitrary and unjust. But ancient pagan despots had no regard for the provision in the Mosaic law (Deut 24:16): ‘Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own sin’ . . . . Perhaps Darius acted as he did to minimize the danger of revenge against the executioner by the family of those who were put to death” (same note).

Darius then issues a new decree that Daniel’s God, the living God, be honored. Perhaps this was after the original 30-day decree had expired. As for Daniel, his position as prime minister was now secure, and he apparently continued in it until his retirement a few years later.

## **Romans Chapter 6**

What is Paul talking about in the beginning of chapter 6? He is talking about sin and grace. His letter to the Romans and their assembly is stating to be dead to sin. Many cannot grasp this concept and say “how can this be? Dead to sin?” If one claims Messiah, to have died with Him and then arisen as a new creation with Him – then sin should have no control over them. Now, this is nothing “magical” that happens because of a word or a thought. This happens through “grace” and “faith”. Faith is doing the commandments, keeping the Sabbaths, observing the Feasts, obeying this Voice and commands of Yehovah. Doing these things “delivers” grace unto you thereby keeping you from sin. Sin no longer has power over you and you walk in grace through and by your acted upon Faith.

Not under the law (verse 14): This means one of two things: (1) under the condemnation of the law, or (2) that this law refers to the law of sin, of which we read in 7:23, 7:25, 8:2, which means the principle of sin-doing, the Adamic carnal nature.

We are no longer under a law of carnality, the law of sin and death. For sin shall not rule over you. He is speaking of the common sins of fleshly natures and lusts here. The flesh desires praise, food, drink, pleasure of sexual natures, admiration and all those things that belong to God Himself the flesh desires. These things, this law, we are no longer under.

## **Romans Chapter 7**

Now Paul changes to focus his attention in writing to those in the Roman Assembly who have been raised in the Torah (Instructions) of Yehovah. The Torah rules over a man as long as he lives. Do you understand these things reader? The Instructions given to us in the books of Moses are for our flesh to produce righteousness. Upon death – we inherit incorruptibility and therefore no longer need a Torah for the flesh to point out the sin.

But he is also discussing a spiritual death here too. If we have died in Messiah and rose again with Him as a new creature, the same Torah (instructions) become “spiritual” and not just the letter of the reading of the instructions. A desire of the heart, based upon love, conscience, and guilt.

“For the married woman” now Paul is not speaking of a woman, but Israel (as she stood at Mt Sinai and stated her vows, and thereafter until Messiah). The Torah as given by Moses to the living husband (Elohim) is binding so long as the husband lives. When he dies, the woman is set free and is no longer bound, but if she goes with another man while he and the agreement are still in effect – she is an adulteress. Now Elohim, her husband, died as in the person of Yeshua Messiah and she dies with him and a re-newed vow is made. Both are made new!

The Torah shows sin and does convict the spirit. It is set apart and Holy and righteous, and good. Prior to hearing the Good News, hearing there is now freedom and power unto righteousness through obedience out of love – there is a raging battle between the flesh and the spirit. The flesh desires to please itself and the heart, mind, and spirit desires to please Elohim. This battle would not even exist without the Torah of Elohim. Does this cause us to say the Torah is bad or good? This is the question for each person to answer. “Thanks to Elohim, through Messiah Yeshua our Master! So then, with the mind I myself truly serve the Torah of Elohim, but with the flesh the law of sin. There is, then, now no condemnation to those who are in Messiah Yeshua, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.”