

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

beyond his grasp. An appreciation has been written (Williams & Norgate; 5s. net). It has been written by twenty-three specialists in science; and every one of them writes of him as if he were a specialist in the particular branch to which the writer belongs. And with all his erudition he was a man. His humanity seems to have impressed everybody—his sympathy, his humour, his general good comradeship. He could tell good stories too. Here is one he told about Charles Lamb.

'Somebody—let us say a fellow-clerk in the

India House—had twitted Lamb with his infirmity of speech.

"That's my p-p-peculiarity," said Lamb. "Everybody has some p-p-peculiarity."

"Nonsense," said the other. "What is mine?"

"Well," rejoined Lamb, "I sup-p-pose you stir your tea with your right hand?"

"Why, yes, of course."

"Ah, that's *your* p-p-peculiarity. Most p-p-people do it with a s-p-p-poon!"

The Last Days of Babylon's Independence.

BY THEOPHILUS G. PINCHES, LL.D., LONDON.

IN more than one respect the tablets which bear upon the fall of Babylon are of interest to us. Compared with the present war, that waged by Cyrus against Nabonidus and Belshazzar was a model conflict from the view-point of humanity and consideration for the vanquished. When we think, moreover, of the great change resulting therefrom, it was one of the briefest of conflicts. In the main the war waged by Cyrus against the Babylonians seems to have been due to his desire to dominate the then known world, or at least that portion of it which was most accessible, and best worth having; and in this it resembles the conflict now raging, for there are but few, in all probability, outside the boundaries of the central allies and the body of their subjects abroad, who would deny that the first desire of those empires is to dominate the world, and apply the destructive power of the weapons which they have so long toiled to perfect, to acquire not only the fullest political overlordship, but also an unassailable position in commerce. Cyrus's aim was probably the same, though whether he realized to the full the commercial advantages to be obtained thereby is a matter for discussion. In any case, the great power which Persia obtained must have had the advantage which falls to the lot of every nation possessing a similar central position and world-wide influence.

The entry, in the Babylonian Chronicle, for Nabonidus's 17th (and last) year, refers to certain religious ceremonies which were performed, possibly to ask the gods for success in the conflict with

Cyrus and his allies which, it was felt, was coming. These ceremonies took place between Nisan and Elul, the first and the sixth months of the Babylonian year. The chronicler then states that Cyrus fought a battle 'in Opis' (*ina Upê^{ki}*) upon the Tigris (*nâr Idiqlat*, written in the puzzling way which some of the scribes liked to use, namely, *ni-ni-lat*). According to my first reading, this took place in Tammuz, but the contract-tablets indicate no disturbance of the normal life of the country during that month, and as the ideograph for Tisri differs from that used for Tammuz by the addition of a single wedge only, this must be the month intended. The Babylonians were defeated, and on the 14th day of the month Sippar was taken without a battle, and Nabonidus fled. On the 16th Ugbaru (Gobryas) of Gutium (Media), with the army of Cyrus, entered Babylon, likewise without a battle, and Nabonidus seems to have been found and captured there. The next statement is to the effect that ^{the} *tukkumē* (? cuirassiers) of Gutium surrounded the gates of Ê-saggil (the temple of Belus), and *baṭla ša mimma* (? failure of a thing) in Ê-saggil and the temples did not take place (*ûl iṣṣakin*, 'was not made'), and a (single) gem(?) passed not (out) (*simanu ûl êtiq*). Though not certain, this is the translation which I would propose for these unusual phrases, and it has at least the merit of being consistent, and of recording events which might well be due to the orders of such a man as Cyrus. The next historical statement of the Chronicle, as I translate it, is also characteristic. The words 'Cyrus entered into

Babylon' are certain, but for the next phrase, *ḥarinē ina pani-šu (w)atrūni*, many suggestions have been made. If *ḥarinē* may be regarded as a plural participle of *ḥarānu*, denominative from *ḥarranu*, 'road,' then the best rendering would be 'those who went before him were numerous,' and they went as 'proposing peace (or safety) for the city' (*šulum ana āli šakin*). After this we have, apparently, what they said: *Kuraš, šulum ša Bābīli, gabbī-šu, qibi*, 'Cyrus, command peace (safety) for Babylon, all of it.' If this be what the chronicler says, it agrees thoroughly with the account in Xenophon, *Cyrop.*, book vii. 8. The date of Cyrus's entry was the 3rd of Marcheswan. Notwithstanding that he was present in Babylon, it was not he who appointed the governors there—this duty was left to Gobryas, 'his governor' (*Gubaru, piḥati-šu*—see THE EXPOSITORY TIMES for April 1915, p. 298, lines 2-5b). As has been often noted, the death of the son of the king (Belshazzar) took place on the 11th.

The contract-tablets give transactions for the 7th and the 9th of Tisri. As the city was taken by Cyrus on the 14th of the month, datings at Sippar now cease. The next document, which refers to silver, is dated at Sippar on the 10th of Marcheswan, the day before Belshazzar's death. Strassmaier's No. 1055 is marked by him 'Nbn. 17.9.0.'—that is, 'Nabonidus, 17th year, month Chisleu, no day.' But Nabonidus was no longer king at that date, as he seems to have been captured about a fortnight before the 1st of the month.

Two explanations are possible: (1) The news of Nabonidus's capture and Cyrus's accession may not have reached Sippar, or (2) the tablet records payments made from the temple-treasuries in advance. In support of the latter, it is noteworthy that the first payment was for Chisleu, the second for the whole of the 17th year, the third for Nisan, the fourth for Chisleu again, and

the fifth for Elul. If this tablet was written about the 1st of Nisan, it naturally does not clash with the Chronicle.

The first dated tablet of the reign of Cyrus is given by Strassmaier as being 'Cyr. acc. 7.0'—i.e. 'Cyrus, accession year, Tisri, day lost.' Unfortunately, the month name is mutilated or partly defaced, and therefore doubtful. Though not legally king of Babylonia until the 12th of Marcheswan, Cyrus had entered Sippar on the 14th of Tisri, and the reading may be correct. This would imply that the Sipparites did not, at the time, know who was their king, Nabonidus or Cyrus. Later in the month, however, there was no doubt, as a tablet referring to barley, and bearing the date 'Marcheswan, day 24th, Cyrus, king of Babylon,' shows.

The invasion and conquest of Babylonia by Cyrus therefore seem to have occupied forty-two days—it was on the 1st day of Tisri that Cyrus fought the battle of Opis, and he assumed the rule of the country, through Gobryas—Darius the Mede—on the 12th of Marcheswan. Normal life at Sippar was hardly disturbed until the 10th of Tisri, and was resumed on or before the 24th of Marcheswan. The capital's calm was disturbed for a few days less, and would have resumed its normal course sooner but for the crowds of petitioners seeking Cyrus's presence.

In addition to Cyrus's moderation, Xenophon makes a point of his desire that the population should suffer as little as possible from the devastation of the country in the district where the troops might ultimately operate (*Cyrop.*, v. 4), and to this end he proposed to the 'Assyrian' king that the labourers should not be interfered with. This the latter agreed to, and he would doubtless have kept his word had the fortune of war favoured him instead of Cyrus. Evidently 'frightfulness' (in better English, 'ruthlessness') formed no part of Cyrus's policy.