

FOREWORD BY DAVE RAMSEY

GEORGE S. CLASON

— THE —
RICHEST
MAN IN
BABYLON



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MAN IN
BABYLON

*“Let no debt remain outstanding,
except the continuing debt to love one another.”*

—ROMANS 13:8

THE
RICHEST
MAN IN
BABYLON

*A COLLECTION OF STORIES
WITH TIMELESS TEACHINGS ON
HOW TO WIN WITH MONEY*

GEORGE SAMUEL CLASON
1930
Foreword by Dave Ramsey



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Published by Ramsey Press, The Lampo Group, Inc.

Franklin, Tennessee 37064

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Editor: Cathy Shanks

Cover Design: Micah Kandros

Interior Design: Mandi Cofer

Ebook formatting: Mark D'Antoni ([eBook DesignWorks](#))

ISBN: 978-194212-128-2

Printed in the United States of America 20 21 22 23 24 WRZ 5 4 3 2 1

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FOREWORD

Dave Ramsey

I love to read. It's a legacy I inherited from some wonderful elementary school teachers—ladies who invested in my life and instilled in me a passion for books at an early age. They taught me that books can transform your life.

When I was older, motivational speaker Charlie “Tremendous” Jones helped stoke that fire. In case you're too young to remember Charlie, he was famous for saying, “You will be the same person in five years as you are today except for the people you meet and the books you read.” I've never forgotten that wisdom—and I've never stopped reading books.

I think books hold a special power because they can take you anywhere you want to go. One minute, they'll transport you into a land of fantasy. The next moment, they'll reveal principles for transforming your life, your business, your marriage, and your children.

And as I grow older, I get more nostalgic about the books that I read as a teen and young adult. So many of those great books formed my outlook on life. Some of them helped my family rebuild in the wake of our bankruptcy. All of them influenced how I think and shaped the things that I teach today.

I laughingly say—and yet it's absolutely true—that I really don't teach anything that I invented. I stole it all. It's wisdom I've absorbed from God, from grandma, and from those books. I've stirred it all up into a hillbilly gumbo, and I serve up that gumbo every day on *The Dave Ramsey Show* and through my own books.

Honestly, I believe the old books—books from before my generation—are some of the most precious. They have stood the test of time because they share truths that are timeless. Their messages are just as important now as they were decades ago.

What's even better—at least from my perspective—is a lot of the old books teach these real-life principles through simple stories. I'm a hillbilly storyteller at heart, so I can appreciate a good yarn. And when someone teaches me through a well-developed parable, I always enjoy it.

The book you're holding is a great example of what I'm talking about.

I first read *The Richest Man in Babylon* when I was fourteen years old. I can't tell you exactly how many times I've read it since then, but the number is high. It's really that good.

And as you read through this edition with my running commentary, you'll see just how much *Richest Man* has influenced me: Budgeting. Wise investing. Saving for the future. Living on less than you make. Generous giving. It all sounds like a Dave Ramsey Top Ten list. But so much of what I teach came—even if subconsciously—from the truths of this book.

Thankfully, I retained a lot of what I read back then, because it's helped me show people how to live and give like no one else for more than three decades now.

Obviously, *The Richest Man in Babylon* isn't our only source of truth at Ramsey Solutions. We've always relied on Grandma's common sense. And, ultimately, we believe that the principles we teach can be traced to the Bible itself, especially the wisdom found in the Book of Proverbs. But here's the thing: even those things can be found in the pages of this classic.

So, sit back and enjoy this ancient yarn from another time. And let it impact you the way it has impacted millions of people—including me—for nearly a century.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

George S. Clason's life reads a little bit like the American Dream.

Born in 1874 in the small river town of Louisiana, Missouri, his early years were pretty ordinary. He went to college in Nebraska and served as a civil engineer during the Spanish-American War. But after the war, his life turned a corner.

Still not sure about his career path, Clason moved to Denver, Colorado, and began working in the mining industry.¹ But it wasn't long before his entrepreneurial spirit kicked in and took him in a completely different direction. Like many business pioneers, he saw a problem and created a solution.

Clason saw two important cultural shifts taking shape in those early years of the twentieth century. First, Americans were falling in love with the automobile. Cars were becoming more affordable, and folks were hitting the road more often. Second, many of those new car owners were migrating west. But they weren't always sure where to go or how to get there.

The Clason Map Company pointed them in the right direction.

Clason started making maps in 1902, focusing on Colorado and a few other western states. But the business quickly grew into one of the most popular—and profitable—map companies in America. By 1923, Clason Maps had made history by publishing the first-ever full atlas of the United States and Canada.²

Long before Zig Ziglar made the idea famous, George Clason discovered that when you help enough people, you don't have to worry about money. He built a thriving company simply by giving people what they needed to turn their dreams into reality.

But Clason didn't just give customers a reliable map. He also showed potential investors where to find energy resources (like coal, gas, or oil). And he researched

and shared important information about key cities and tourist attractions.³ With these personal touches, the Clason Map Company grew into the largest map producer west of the Mississippi River.⁴

Then came the crash.

The Wall Street plunge of October 1929 turned America's economic boom into a bust. As the Great Depression took hold across the nation, economic growth came to a screeching halt. People stopped traveling as much—and they stopped buying maps. As a result, the Clason Map Company went bankrupt in 1932.⁵

But like any resourceful businessman, Clason saw another opportunity. While his map business was still prospering, he had started writing and publishing stories about financial success. After the crash, these simple parables became even more important to Americans who were struggling to find—and keep—enough money to survive. Clason's stories gave them commonsense advice about living on less than you make and saving part of your income for hard times.

These easy-to-understand stories caught the imagination of many Americans. Eventually, they became so popular that he collected his favorites, and in 1930, he published them as a book called *The Richest Man in Babylon*.⁶ As Clason shared in the book's original foreword, he set the stories in Babylon because that's where common sense with money started. He even called it the “cradle in which was nurtured the basic principles of finance now recognized and used the world over.”

The book's principles became a long-standing success, and Clason was able to rebuild his financial nest egg. He spent his later years in Napa, California, where he died in 1957. But the impact of *The Richest Man in Babylon* lives on and continues to influence millions of readers each year—as it has for almost a century.

INTRODUCTION

Ahead of you stretches your future, like a road leading into the distance. Along that road are ambitions you wish to accomplish . . . desires you wish to gratify.

To bring your ambitions and desires to fulfillment, you must be successful with money. Use the financial principles made clear in the pages which follow. Let them guide you away from the stringencies of a lean purse to that fuller, happier life a full purse makes possible.

Like the law of gravity, they are universal and unchanging. May they prove for you, as they have proven to so many others, a sure key to a fat purse, larger bank balances and gratifying financial progress.

*LO, MONEY IS PLENTIFUL FOR THOSE WHO
UNDERSTAND THE SIMPLE RULES OF ITS
ACQUISITION*

1. Start thy purse to fattening.
2. Control thy expenditures.
3. Guard thy treasures from loss.
4. Make thy gold multiply.
5. Increase thy ability to earn.
6. Make of thy dwelling a profitable investment.
7. Insure a future income.

— OR, AS DAVE WOULD SAY —

Benjamin Franklin got it right when he said, "Nothing is as uncommon as commonsense."

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

Our prosperity as a nation depends upon the personal financial prosperity of each of us as individuals.

This book deals with the personal successes of each of us. Success means accomplishments as the result of our own efforts and abilities. Proper preparation is the key to our success. Our acts can be no wiser than our thoughts. Our thinking can be no wiser than our understanding.

This book of cures for lean purses has been termed a guide to financial understanding. That indeed is its purpose: to offer those who are ambitious for financial success an insight which will aid them to acquire money, to keep money and to make their surpluses earn more money.

In the pages which follow we are taken back to Babylon, the cradle in which was nurtured the basic principles of finance now recognized and used the world over.

To new readers the author is happy to extend the wish that its pages may contain for them the same inspiration for growing bank accounts, greater financial successes, and the solution of difficult personal financial problems so enthusiastically reported by readers from coast to coast.

To the business executives who have distributed these tales in such generous quantities to friends, relatives, employees and associates, the author takes this opportunity to express his gratitude. No endorsement could be higher than that of practical men who appreciate its teachings because they, themselves, have worked up to important successes by applying the very principles it advocates.

Babylon became the wealthiest city of the ancient world because its citizens were the richest people of their time. They appreciated the value of money. They practiced sound financial principles in acquiring money, keeping money, and making their

money earn more money. They provided for themselves what we all desire—incomes for the future.

G. S. C.

AN HISTORICAL SKETCH OF BABYLON

In the pages of history there lives no city more glamorous than Babylon. Its very name conjures visions of wealth and splendor. Its treasures of gold and jewels were fabulous. One naturally pictures such a wealthy city as located in a suitable setting of tropical luxury, surrounded by rich natural resources of forests, and mines.

Such was not the case. It was located beside the Euphrates River, in a flat, arid valley. It had no forests, no mines—not even stone for building. It was not even located upon a natural trade route. The rainfall was insufficient to raise crops.

Babylon is an outstanding example of man's ability to achieve great objectives using whatever means are at his disposal. All of the resources supporting this large city were man-developed. All of its riches were man-made.

Babylon possessed just two natural resources: a fertile soil and water in the river. With one of the greatest engineering accomplishments of this or any other day, Babylonian engineers diverted the waters from the river by means of dams and immense irrigation canals. Far out across that arid valley went these canals to pour the life-giving waters over the fertile soil. This ranks among the first engineering feats known to history. Such abundant crops as were the reward of this irrigation system the world had never seen before.

Fortunately, during its long existence Babylon was ruled by successive lines of kings to whom conquest and plunder were but incidental. While it engaged in many wars, most of these were local or defensive against ambitious conquerors from other countries who coveted the fabulous treasures of Babylon. The outstanding rulers of Babylon live in history because of their wisdom, enterprise and justice. Babylon

produced no strutting monarchs who sought to conquer the known world that all nations might pay homage to their egotism.

As a city, Babylon exists no more. When those energizing human forces that built and maintained the city for thousands of years were withdrawn, it soon became a deserted ruin.

The site of the city is in Asia about 600 miles east of the Suez Canal, just north of the Persian Gulf. The latitude is about thirty degrees above the equator, practically the same as that of Yuma, Arizona. It possessed a climate similar to that of this American city, hot and dry.

Today, this valley of the Euphrates—once a populous irrigated farming district—is again a windswept arid waste. Scant grass and desert shrubs strive for existence against the windblown sands. Gone are the fertile fields, the mammoth cities and the long caravans of rich merchandise. Nomadic bands of Arabs, securing a scant living by tending small herds, are the only inhabitants. Such it has been since about the beginning of the Christian era.

Dotting this valley are earthen hills. For centuries, they were considered by travelers to be nothing else. The attention of archaeologists was finally attracted to them because of broken pieces of pottery and brick washed down by the occasional rainstorms. Expeditions financed by European and American museums were sent here to excavate and see what could be found. Picks and shovels soon proved these hills to be ancient cities. City graves, they might well be called. Babylon was one of these. Over it, for something like twenty centuries, the winds had scattered the desert dust. Built originally of brick, all exposed walls had disintegrated and gone back to earth once more.

Such is Babylon, the wealthy city, today. A heap of dirt so long abandoned that no living person even knew its name until it was discovered by carefully removing the refuse of centuries from the streets and the fallen wreckage of its noble temples and palaces.

Many scientists consider the civilization of Babylon and other cities in this valley to be the oldest of which there is a definite record. Positive dates have been proved reaching back 8,000 years. An interesting fact in this connection is the means used to determine these dates. Uncovered in the ruins of Babylon were descriptions of an

eclipse of the sun. Modern astronomers readily computed the time when such an eclipse visible in Babylon occurred and thus established a known relationship between their calendar and our own. In this way, we have proved that 8,000 years ago the Sumerites, who inhabited Babylonia, were living in walled cities.

One can only conjecture for how many centuries previous such cities had existed. Their inhabitants were not mere barbarians living within protecting walls. They were an educated and enlightened people. So far as written history goes, they were the first engineers, the first astronomers, the first mathematicians, the first financiers, and the first people to have a written language.

Mention has already been made of the irrigation systems which transformed the arid valley into an agricultural paradise. The remains of these canals can still be traced, although they are mostly filled with accumulated sand. Some of them were of such size that, when empty of water, a dozen horses could be ridden abreast along their bottoms. In size they compare favorably with the largest canals in Colorado and Utah.

In addition to irrigating the valley lands, Babylonian engineers completed another project of similar magnitude. By means of an elaborate drainage system, they reclaimed an immense area of swampland at the mouths of the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers and put this also under cultivation.

Herodotus, the Greek traveler and historian, visited Babylon while it was in its prime and has given us the only known description by an outsider. His writings give a graphic description of the city and some of the unusual customs of its people. He mentions the remarkable fertility of the soil and the bountiful harvest of wheat and barley which they produced.

The glory of Babylon has faded, but its wisdom has been preserved for us. For this, we are indebted to their form of records. In that distant day the use of paper had not been invented. Instead, they laboriously engraved their writing upon tablets of moist clay. When completed, these were baked and became hard tile. In size they were about six by eight inches and an inch in thickness.

These clay tablets, as they are commonly called, were used much as we use modern forms of writing. Upon them were engraved legends, poetry, history, transcriptions of

royal decrees, the laws of the land, titles to property, promissory notes, and even letters which were dispatched by messengers to distant cities.

From these clay tablets we are permitted an insight into the intimate, personal affairs of the people. For example: One tablet—evidently from the records of a country storekeeper—relates that upon the given date a certain named customer brought in a cow and exchanged it for seven sacks of wheat, three being delivered at the time and the other four to await the customer's pleasure.

Safely buried in the wrecked cities, archaeologists have recovered entire libraries of these tablets—hundreds of thousands of them.

One of the outstanding wonders of Babylon was the immense walls surrounding the city. The ancients ranked them with the great pyramid of Egypt as belonging to the Seven Wonders of the World.

Queen Semiramis is credited with having erected the first walls during the early history of the city. Modern excavators have been unable to find any trace of the original walls. Nor is their exact height known. From mention made by early writers, it is estimated they were about fifty to sixty feet high, faced on the outer side with burnt brick and further protected by a deep moat of water.

The later and more famous walls were started about 600 years before the time of Christ by King Nabopolassar. Upon such a gigantic scale did he plan the rebuilding, he did not live to see the work finished. This was left to his son, Nebuchadnezzar, whose name is familiar in biblical history. The height and length of these later walls staggers belief. They are reported upon reliable authority to have been about 160 feet high, the equivalent of the height of a modern fifteen story office building. The total length is estimated as between nine and eleven miles. So wide was the top that a six-horse chariot could be driven around them.

Of this tremendous structure, little now remains except portions of the foundations and the moat. In addition to the ravages of the elements, the Arabs completed the destruction by quarrying the brick for building purposes elsewhere.

Against the walls of Babylon marched, in turn, the victorious armies of almost every conqueror of that age of wars of conquest. A host of kings laid siege to Babylon but always in vain. Invading armies of that day were not to be considered lightly. Historians speak of such units as 10,000 horsemen, 25,000 chariots, 1,200

regiments of foot soldiers with 1,000 men to the regiment. Often two or three years of preparation would be required to assemble war materials and depots of food along the proposed line of march.

The city of Babylon was organized much like a modern city. There were streets and shops. Peddlers offered their wares through residential districts. Priests officiated in magnificent temples. Within the city was an inner enclosure for the royal palaces. The walls about this were said to have been higher than those about the city.

The Babylonians were skilled in the arts. These included sculpture, painting, weaving, gold working, and the manufacture of metal weapons and agricultural implements. Their jewelers created most artistic jewelry. Many samples have been recovered from the graves of its wealthy citizens and are now on exhibition in the leading museums of the world.

At a very early period, when the rest of the world was still hacking at trees with stone-headed axes or hunting and fighting with flint-pointed spears and arrows, the Babylonians were using axes, spears, and arrows with metal heads.

The Babylonians were clever financiers and traders. So far as we know, they were the original inventors of money as a means of exchange, of promissory notes, and written titles to property.

Babylon was never entered by hostile armies until about 540 years before the birth of Christ. Even then, the walls were not captured. The story of the fall of Babylon is most unusual. Cyrus, one of the great conquerors of that period, intended to attack the city and hoped to take its impregnable walls. Advisors of Nabonidus, the King of Babylon, persuaded him to go forth to meet Cyrus and give him battle without waiting for the city to be besieged. In the succeeding defeat to the Babylonian army, it fled away from the city. Cyrus thereupon entered the open gates and took possession without resistance.

Thereafter, the power and prestige of the city gradually waned until, in the course of a few hundred years, it was eventually abandoned, deserted, and left for the winds and storms to level once again to that desert earth from which its grandeur had originally been built. Babylon had fallen—never to rise again—but to it, civilization owes much.

The eons of time have crumbled to dust the proud walls of its temples, but the wisdom of Babylon endures:

Money is the medium by which earthly success is measured.

— OR, AS DAVE WOULD SAY —

“Money doesn’t buy happiness. People shouldn’t be measured by what’s in their bank accounts but by their character. Money is just a magnifier—it will make you more of what you already are.”

Money makes possible the enjoyment of the best the earth affords.

— OR, AS DAVE WOULD SAY —