

Note: Events in this chapter take place about 25 years after those recorded in chapter 4.

Dan. 5:1 Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand.

According to Easton's Bible Dictionary, Belshazzar was the son of Nabonidus by Nitocris, who was the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar. He served as a co-regent with Nabonidus as the last kings of the great Babylonian empire. Historical evidence from the Nabonidus cylinders from Ur affirm Belshazzar as his son. Other cylinders indicate that Nabonidus lived in Arabia during at least part of his reign and left his son in charge in Babylon.

History indicates that the Babylonians were so sure of the invincibility of their city, that the king threw a huge feast for the nobility even while Cyrus and his armies were besieging the city. Wine appeared to be in abundance at this feast.

Dan. 5:2 Belshazzar, while he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which *was* in Jerusalem; that the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, might drink therein.

Dan. 5:3 Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God which *was* at Jerusalem; and the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, drank in them.

Belshazzar appeared to get drunk and cocky. He ordered his servants to serve the wine in the golden and silver vessels that his grandfather Neb had taken from the temple in Jerusalem. This was a direct affront to the God of Israel.

Those in attendance at this feast included the king, his princes, his wives and his concubines. (The word for *lords* and *princes* in verses 1 and 2 are the same.)

Dan. 5:4 They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone.

In the ancient world, there were gods for everything. As they drank, the partygoers praised the gods of gold, silver, brass, iron, wood and stone. Maybe it is just a reference to the gods represented by images of the materials mentioned. Either way it was direct insult to the one true God.

Dan. 5:5 In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaister of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote.

"in the same hour" – I think this is referencing the hour that the vessels from the temple were brought out for use.

All of a sudden the fingers of a man's hand appears and writes on the wall close to the candlestick so as to be easily seen. The king saw the mysterious hand write its message.

Dan. 5:6 Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another.

You could tell by the look on the king's face that he was afraid. Evidently his legs were shaking and his knees were knocking. The loins is a reference to the area of the kidneys—maybe, as I've heard some preach, he lost control of his bodily functions. This specific response was predicted by the prophet Isaiah about 400 years earlier:

Isaiah 45:1 Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; **and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut....**

Dan. 5:7 The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. *And the king spake, and said to the wise men of Babylon, Whosoever shall read this writing, and shew me the interpretation thereof, shall be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about his neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.*

Dan. 5:8 Then came in all the king's wise *men*: but they could not read the writing, nor make known to the king the interpretation thereof.

Dan. 5:9 Then was king Belshazzar greatly troubled, and his countenance was changed in him, and his lords were astonished.

Immediately, the king yells for his astrologers (conjurers, those who practice enchantment), the Chaldeans (professional astrologers, readers of the heavens), and the soothsayers (those who claimed to know the future); these three groups comprised the wise men of Babylon. Belshazzar promises the third position of authority in the kingdom to the man who can interpret the writing. (Nabonidus and Belshazzar were #1 and #2 respectively.) None of the wise men could interpret the writing. This really troubled the king; I would say he was terrified by this time. His countenance reflected his increasing terror.

Dan. 5:10 *Now the queen, by reason of the words of the king and his lords, came into the banquet house: and the queen spake and said, O king, live for ever: let not thy thoughts trouble thee, nor let thy countenance be changed:*

Dan. 5:11 *There is a man in thy kingdom, in whom is the spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of thy father light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, was found in him; whom the king Nebuchadnezzar thy father, the king, I say, thy father, made master of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers;*

Dan. 5:12 *Forasmuch as an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, interpreting of dreams, and shewing of hard sentences, and dissolving of doubts, were found in the same Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar: now let Daniel be called, and he will shew the interpretation.*

“the queen” – Most commentators agree that this is a reference to Nitocris, the king’s mother. It would appear that the news of the mysterious handwriting on the wall traveled quickly throughout the palace. The queen must have come to see what was going on. Upon seeing her son in such a state, she tries to calm him down by telling him that there is a man in the kingdom who is so wise that his grandfather Neb had made him the master, the first in authority, of all the wise men of Babylon. She was sure that he would be able to interpret the writing. She then identified the man as Daniel, whom the king had named Belteshazzar.

Dan. 5:13 Then was Daniel brought in before the king. *And the king spake and said unto Daniel, Art thou that Daniel, which art of the children of the captivity of Judah, whom the king my father brought out of Jewry?*

Dan. 5:14 I have even heard of thee, that the spirit of the gods *is* in thee, and *that* light and understanding and excellent wisdom is found in thee.

Dan. 5:15 And now the wise *men*, the astrologers, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing, and make known unto me the interpretation thereof: but they could not shew the interpretation of the thing:

Dan. 5:16 And I have heard of thee, that thou canst make interpretations, and dissolve doubts: now if thou canst read the writing, and make known to me the interpretation thereof, thou shalt be clothed with scarlet, and *have* a chain of gold about thy neck, and shalt be the third ruler in the kingdom.

Belshazzar immediately sent for Daniel who soon appeared before the king. First, the king asks Daniel if he is the Jewish captive who had served his grandfather. He lets Daniel know that his reputation preceded him, and that he was considered as possessing the spirit of the gods and great wisdom. He informs Daniel that none of the wise men of the kingdom had been able to interpret the writing on the wall. He tells Daniel that he has heard that he can make interpretations and solve hard problems. Then he offers Daniel the position of third in the kingdom if he can interpret the message on the wall.

Dan. 5:17 Then Daniel answered and said before the king, Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation.

Daniel lets the king know that he isn’t interested in position or rewards, but he will interpret the writing for the king. (Commentaries indicate that Daniel was taken captive circa 605 BC and Cyrus conquered Babylon in 539 BC. So it would seem that Daniel was at least in his early 80’s at this time.)

Dan. 5:18 O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour:

Dan. 5:19 And for the majesty that he gave him, all people, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him: whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down.

Dan. 5:20 But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him:

Dan. 5:21 And he was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling *was* with the wild asses: they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and *that* he appointeth over it whomsoever he will.

Before Daniel gives the interpretation to the writing on the wall, he teaches the king a little lesson. He tells him how “the most High God” was the One Who gave Neb, his grandfather, his position of power and great glory. He raised him up as a mighty king who was feared by the nations. He had the power to declare who would live and who would die and who would be given honored positions and who would be in subjection. He related how Neb developed such pride and arrogance that God took his throne away from him. Then he related how the king had lived as a beast of the field for 7 years, until he was ready to recognize that the most high God was the great ruler over men and gave kingdoms according to His choosing.

Dan. 5:22 And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this;

Dan. 5:23 But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath *is*, and whose *are* all thy ways, hast thou not glorified:

Daniel then boldly confronts the king with his own pride and contempt of God. Daniel had been part of this kingdom’s elite for a long time and knew that Belshazzar was aware of his grandfather’s history. In spite of the example that God had made of Neb, Belshazzar evidently had learned nothing from his grandfather’s experience and example. He had brazenly insulted the most high God by using the vessels that had been consecrated for God’s use in the temple at Jerusalem. They had used these precious vessels to get drunk and proceeded to give praise to false gods that could not hear, could not see, and could not think. He had totally ignored and shown great contempt for the one true God.

Dan. 5:24 Then was the part of the hand sent from him; and this writing was written.

Daniel then informs the king that the hand had written a message to the king directly from the most high God.

It’s amazing to me that Daniel was able to continue with his harsh words against the king without endangering himself. This is probably an indication of how frightened the king was. He would listen to any attack on his character that might result in knowing the message on the wall. Then again, maybe the king was actually convicted as he recognized the truth of what Daniel said.

Dan. 5:25 And this is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.

Dan. 5:26 This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it.

Dan. 5:27 TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.

Dan. 5:28 PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.

Mene = numbered – number is up, time is up

Tekel = weighed and wanting / deficient – does not measure up

Upharsin/Peres = split up or divided

Now Daniel gets to the actual message. God has decided to allow the Babylonian Empire to be conquered. The king has been determined as unfit for God's purposes. The kingdom is to be divided between the Medes and the Persians. The Medes and Persians were in league with one another, but the Medes exercised the greater authority.

My daughter's questions continue to help me recognize notes that would be helpful. Both Upharsin (v25) and Peres (v28) are translations of the same Hebrew word "prac," which means to split up or divide.

Dan. 5:29 Then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

Belshazzar doesn't question Daniel's interpretation. He orders Daniel to be proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom according to his word.

Dan. 5:30 In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain.

Dan. 5:31 And Darius the Median took the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old.

That very same night Belshazzar was killed. According to Herodotus, Cyrus and his armies diverted the Euphrates River, dried up the channel that went under the wall and marched into the city on the dry riverbed. The 62-year old Darius the Mede assumed control in Babylon after Cyrus and his armies conquered the city; Darius ruled from 539-536 BC.

Herodotus records the date as the 16th of Tishri, October 11-12, 539 BC.

Thinking—How does America today compare to Babylon before God judged her. Both cultures are and were characterized with drunkenness, pleasure, immorality, idolatry, blasphemy, rebellion against God and corrupt leadership.