

Daniel Chapter 5

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

We must quickly make note that this is not Daniel, whose name had been changed to Belshazzar. Belshazzar, the king, was not the son of Nebuchadnezzar, but the grandson. History tells us his mother, Nitocris, was the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar.

It appears, they are having a great feast. Perhaps as many as a thousand people are in attendance, so this is a very big party. They were drinking wine at the feast, so we may assume it was a festive occasion.

These events occurred (in 539 B.C.), over two decades after Nebuchadnezzar's death. This king, whose name means "Bel, protect the king," is about to be conquered by the Medo-Persian army.

The years between Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar are filled with murder, intrigue, conspiracy, and political decline. Nebuchadnezzar was succeeded by his son Evil-merodach who had reigned for only two years when he was murdered by his brother in law, Neriglissar. After a brief reign, Neriglissar died, leaving the kingdom in the hands of his son, Labashi-marduk. The latter lasted only two months before being killed by an assassin and succeeded by Nabonidus.

Nabonidus, who was probably the son in law of Nebuchadnezzar, reigned for some 16 years. Although he left the kingdom in the hands of his son Belshazzar for much of the time, Nabonidus was able to restore a measure of glory to Babylon.

Belshazzar ruled as king during the last years of Babylon. It is not evident until the end of the chapter, but while Belshazzar was feasting in revelry, the city was surrounded by the Persian army. Belshazzar considered the city unassailable because of its massive walls, and therefore felt confident to hold a banquet in the face of military threat.

Daniel 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."

This calls Nebuchadnezzar his father, but he was his grandfather, as we said in the verse above.

The celebration was designed to boost morale and break the feelings of doom, because at this very time, armies of Medo-Persia (verse 30), had Babylon helplessly under siege.

Daniel 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."

These atheists had no idea what they were doing. The silver and the gold vessels were holy, and dedicated to God alone. To drink from these vessels, would be a terrible sin before God.

This is such a terrible thing to do, that judgment will be swift. Look, with me, at the following New Testament Scripture about the same thing.

1 Thessalonians 5:3 "For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape."

God will not overlook this act of disrespect for His holy things. They have sealed their own fate, by this terrible thing they have done.

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

As if defiling His holy things is not enough, they worship false gods using God's vessels. All of these idols made of earthly things do not bring life. They have no power to help anyone. They can only destroy.

This exercise was a call for their deities to deliver them.

Even the destruction does not come directly from them. God brings the destruction, as judgment against them.

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

These fingers and hand came out of the total darkness, and came to a lighted area of the wall near the lamp to write. This is where the statement (handwriting on the wall), came from. This is the hand of God. The finger of God had written the Ten Commandments.

This is the same finger, but with an entirely different purpose. This judgment is for the eyes of the king.

Babylonian hands had taken God's vessels (mentioned twice), and held them in contempt to dishonor and challenge Him. Now the hand that controls all men, and which none can restrain, challenged them. God's answer to their challenge was clear (as we'll see in verses 23-28).

Archaeologists have unearthed a room on the site of ancient Babylon, located in Iraq, that is plastered and measures 165 feet by 55 feet. It may very well have been Belshazzar's banquet hall.

Daniel 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."

The fear of the king is so great, when this happens, that horror came upon his face, and his knees began to quake. He was quaking so badly that the joints of his hips come loose.

The Scripture is similar to the following from the New Testament.

Luke 21:26 "Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken."

Daniel 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 show 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."

This king is unfamiliar with Daniel. He calls for all the wise men, to see if anyone can tell him what this means.

"Scarlet" here, is speaking of purple. Purple symbolizes royalty. This robe would be showing the wearer to be of very high rank. The third ruler of the kingdom is saying he would rule over one-third of the kingdom.

This "chain of Gold" shows the power of authority he would have. We must realize that Daniel had been in the court of the kings for nearly 70 years at this point. Daniel had been one of the first captives, and this happens near the end of the captivity which was for 70 years.

Without God's help, the experts again failed as we see in the next couple of verses. But God's man Daniel would not.

Daniel 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."

These wise men were speaking of the sorcerers, and the astrologers, and the soothsayers. They had no real power, so certainly they could not tell of this message from God.

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

Their astonishment was at the hand that wrote.

Daniel 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:"

This is speaking of the queen mother, who remembers the interpretations of the king's dreams by Daniel. Perhaps, this king was unfamiliar with Daniel, since it was Nebuchadnezzar who had benefited from the interpretations of Daniel. She, at least, brings hope.

Daniel 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;"

Again Belshazzar the king, is called the son of Nebuchadnezzar, when, in fact, he is his grandson.

It appears from this, Daniel had not been prominent in this king's court. This is also, different from interpreting dreams. Perhaps, this is why he did not call for Daniel before. This queen recognizes the fact that Daniel is a man of God.

Daniel 5:12 "Forasmuch as an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, interpreting of dreams, and showing 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 show the interpretation."

We see from this, that Daniel had done much more than interpret two dreams for the king. He was in charge of the eunuchs, after he had interpreted the first dream for Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar had renamed him Belteshazzar.

She has no doubt that Daniel can tell them what this handwriting is. He has made a good reputation, as being a man of God.

Daniel 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?"

We see that this king was not acquainted with Daniel at all. Daniel had, probably, been demoted after the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. The king wants to make sure he is the right Daniel.

The word "father" is used in the same sense of grandfather which was probably a custom in those days to the Babylonians.

Daniel 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."

Even the unsaved world recognizes a person who is in good relationship with God. We can see from the verse above, that this king's information is hear-say. He has heard of Daniel.

Notice, light is mentioned in connection with wisdom and understanding.

Isaiah 9:2 "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined."

2 Corinthians 4:6 "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to [give] the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

This is all saying, that Daniel is inhabited of his God. His power is God's power in him.

Daniel 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 show the interpretation of the thing:"

The wise men, spoken of in this verse, are the worldly wise. They have no power of God working within them. They would be of no help.

Daniel 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."

Again, this is back to Daniel. He will be greatly rewarded of the king, when he tells what this writing is. All of the things mentioned, like the scarlet robe and the gold chain, show his authority to rule.

“The third ruler”: This trio included Daniel, along with Belshazzar (553 – 539 B.C.), and Nabonidus, (ruled 555 – 539 B.C.). The prizes turned out to be non existent in light of the city’s conquest that very night (verses 29-30).

Daniel 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 is saying to him, forget the gifts. He will interpret the writing on the wall. Not only will Daniel read the writing, but he will explain the interpretation of it as well, to the king.

Daniel 5:18 "O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honor:"

This first statement, is probably a shock to the king. He had not given the Most High God credit for anything. In fact, they had many false gods in Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar's power to conquer was because God used him to fulfill His purpose.

Daniel 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."

This power had seemed to be unlimited. He was a very powerful king, as long as he was doing the will of God.

Daniel 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:"

When he went further than God had wanted him to, he was removed as king. Pride comes before a fall. This is what Jesus had to say about those who exalt themselves.

Luke 18:14 "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified [rather] than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

Daniel 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."

This experience happened to him, to make him realize that it was not by his own might he had become so powerful. He was left to eat grass as an animal, until he recognized God. It is God who makes a man king. It is also, God who brings them down.

John 19:11 "Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power [at all] against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin."

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

Now, we see Daniel explaining to Belshazzar that it will be no different with him. He is so proud, he has not given God credit for making him king. He is not a humble man. God will bring him down.

Daniel 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:"

The things of God are to be holy. They are not to be used by common man. This was blasphemy to use his holy vessels in such a manner.

Belshazzar and all these people worshipped things of this world. They did not worship the One True God. God breathed the breath of life into man, before man could even live. The man's very life depends upon God.

Things you can see with your eyes are part of God's creation and are not to be worshipped. They have worshipped God's creation and not the Creator God.

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

Daniel explains first, that this hand is God's hand. This writing is a judgment of God. God has weighed Belshazzar in the balance, and found him guilty.

Daniel 5:25 And this [is] the writing that was written, "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN."

This was a miracle of God that Daniel could read the words. The more wonderful miracle is that Daniel knew this language, even in the natural. God can write in any language. He wanted Daniel to interpret the message, so he wrote it in a language Daniel knew.

The word Mene means "counted," or "appointed," and is doubled for stronger emphasis. Tekel means "weighed" or "assessed," by the God who weighs actions. Upharsin is the plural of Peres, possibly emphasizing the parts in the division. (Peres denotes divided, as to the Medes and Persians. The "U" prefix on Pharsin has the idea of the English word "and.")

Jesus spoke a very similar message to this.

Luke 12:20 "But God said unto him, [Thou] fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?"

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

The fact that this judgment was pronounced twice showed it was soon to happen.

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

God is a just God. He does not judge, before He carefully considers. He has considered, and now the judgment has come.

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

We have studied in previous lessons, the great fortification of Babylon. This must seem impossible to the king, because of that. UPHARSIN means divided. (and given to the Medes and Persians)

We must remember that Daniel was not only reading the words on the wall, but interpreting them as well. God told Daniel the Medes and the Persians would take Babylon.

Daniel 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."

Daniel had not asked for these gifts, but Belshazzar gave them anyway. One thing we must realize here, Belshazzar did not reject the interpretation of Daniel. He knew what Daniel said was true.

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

That very night the fulfillment came, and Belshazzar was killed. Babylon fell to Darius.

Jeremiah 50:24 "I have laid a snare for thee, and thou art also taken, O Babylon, and thou wast not aware: thou art found, and also caught, because thou hast striven against the LORD."

An ancient account alleged that Persia's General Ugbaru had troops dig a trench to divert and thus lower the waters of the Euphrates River. Since the river flowed through the city of Babylon, the lowered water enabled besiegers to unexpectedly invade via the waterway under the thick walls and reach the palace before the city was aware. The end then came quickly, as guards, Belshazzar and others were slain (on Oct. 16, 539 B.C.).

Daniel 5:31 "And Darius the Median took the kingdom, [being] about threescore and two years old."

Babylon has fallen into the hands of the Medes. Darius is 62 years old, when he took the kingdom of Babylon.

Possibly Darius is not a name, but an honored title for Cyrus, who with his army entered Babylon. It is used in inscriptions for at least 5 Persian rulers. History mentions no specific man named Darius the Mede.

As far as his name goes, historians believe that the name Darius was not a proper name at all, but a title of honor meaning "Holder of the Scepter." In other words, "The Scepter Holder (King), of the Medes."

Daniel Chapter 5 Questions

1. What was the new king's name?
2. What must we quickly take note of about this name?
3. Who was his mother?
4. Who was her father?
5. What had the thousand people gathered for?
6. What did the king command to be brought to drink from?
7. Why should they not drink from these vessels?
8. Who drank from the vessels?

9. What did they do, besides drink wine from the holy vessels?
10. What power do false gods have?
11. What unusual thing happens in verse 5?
12. Who saw it?
13. What are these fingers?
14. What effect did this have on the king?
15. What will the king do, for the person who can tell him what this means?
16. Who did the king call for, to interpret the meaning of this for him?
17. What is "scarlet" speaking of?
18. What does the chain of Gold show?
19. Could the men Belshazzar called give him the interpretation?
20. Who came to the king, and told him of Daniel?
21. How did she describe Daniel?
22. Belshazzar is Nebuchadnezzar's _____.
23. Did Belshazzar take her advice?
24. What power does Daniel have?
25. What was Daniel promised by Belshazzar?
26. What was Daniel's answer to Belshazzar?
27. Who had made Nebuchadnezzar king?
28. Why did God bring him down?
29. Why is God against Belshazzar?
30. Who gives man life?
31. What did the hand write on the wall?
32. What does MENE mean?
33. What does TEKEL mean?

34. What does UPHARSIN mean?
35. When was the judgment fulfilled?
36. Who became ruler?