

# Daniel Chapter 5

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**Fellowship**  
BIBLE CHURCH

# Time of Chapter 5's Events

- The last day of Belshazzar's reign.
- The Medes and Persians (Achaemenid Empire) took over the empire in October of 539 B.C.
- 66 years after Daniel's captivity began. He was perhaps 84 years old at this point.
- In the next year, Daniel 9's events occurred.

# Kings of Neo-Babylon

- Nabopolassar 626-605 BC
- Nebuchadnezzar 605-562 BC
- Amel-Marduk 562-560 BC
  - Son of Nebuchadnezzar, aka Evil-Merodach
- Neriglissar 560-556 BC
  - Brother-in-law of Amel-Marduk, son-in-law of Nebu.
- Labashi-Marduk 556 BC, son of Neriglissar

# Kings of Neo-Babylon

- Nabonidus 556-539 BC
  - Another son-in-law of Nebuchadnezzar?
  - Self-described as being of unimportant origins.
  - Promoted moon god “Sin” and demoted Marduk, the customary deity of Babylon. This made priests unhappy. (So, Cyrus politically positioned himself as restorer of Marduk.)

# Re: Amel-Marduk – 2 Kings 25:27

- Now it came to pass in the thirty-seventh year of the captivity of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-seventh *day* of the month, *that* Evil-Merodach king of Babylon, in the year that he began to reign, released Jehoiachin king of Judah from prison.
- This was March 22, 561 BC.

# A Bit More on Jehoiachin

- He had been taken captive in 597 BC, the 8<sup>th</sup> year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign.
- His deportation is recorded in 2 Kings 24:8-16.
  - He was taken with 10,000 others after a siege by Nebudhadnezzar. The temple and royal palace were pillaged. Many skilled people were deported.

# Back to the Kings of Neo-Babylon

- Belshazzar was the son of Nabonidus.
  - He would really be a “prince,” but he was left by his father in charge at the capital for long periods of time. Therefore he was effectively “king.”
  - Nabonidus spent much time at the oasis of Teima in northern Arabia.

# This is Real History—But Doubted

- Yet, secular sources such as on Wikipedia say:
  - Daniel was compiled in 164 BC.
  - Belshazzar’s feast is historical fiction.
  - Belshazzar was not actually the king.
  - Belshazzar was not a son of Nebuchadnezzar.
  - Darius the Mede is unknown to historians.
  - Persians, not Medes, were the conquerors of Babylon.



# Taking the Criticisms in Turn

- Daniel was compiled in 164 BC
  - We have already dealt with this. The Dead Sea Scrolls have copies from this time, indicating that the original was earlier, and probably much earlier.
  - The obvious close proximity of the author to the events precludes a late date.
  - Late date is used to avoid supernatural implications.

# Taking the Criticisms in Turn

- Belshazzar's feast is historical fiction.
  - Feasts like this were not uncommon.
  - For example, see Esther 1:3-9.
  - Alexander the Great had a feast reputedly attended by 10,000 guests.
  - There were larger ones.
  - We have a first-hand record of it, in Daniel.

# Taking the Criticisms in Turn

- Belshazzar was not actually the king.
  - In effect, he was king. His word was authoritative.
  - But notice that the Bible tells us explicitly his position in the kingdom when it says that he offered the third place of rulership in the kingdom (5:7, 16, 29). The clear implication is that he was second in command!

# Taking the Criticisms in Turn

- Belshazzar was not a son of Nebuchadnezzar.
  - Matthew 1:1 shows that “son” is used more broadly in Biblical thinking than in our modern thinking. Jesus was a “son” of David and of Abraham.
  - It can refer to a descendant/fore-father relation.

# Taking the Criticisms in Turn

- While Belshazzar was clearly Nabonidus' son, Nabonidus doesn't seem to be descended from Nebuchadnezzar.
  - Father *Nabu-balatsu-iqbi* or *Naksu-balatsu-iqbi* and mother Addagoppe.
- Whitcomb and Britannica have *Nitocris* as wife of Nabonidus (as does Herodotus). She was daughter of Nebuchadnezzar.
  - So Belshazzar's maternal grandfather was Nebuchadnezzar

# Taking the Criticisms in Turn

- Darius the Mede is unknown to historians.
  - He comes up in 5:31, and again in 6:1, 9:1.
  - Admittedly there is no extra-Biblical info on a man by this name. But the Scriptures have shown themselves accurate all the way thus far, and there is no reason to distrust them. They are first-rate, first-hand historical documents.

# Taking the Criticisms in Turn

- Darius the Mede is identified as:
  - Gubaru, appointed over the Babylonian province under Cyrus (not the same as Ugbaru, a general who died shortly after conquering Babylon).
  - Or as a special title for Cyrus. This is unlikely, since Cyrus was Persian, not Median.

# Taking the Criticisms in Turn

- Persians, not Medes, were the conquerors of Babylon.
  - Not the full story: it was the Medo-Persian empire (= Achaemenid Empire), consisting of both people groups.
  - Medes outnumbered Persians in the empire, so the Persian likely king tipped his hat to a Mede for the job of leading Babylon.



# Outline of Chapter 5

Verses	Subject Matter
1-4	The feast
5	Supernatural handwriting
6-9	Belshazzar troubled and calls for interpretation
10-12	The Queen recommends Daniel
13-16	Daniel introduced
17-24	Stage set for interpretation: arrogance of Belshazzar
25-28	Handwriting interpreted: judgment about to happen
29-31	Reward and fulfillment of the prophecy

# The Feast, 1-4

- Two prominent items about this feast
  - The number of guests = 1,000. That's a large party.
  - The wine (3x). Obviously, intoxication was happening.
- Somewhat inebriated already, Belshazzar called for the cups of the Jerusalem temple.
  - Using them would defile them and blaspheme God.
  - Remember Daniel 1:2 and where these items were.

# The Feast, cont.

- The goal was to drink wine from them...
- ....and praise the gods of gold, silver, etc.
  - So they put items meant to serve the living and true God into service for their polytheistic, drunken party, elevating themselves above God.
- This was the last straw. Belshazzar was done.

# Supernatural Handwriting, 5

- An angelic hand came to write a message right then, in the same hour.
- Location: a prominent wall in the throne or banquet room, on the plaster.
- At this point we don't know the words, because no one understood them.

# The Handwriting

- We have the phrase “the handwriting is on the wall” in modern English.
  - It refers to a premonition, portent, or certainty of some future negative event.

מנא מנא תקל ופרסין

# Belshazzar Troubled, 6-9

- Like his grandfather before him was troubled about his dreams (2:1, 4:5), so was Belshazzar.
- The angelic presence, combined perhaps with what was left of his conscience, caused:
  - Change in face and thoughts;
  - Knocking of knees and weakness in hips.

# Belshazzar Troubled

- So he cried out for a useless bunch of people to come and help him: the astrologers, etc.
- He offers a reward to anyone who can read and interpret the writing.
  - Reading and interpreting are two necessary steps.
- The reward is honor and office, as 3<sup>rd</sup> ruler.

# No Help from the Helpless, 8-9

- The “wise men” came, but as usual, God’s wisdom confounded the wise (1 Cor. 1:19-20, 3:19).
- They were unable to do either of the king’s requests, thus causing him further anxiety.
  - They could not read it. It was terse, but not coded.
  - They could not interpret it.



# Queen Recommends Daniel, 10-12

- The “queen” coming to the banquet hall:
  - Was probably not Belshazzar’s wife, who would already have been present at the feast.
  - Was probably not Nabonidus’ wife (Belshazzar’s mom), who likely was with her husband in Teima.
  - Seems to have first-hand historical knowledge.
  - Could have been Amytis, Nebuchadnezzar’s wife!

# The Queen's Recommendation

- She exhorts Belshazzar not to be troubled.
- She reminds him of Daniel's place before "your (grand)father" Nebuchadnezzar and the god-like wisdom that he showed.
- She was fully confident that Daniel could interpret the handwriting.

# The Queen's Recommendation

- Perhaps Daniel's reputation had become a little "enlarged" over the course of decades.
- Or, perhaps he did indeed solve more enigmas and riddles than just the few that are recorded in Daniel 1-5.

# The Queen's Recommendation

- The key about Daniel that the queen recognized was that God's spirit was in him. This gave him:
  - Light, understanding, and wisdom like the gods
  - Knowledge
  - Understanding
- With this, he could:
  - Interpret dreams
  - Solve riddles
  - Explain enigmas

# The Holy Spirit and Wisdom

- Ministry in/with Jesus Christ:
  - Isaiah 11:1-2, Luke 2:40.
- Ministry in Believers ← And this can be YOU.
  - Acts 6:3.
  - 1 Cor. 2:9-14.
  - Ephesians 1:17.

# Daniel Introduced, 13-16

- The king put Daniel in his “proper place” by speaking down to him as a captive from Judah.
- Daniel represented the Jews as a whole and was treated with some anti-semitism here.
- In the same way Belshazzar looked down upon God and treated God’s holy vessels with contempt.
- “I have heard...” as if he just learned it. Didn’t he read the letter of his grandfather (chapter 4)?

# Daniel Introduced, 15-16

- The astrologers, etc. were unable to read and interpret the writing.
  - As they were unable in chapters 2 and 4.
- Note that it is assumed that there has to be meaning in the symbols. It is not random.
- Same reward offered to him if he can help.

# Stage Set for Interpretation, 17-24

- Daniel didn't want bribes or payment. He was a servant of God. As long as he had what was needed to live, he didn't want anything else.
- The arrogance of Belshazzar is shown by way of contrast to the humbling of his grandfather.
- Nebuchadnezzar had plenary power. Belshazzar does not.



# Stage Set for Interpretation, 17-24

- Pride became Nebuchadnezzar's sin. His spirit was hardened.
- God took away his glory and made him like an animal (chapter 4).
- This condition persisted until he acknowledged that the true God rules over men and gives it to the care of whomever He wishes.

# Stage Set for Interpretation, 22-24

- BUT YOU, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, despite the fact that you knew all of this history.
  - This is a devastating critique.
- Belshazzar was trying to pass himself off as clueless about Daniel, but he was not.

# Stage Set for Interpretation, 22-24

- Belshazzar had wickedly exalted himself against the God of Heaven. How?
  - By bringing out the vessels from the Jerusalem temple to drink wine from them. Blasphemy.
  - And by praising false gods which are blind, deaf, mute, without knowledge. Idolatry.
  - And by not honoring God who owns your breath and all your ways. Non-worship of the true God.

# Stage Set for Interpretation, 22-24

- Note that neutrality in your worship is not acceptable. It is sin.
  - That's right. Not worshipping God is sinful. He holds your breath and gives you all things. You OWE Him worship.
- God sent the writing on the wall in response.

# The Handwriting

- How was it hard to read? Daniel's reading of it in v. 25 indicates that it was written in Aramaic. Daniel 2—7 are written in Aramaic.
- But it is very terse. Likely there were only consonants and no vowels, perhaps no spaces, and no verbs or prepositions, so it was understandably hard to figure out.

# The Handwriting

- Example in English:

**FLLWSHPBBL**

- Is it

**FELLOWSHIP BIBLE**

- Or is it

**FOLLOW a SHIP from BABEL**

# The Handwriting Could Have Been

- מנא מנא תקל ופרסין
- מְנֵא מְנֵא תְקֵל וּפְרָסִין
- מנא מנא תקל ופרסין
- מנא מנא תקל ופרסין

# Other Interpreting Issues

- God could have supernaturally blinded the astrologers and the king to its meaning.
- Their own sinful and inebriated minds may have been naturally confused.
- Daniel had special insight from God as to the meaning and how it was prophetic.



# Handwriting Interpreted, 25-28

מנא מנא תקל ופרסין

- Mene = counted/**numbered**, related to mina, a measure of weight. Repeated for emphasis.
- Tekel = like shekel (Gen. 24:22), **weighed**.
- U-phars-in = and; Paras/Peres **divided**; plural.

# Theology of the Handwriting

- Numbered
  - Every kingdom has a set number of days (Acts 17:26).
  - Every life has a set number of days (Ps. 139:16).
  - Belshazzar’s time was up (Luke 12:20).
  - It was finished “early” because of his arrogance.

# Theology of the Handwriting

- Weighed
  - Go back to the age-old idea of good and bad being put on a scale to see which comes out heavier.
  - Belshazzar's works weighed far more on the bad side than the good.
  - He was found *wanting or deficient*.

# Theology of the Handwriting

- More on Weighed
  - Salvation is obtained by faith alone.
  - People think that good works will earn salvation, but they cannot. God doesn't take bribes!
  - Still, a believer's good works will result in reward.
  - The unbeliever's works will be judged and found lacking at the Great White Throne judgment.

# Play on Words

- Divided, a play on words with “Persian.”
  - Related to Hebrew “perez” which means breached or divided.
  - In Aramaic, this word can refer to a “half mina.”
- The kingdom is divided among the Medes and Persians and Belshazzar will be reduced to nothing.

# Reward and Fulfillment, 29-31

- An empty reward was given to Daniel, which only lasted a few hours.
  - Clothing
  - Gold chain
  - Third ruler in the kingdom
- Then Belshazzar was killed.

# Darius the Mede, 31

- Cyrus appointed a man of Median descent named Darius to be the governor over this newly conquered territory.
  - See slides above on his identity.
- The head of gold has just been toppled. The chest and arms of silver has taken over.
  - It is inferior in some way to Neo-Babylonia (2:39).

# Lessons Learned

- Nebuchadnezzar was arrogant, but God humbled him and he accepted it.
  - Nebuchadnezzar believed in the true God.
- Belshazzar knew this lesson very well, but willfully ignored it.
  - God punished Belshazzar with death.