

CAPITOL STUDIES

FEBRUARY 14, 2024 • WEEK 6



DANIEL:
CHRIST'S CIVIL
SERVANT IN
BABYLON

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Verse of the Week

Daniel 5:23

You have exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven... But the God in whose hand are your life-breath and all your ways, you have not glorified.

Daniel Communicates Judgment



THE LAST SOLEMN SCENES in the downfall of the *head of gold* are before us. A dynasty is passing away in this chapter. God's judgment of the godless brings down the great Babylon. As a supreme power in the world, Babylon seemed impregnable. Its walls, according to a Greek historian, were 87 feet thick and 350 feet high, dominated by 250 watchtowers and encircled by a moat 35 feet wide. The amount of pasture land inside the city could sustain the populace for a 25-year siege, and the Euphrates, flowing diagonally across the city, would provide an unending supply of water. The city seemed very secure and prosperous, yet the armies of the Medo-Persians were at the city gates, and Babylon the Great would soon fall in fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy in chapter two.

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INTRODUCTION

Twenty to thirty years passed between chapters four and five. Nebuchadnezzar was succeeded at his death by his son, Evil-Merodach, who reigned for only a couple of years and was assassinated. In the upheaval that followed, no ruler was able to remain on the throne for any length of time until Belshazzar and his father, Nabonidus, came to power. Archaeological discoveries have verified Belshazzar's reign and Daniel's account. The inscribed name of Belshazzar has been found on Babylonian artifacts, confirming, once again, the veracity of the Bible.¹



I. THE PARTY OF THE KING

Daniel 5:1-4

Belshazzar the king held a great feast for a thousand of his nobles, and he was drinking wine in the presence of the thousand. ²When Belshazzar tasted the wine, he gave orders to bring the gold and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. ³Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God which was in Jerusalem; and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. ⁴They drank the wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.²

After the death of Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon sank to new depths of moral depravity. At this time, Belshazzar was co-ruler with his father, Nabonidus, who had fallen out of favor with the people and absented himself much of the time from the capital city because of his seeming devotion to the Mesopotamian moon-god Sin. Belshazzar entertained the aristocracy of Babylon at a most sacrilegious feast. It was unparalleled for the presence and number of dignitaries, the desecration of the vessels from Jerusalem, and the defiance of the one true God. In all the annals of biblical history, this banquet is unrivaled for debauchery, blasphemy, revelry, and profanity.

Belshazzar's menu was wine and women. Inflamed with wine, he sought to do something daring and sensational. He made mockery of the true and living God and defiled the sacred utensils which his grandfather had removed from the temple in Jerusalem. In praise of the superiority of his Babylonian gods, Belshazzar commanded the gold and silver temple vessels be filled with wine and distributed to the intoxicated guests. We



assume he believed that his heathen deities had secured him against the siege of Cyrus and the eastern army, and so Belshazzar arranged this feast to honor his gods and show his contempt for the Medes and Persians.

II. THE PRINT OF GOD

Daniel 5:5-6

Suddenly the fingers of a man's hand emerged and began writing opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, and the king saw the back of the hand that did the writing. ⁶Then the king's face grew pale and his thoughts alarmed him, and his hip joints went slack and his knees began knocking together.

The hand of God interrupts Belshazzar's party. In the grim watches of the night when the orgy had reached its zenith, the fingers of a man's hand appeared, writing on the palace wall. The wicked merry-makers came to a sudden, sober halt. The king was so affected by this apparition that his face took on a ghastly pallor, his mind reeled under the force of it, and his knees trembled uncontrollably. His own guilty conscience told him that he could not expect anything but bad news (Isaiah 45:1-3). Rand Hummel says, "True guilt is your friend – a godly companion who whispers truth and motivates you to repent and be free. But false guilt is a relentless foe. It is the enemy within that encourages not godly, but superficial sorrow that brings death!"³

Daniel 5:7-9

The king called aloud to bring in the conjurers, the Chaldeans and the diviners. The king spoke and said to the wise men of Babylon, "Any man who can read this inscription and explain its interpretation to me shall be clothed with purple and have a necklace of gold around his neck, and have authority as third ruler in the kingdom." ⁸Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the inscription or make known its interpretation to the king. ⁹Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, his face grew even paler, and his nobles were perplexed.

As with the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, the king's wise men are unable to give an interpretation of the handwriting.

Daniel 5:10-12

The queen entered the banquet hall because of the words of the king and his nobles; the queen spoke and said, "O king, live forever! Do not let your thoughts alarm you or your face be pale. ¹¹There is a man in your kingdom in whom is a spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of your father, illumination, insight and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods were found in him. And King Nebuchadnezzar, your father, your father the king, appointed him chief of the magicians, conjurers, Chaldeans and diviners. ¹²This was because an extraordinary spirit, knowledge and insight, interpretation of dreams, explanation of enigmas and solving of difficult problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar. Let Daniel now be summoned and he will declare the interpretation."





Belshazzar's mother, Queen Nitocris, who was the wife of Nabonidus and likely the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar, implored her son to summon Daniel. She spelled out six superlatives or unique abilities of Daniel. He had an excellent spirit (extraordinary or superior), had knowledge and understanding, knew how to interpret dreams, knew how to explain dark sentences, and was a master in dissolving doubts.⁴

III. THE PETITION OF THE KING

Daniel 5:13-16

Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king spoke and said to Daniel, "Are you that Daniel who is one of the exiles from Judah, whom my father the king brought from Judah?"¹⁴ Now I have heard about you that a spirit of the gods is in you, and that illumination, insight and extraordinary wisdom have been found in you.¹⁵ Just now the wise men and the conjurers were brought in before me that they might read this inscription and make its interpretation known to me, but they could not declare the interpretation of the message.¹⁶ But I personally have heard about you, that you are able to give interpretations and solve difficult problems. Now if you are able to read the inscription and make its interpretation known to me, you will be clothed with purple and wear a necklace of gold around your neck, and you will have authority as the third ruler in the kingdom."

Belshazzar sought Daniel, telling him he would be rewarded with prestige, power, and princedom as third in the kingdom if he could interpret the mysterious handwriting on the wall. This "handwriting on the wall" phrase is commonly used in our society today, but most people have no idea of its origin.

IV. THE PRONOUNCEMENT BY DANIEL

Daniel 5:17-23

Then Daniel answered and said before the king, "Keep your gifts for yourself or give your rewards to someone else; however, I will read the inscription to the king and make the interpretation known to him."¹⁸ O king, the Most High God granted sovereignty, grandeur, glory and majesty to Nebuchadnezzar your father.¹⁹ Because of the grandeur which He bestowed on him, all the peoples, nations and men of every language feared and trembled before him; whomever he wished he killed and whomever he wished he spared alive; and whomever he wished he elevated and whomever he wished he humbled.²⁰ But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit became so proud that he behaved arrogantly, he was deposed from his royal throne and his glory was taken away from him.²¹ He was also driven away from mankind, and his heart was made like that of beasts, and his dwelling place was with the wild donkeys. He was given grass to eat like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until he recognized that the Most High God is ruler over the realm of mankind and that He sets over it whomever He wishes.²² Yet you, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this,²³ but you have exalted



yourself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines have been drinking wine from them; and you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which do not see, hear or understand. But the God in whose hand are your life-breath and all your ways, you have not glorified.

Daniel was probably an old man by now, maybe in his eighties. He could not be bribed or bought, and he would not read the divine inscription for money. He refused any gifts or rewards from the king. Daniel explained history before he explained mystery. He reminded Belshazzar of how God had humbled his grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar, until he honored God as the supreme Ruler over all mankind (v. 21). “When the Hebrew Bible refers to YHWH as the Most High, it emphasizes that God is the owner and possessor of the heavens and the earth (cf. Gen. 14).”⁵ Belshazzar had rejected the “Lord of heaven.” In contrast to Belshazzar, Daniel had respect for Nebuchadnezzar. Now Daniel was pointing his finger at king Belshazzar for failing to learn from his grandfather. Daniel’s message was: “you... have not humbled your heart, even though you knew....” Belshazzar had refused to acknowledge dependence upon God, denied God’s supremacy, and robbed God of the glory due His Name. His sin also involved the blasphemy of desecrating the holy items from God’s temple.

Daniel 5:24-28

Then the hand was sent from Him and this inscription was written out.

²⁵*“Now this is the inscription that was written out: ‘MENĒ, MENĒ, TEKĒL, UPHARSIN.’* ²⁶*This is the interpretation of the message:*

‘MENĒ’—God has numbered your kingdom and put an end to it.

²⁷*‘TEKĒL’—you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient.*

²⁸*‘PERĒS’—your kingdom has been divided and given over to the Medes and Persians.”*

An empire is about to be dissolved. God’s patience had come to an end. Righteous judgment must be executed. The king’s sin was very grave, and the day of reckoning had dawned. Daniel was used to pronouncing the sentence of doom written by the finger of God.

Mene means “numbered.” The allotted number of days for the duration of the Babylonian empire had been determined by God. They had run their course.

Tekel means “weighed or found wanting.” The king had been weighed by the scale of God’s standard and was found deficient.

Upharsin means “to divide into pieces.” The empire would be split up, and there would be a transfer of power to the Medes and Persians.

V. THE PROPHECY FULFILLED

Daniel 5:29-31

Then Belshazzar gave orders, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a necklace of gold around his neck, and issued a proclamation





concerning him that he now had authority as the third ruler in the kingdom. ³⁰*That same night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain.* ³¹*So Darius the Mede received the kingdom at about the age of sixty-two.*

While Belshazzar kept his word to Daniel and promoted him to become the third ruler in the kingdom, the king did not live long enough to see Daniel installed. Cyrus the Great was God's appointed minister of judgment who would subdue Babylon. Cyrus, by rechanneling the Euphrates River, succeeded in marching his troops up the riverbed into the city. He found the bronze gates unbolted because of Belshazzar's false sense of security. Before the light of morning had broken across the eastern skies, Cyrus's soldiers entered the city by marching under the walls in the muddy riverbed, and Belshazzar came to an ignominious end. Josephus says, "Babylon was taken by Darius, and when he, with his kinsman Cyrus, had put an end to the Babylonians, he was sixty-two years old."⁶ "The verb 'received' [v. 31] implies that a higher authority than Darius gave him the kingdom. This higher authority was Cyrus the Great."⁷ But we know the Greatest Authority in the universe, YHWH God, actually elevated Darius to that position.

CONCLUSION

"In many respects, modern civilization is much like ancient Babylon, resplendent with its monuments of architectural triumph, as secure as human hands and ingenuity could make it, and yet defenseless against the judgment of God at the proper hour. Contemporary civilization is similar to ancient Babylon in that it has much to foster human pride but little to provide human security. Much as Babylon fell on that sixteenth day of Tishri (October 11) of 539 B.C., as indicated in the Nabonidus Chronicle, so the world will be overtaken by disaster when the day of the Lord comes [1 Thess. 5:1-3]. The disaster of the world, however, does not overtake the child of God; Daniel survives the purge and emerges triumphant as one of the presidents of the new kingdom in chapter six."⁸

There is also a deeper interpretation to be found in these verses. Chapter five is a history of the collapse of the past Babylonian empire, but it is also a forecast of the destruction of the future Babylon. The whole book of Daniel was written with the times of the Gentiles in view—their commencement, course, characteristics, culmination, and collapse. Everything that is true of the early stages of the Gentile period of world politics is also true of the final stage of Gentile history.

"If Belshazzar's last night on earth teaches us anything relevant to our theology of time, it is we must take advantage of the time we have to make sure we are right with God. Since we do not know the eternally scheduled time of our deaths, it is imperative that we be ready for it whenever it comes. What we do in time regarding our relationship with God fixes our place in eternity."⁹

Questions for Application:

1. What do you think are the primary elements that bring about the collapse of a nation?
2. Why do you think so many people in our day desire or seek after the sensual?¹⁰



Pastor Arin Hess

FOOTNOTES

1. Chart of Babylonian kings from Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel's Bible Commentary: The Book of Daniel*, Ariel Ministries, San Antonio, TX, 2023, pg. 171.
2. All Scripture quotations, unless noted, are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*, 1995 Update.
3. Rand Hummel, *The Daniel Dilemma*, Journey Forth, Greenville, SC, 2016, pg. 89.
4. Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Daniel*, pg. 186.
5. *Ibid.*, pg. 188.
6. *Ibid.*, pg. 206.
7. *Ibid.*, pg. 196
8. John Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key To Prophetic Revelation*, Moody Press, 1971, pg. 131
9. Michael Barrett, *God's Unfailing Purpose: The Message of Daniel*, Ambassador Emerald International, Greenville, SC, 2003, pg. 148.
10. Some of this material is taken from Edward Watke, Jr., *Study of the Book of Daniel*, Revival In the Home Ministries, Augusta, GA, 1992.

Theme Verse

Daniel said,

“Let the name of God be **blessed** forever and ever,

For **wisdom** and **power** belong to Him.

It is He who changes the **times** and the **epochs**;

He **removes** kings and **establishes** kings;

He gives **wisdom** to wise men and **knowledge** to men of understanding.”

Daniel 2:20-21



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