

Like Father – Like Son

Daniel 5:1-31

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*“Yet you, his son, Belshazzar,
have not humbled your heart
even though you knew all this,
but you have exalted yourself
against the Lord of
heaven.....but the God in whose
hand are your life-breath and
your ways you have not
glorified” (Daniel 5:22-23)*

There is a New Sheriff in Town

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. When **Belshazzar** tasted the wine, he gave orders to bring the gold and the 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”

(Daniel 5:1-2)

- Scripture doesn't give us an indication of when Nebuchadnezzar actually died:
 - 1) Our last scriptural record of Nebuchadnezzar shows him humbling himself and recognizing God as sovereign. (Daniel 4:34-37)
 - 2) A couple of well-known historians (Herodotus, Josephus and Berosus) place the death of Nebuchadnezzar in 562 B.C. making his rule 43 years in total.

- Scripture doesn't give us an indication of when Nebuchadnezzar actually died:
 - 3) The date that Babylon fell to the Persians was 539 BC so we can somewhat work backward from that date. Daniel 5:1 reveals a new king named Belshazzar is in charge of Babylon.
 - 4) The death of Nebuchadnezzar would have occurred sometime prior to 539 B.C. and allowing for the historical succession of Babylonians kings then a date for the death of Nebuchadnezzar would best fit about 562 B.C.

- Scripture also does not give us a succession of Kings between Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar but we have historical accounts that pretty much lay out a succession for us.
 - 1) Nebuchadnezzar was succeeded by his son *Evil-Merodach* (Amel-Marduk) and he reigned for two years (562-560 BC)
 - 2) Next up - *Neriglissar* (Nebuchadnezzar's son in law and Evil-Merodach's brother in law) who actually had Evil-Merodach murdered. He reigned four years (560-556 BC). Jeremiah speaks of him in (Jeremiah 39:3, 13) and spells his name Nergal-Sharezer.

- Scripture also does not give us a succession of Kings between Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar but we have historical accounts that pretty much lay out a succession for us.
 - 3) Get a load of this next King....Laborosoarchod or also known as Labashi-Marduk who took over after his father Neriglissar died. This king was very young and lasted somewhere between 2-9 months. He was assassinated.
 - 4) The Next King of Babylon was Nabonidus who reigned from 556-539 B.C.

- Nabonidus is the actual father of Belshazzar and although Belshazzar is called Nebuchadnezzar's son in Daniel 5:2, it is probably best to interpret him as his grandson.
 - 1) Most scholars agree that Daniel would have simply followed normal cultural practices that do not reference the “grand” in father. This was both normal in Babylonian culture and in Jewish culture.
 - 2) There are other possible suggestions explaining the father-son relationship between Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar but they involve incest and other twist and turns that are just rabbit trails in my opinion.

- Nabonidus is the actual father of Belshazzar and although Belshazzar is called Nebuchadnezzar's son in Daniel 5:2, it is probably best to interpret him as his grandson.
- 3) Nabonidus restored much of the glory and majesty that represented the Babylonian Empire during Nebuchadnezzar's era.
- 4) Nabonidus reinstituted and restored many of the abandoned temples and wicked religious practices of Nebuchadnezzar's reign.
- 5) Nabonidus clearly did not adopt the faith or belief in God as sovereign and that is never more evident in the life of his son Belshazzar as we will see.

“Then 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. They drank the wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone” (Daniel 5:3-4)

- These “**gold vessels**” were taken from the Temple in Jerusalem during the time that Nebuchadnezzar (Belshazzar’s grandfather) had conquered the Southern Kingdom of Judah, destroyed the city of Jerusalem and taken its people captive.

“In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the vessels of the house of God; and he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and he brought the vessels into the treasury of his god”

(Daniel 1:1-2)

- These “**gold vessels**” were taken from the Temple in Jerusalem during the time that Nebuchadnezzar (Belshazzar’s grandfather) had conquered the Southern Kingdom of Judah, destroyed the city of Jerusalem and taken its people captive.

“Nebuchadnezzar also brought some of the articles of the house of the Lord to Babylon and put them in his temple at Babylon” (II Kings 36:7)

- These vessels or goblets of gold were sacred to the Jews:
 - 1) They were to be used only in the Temple in Jerusalem
 - 2) They were to be used only by the Jewish priests
 - 3) They were to be used only for the purposes of worshipping Jehovah

- Belshazzar chooses to make a mockery of what is sacred and decides to throw a party and intentionally desecrates these holy articles.
 - 1) Belshazzar, his nobles, their wives and concubines all drink their wine from these gold goblets and their purposes in doing this were less than holy or honorable to the Lord.
 - 2) These participants (Belshazzar, his nobles, their wives and concubines) worshipped and praised their “gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone”, which showed their complete contempt for that which is sacred and holy. This will bring about the Lord’s judgment.

Let Your Fingers Do the Talking

Daniel 5:5-12

“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. Then the king’s face grew pale and his thoughts alarmed him, and his hip joints went slack and his knees began knocking together” (Daniel 5:5-6)



- What an interesting contrast between Daniel 5:4 and Daniel 5:6
 - 1) “They drank the wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone” (Daniel 5:4)
 - 2) “Then the king’s face grew pale and his thoughts alarmed him, and his hip joints went slack and his knees began knocking together” (Daniel 5:6)

According to John Walvoord in his commentary on Daniel he states that; Archeologists have actually found a large throne room in the ruins of Nebuchadnezzar's palace that is 56 feet wide by 173 feet long. In this throne room is a large white plaster wall which would have made for a great display board for this writing to take place. There is no proof that this is where it took place but it is an interesting thought.

- I would imagine that seeing a hand appear out of nowhere that begins to write a message on a wall would get anyone's attention and it clearly gets Belshazzar's.
 - 1) There is no reason to think that this is anything other than a "literal" hand which writes this message and the message and the hand are from the Lord.
 - 2) Daniel makes a point to identify some specific things such as a structure (a plaster wall in the king's palace) and a location (opposite the lampstand) which (in my mind) helps validate this as a literal occurrence.

The king was visibly shaken, almost as if he had seen a ghost, which adds credence to the fact that this was a *literal* occurrence for why would someone who had just *mocked* the God of the universe be otherwise disturbed had this not been the hand of the Lord Himself?

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 the third ruler of the kingdom” (Daniel 5:7)

- Take note of who Belshazzar turns to for help:
 - 1) **Sorcerers and Conjurers**, were those who cast spells or practice witchcraft
 - 2) The **Chaldeans** were a “*priestly*” class of men who among many things were known as **Astrologers** and they primarily studied the stars and attempted to predict the future by them.
 - 3) **Magicians/Enchanters/Diviners**, were men who practiced the occult

- Belshazzar turns to these “wise men” because in his mind these were the people who he trusted to provide him with an understanding of the inscription and also to explain its interpretation.
- We can see that Belshazzar has fallen into the “old ways” of his grandfather and his trust is in these false prophets and he clearly does not know where to turn to obtain a true interpretation of the inscription.
- There is a sizeable reward for providing the meaning of the inscription

“Then all the king’s wise men came in, but they could not read the inscription or make known its interpretation to the king. Then **King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, his face grew even paler, and his nobles were perplexed**” (Daniel 5:8-9)

- In the same way that the wise men failed to describe Nebuchadnezzar’s dream to him they are also unsuccessful in helping Belshazzar understand the meaning of the inscription written on the wall – that is **strike two for the wise guys!**
- The inability of the wise men to provide the meaning of the inscription only added further fear and trembling to Belshazzar and his nobles.

“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. There 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 as chief of the magicians, conjurers, Chaldeans and diviners” (Daniel 5:10-11)

- The “queen” mentioned here is probably Belshazzar’s mother or grandmother
 - 1) Verses 2-3 indicate his wives were already with him in the banquet hall
 - 2) She was already familiar with Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar and had more than just a passing knowledge of them both, especially Daniel’s abilities and may even have had some previous contact with him.
 - 3) She also seems to have the respect of Belshazzar which would have been more afforded to a mother or grandmother than a wife in their culture.

The queen does make reference to Nebuchadnezzar being Belshazzar's father but we know from the historical record that just doesn't really fit and the best conclusion to draw here is that Nebuchadnezzar was Belshazzar's grandfather.

“This was because an extraordinary spirit, knowledge and insight, interpretation of dreams, explanations 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” (Daniel 5:12)

- The queen recognizes Daniel’s insight, and wisdom in interpreting dreams
- The final thing that convinces me the queen was probably Belshazzar’s grandmother was her bold (almost like giving an order) statement; “Let Daniel now be summoned and he will declare the interpretation”.

Daniel's Reputation Precedes Him

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 who my father the king brought from Judah? 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” (Dan. 5:13)

- At the request/command of the Queen, Belshazzar summons Daniel into his presence for the purposes of inquiring whether he could help interpret the writing.

“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 who my father the king brought from Judah? 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” (Dan. 5:13)

- Belshazzar acknowledges Daniel’s reputation as one who is capable of providing insight and understanding in unique situations such as this.

“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 who my father the king brought from Judah? 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” (Dan. 5:13)

- Take note of the phrase; “Now I have heard that a spirit of the gods is in you”, which would indicate that Belshazzar is not a believer in the One True God and probably followed the same polytheistic (worship of many gods) religious practices that most if not all of the people of Babylon followed.

“Just now the wise men and 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”
(Daniel 5:15)

- This is further evidence that Belshazzar trusted psychic advisors to help guide him through situations like this, rather than spiritual advisors like Daniel.
- Once again these psychic advisors fail the king

“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” (Daniel 5:16)

- I doubt that Belshazzar had much firsthand knowledge of Daniel but he was at least wise enough to listen to the advice of the queen and seek his help.
- Belshazzar was even willing to reward Daniel for a successful interpretation

Daniel Reminds Belshazzar of the Lessons His Grandfather Learned

Daniel 5:17-21

“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. (Daniel 5:17)

- Daniel choice to not accept the gifts offered to the king was consistent with his character and testimony:
 - 1) Although Daniel would have been entitled to receive them he may have simply not wanted to give the impression that he was seeking some sort of payment in exchange for providing the interpretation.
 - 2) Even though Daniel told the king he could keep the gifts and rewards, the king will still give them to Daniel anyway for his honest interpretation of the inscription – see Daniel 5:29.
 - 3) This response by Daniel spoke volumes to the king as it showed the true character of Daniel which was in contrast to the culture of the Babylonians.

Daniel then proceeds to boldly declare the meaning of the inscription, but will first provide some insight into the pride of his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar and the judgment he received for his arrogant and unthankful spirit.

“O king, the Most High God granted sovereignty, grandeur, glory and majesty to Nebuchadnezzar your father. Because of the grandeur which He bestowed on him, all the peoples, nations of 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” (Daniel 5:18-19)

- Daniel tells Belshazzar that Nebuchadnezzar had it all going for him and that Most High God had granted him complete reign over all the peoples and surrounding nations to do as he pleased.
- It was the Most High God who raises up kings and removes them and Nebuchadnezzar was the benefactor of God's grace.

“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. 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” (Daniel 5:20-21)

- Daniel recounts the series of events that led to the downfall of Nebuchadnezzar as well as the results of his arrogance:
 - 1) Nebuchadnezzar allowed pride to control his life and this sin led to his being removed from his throne.
 - 2) Nebuchadnezzar suffered the humiliation of not just losing his throne but also in losing his mind – he became insane for a period of time and literally driven away from his royal palace.
 - 3) He literally lived among the animals and looked and acted as one

- Eventually Nebuchadnezzar repents and submits to the Lord:
 - 1) He acknowledges that the Lord is sovereign and is ruler over all the realm of mankind.
 - 2) He admits that it is the Lord who “raises up kings and removes them” and recognizes that it is the Lord who placed him on the throne in Babylon to accomplish His will.
 - 3) It was because Nebuchadnezzar repented and submitted to the Lord that he was restored to his throne and finish out his reign.

Belshazzar on the other hand allows pride and arrogance to completely absorb his life and his choice to desecrate the very articles of the Temple of the Lord will cause him to not only lose his throne but to also lose his life as we will see in Daniel's words of rebuke toward him.

Daniel Rebukes Belshazzar and Prepares Him for Judgment

Daniel 5:22-24

“Yet you, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this” (Daniel 5:22)

- The fact that Belshazzar was a descendant of Nebuchadnezzar (his grandson), he would have had known of the things that Nebuchadnezzar experienced.
- Daniel is letting Belshazzar know that he has no excuse for his actions and behavior. Belshazzar knew full well that the same God, who expected Nebuchadnezzar to be obedient to him, also expected the same from him.

“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 hands are your life-breath and your ways, you have not glorified”
Daniel 5:23)

- Belshazzar fell into the same trap of pride that Nebuchadnezzar fell into, in that he chose to do as he pleased with nothing or no one to hold him accountable:
 - 1) This too led to the fall of Lucifer (Isaiah 14:12-14, Ezekiel 28:12-19)
 - 2) This too led to the fall of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:1-6)
- Belshazzar's decision to desecrate the holy articles from the Temple of God by lifting them in praise to his "gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which do not see, hear or understand" was an act of rebellion and open defiance against the Lord who allowed him to rule in Babylon.

“Then the hand was sent from Him and this inscription was written out” (Daniel 5:24)

- The hand that wrote the inscription was clearly from the Lord and perhaps an ironic play on words since the Lord also held Belshazzar’s very life in His hands.
- Belshazzar knew about God but failed to honor Him and judgment was coming

Daniel Recites to Belshazzar the Inscription and its Meaning

Daniel 5:25-31

“Now this is the inscription that was written out: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN” (Daniel 5:25)

- MENE - “is an Aramaic noun referring to a weight of 50 shekels (1.25 lbs.). It is from the verb (m nah) which means to number.” (*Bible Knowledge Commentary*)
- TEKEL - “is a noun referring to a shekel (2/5 of an ounce). It is from the verb (t qal) which means to weigh.” (*Bible Knowledge Commentary*)
- UPHARSIN - “is a noun meaning a half-mina (25 shekels or 2/3 of a pound). It is from the verb (p ras) which means to break in two, to divide.” (*Bible Knowledge Commentary*)

“This is the interpretation of the message:
MENE – God has numbered your kingdom
and put an end to it” (Daniel 5:26)

- The duration of Belshazzar’s days was numbered and about to come to an abrupt and very quick end!
- The fact that the word is used twice (MENE MENE) leads many commentators to conclude it was there for emphasis.

“TEKEL – you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient” (Daniel 5:27)

- You have been measured/weighed and found wanting or deficient
- The use of scales/balances was common in Babylonian days for weighing payments. The payment was to meet a certain standard and if it came up short/light or unable to meet the standard then it was rejected. The scale had to balance.
- “Boast no more so very proudly, do not let arrogance come out of your mouth; for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and with Him actions are **weighed**” (I Sam. 2:3)

“PERES – your kingdom has been divided and given over to the Medes and Persians” (Dan 5:28)

- PERES is another form of the word UPHARSIN
- Daniel would have also understood that PERES is the Aramaic word for Persians.
- Some commentators feel Daniel is using a play on words by changing the plural word PARSIN to its singular form PERES giving it a double meaning from a “single” Empire that is to be divided between the Medes and the Persians.
- The kingdom is divided between the Medes and the Persians

“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”
(Daniel 5:29)

- Belshazzar makes good on his earlier promise to Daniel and rewards him for interpreting the inscription on the wall:
 - 1) He clothes him in purple which signified royalty
 - 2) He placed a necklace of gold around his neck which signified power
 - 3) He issued a proclamation making Daniel the third ruler in the kingdom which signified authority.

- We are only told that the king gave orders for Daniel to receive these gifts and since Daniel had earlier rejected these gifts there is no evidence that he fully accepts them in this instance.
- It does seem interesting that Belshazzar chooses to reward Daniel rather than have him killed for providing such a scathing rebuke.
- Had Daniel actually accepted the reward it would have been short lived anyway, as that very night Belshazzar was killed and the Babylonian Empire was now governed by Darius the Mede and the rest of the Persian Empire.

“That same night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain. So Darius the Mede received the kingdom at about the age of sixty two” (Daniel 5:30-31)

How is it possible that a city whose walls were considered impenetrable and also had enough food and water stored up to last them 20 years was conquered so easily?

- 1) Clearly Belshazzar and his nobles had no fear of their walls being breached since that very night they were partying it up like there was no tomorrow. (Daniel 5:1-4)
- 2) This question is probably best answered by reading Isaiah 13:17-19, *“Behold I am going to stir up the Medes against them who will not value silver or take pleasure in gold. And their bows will mow down the young men, they will not even have compassion on the fruit of the womb, nor will their eye pity children. And Babylon, the beauty of kingdoms, the glory of the Chaldeans pride, will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah”*.

- 1) The city had already been under assault by the Persian king named Cyrus but it was Ugbara (commander of the Persian army) who conceived an idea to divert the waters of the Euphrates river (which ran through the city from north to south) making it possible to access the city by going under the city walls as opposed to breaching the walls from above as was the normal military strategy of that time.
- 2) Once inside the city walls (which were left unguarded) the Persian armies were able to quickly defeat the unprepared Babylonian soldiers in what amounted to a one night siege of the city.

- That very night Belshazzar was killed and Darius the Mede seized control of the city and the Babylonian Empire was no more.
- The image that Nebuchadnezzar saw in Chapter 2 came true. The Medo-Persian Empire is the silver chest and arms that are spoken of in that dream and they now ruled the land of Israel and what was once known as the Babylonian Empire.
- God is in control of all things and Daniel 5 illustrates that so clearly!