

Daniel - Chapter five

In chronology, events of this chapter follow those of chapters 7 and 8. The visions outlined in those two chapters occurred in the first and third years of Belshazzar's reign, while that listed here took place in the final moments of his life.

Vs.1-4. Before discussing the 'great feast', notice that Nebuchadnezzar is referred to as being Belshazzar's father (v.2). He was 'father of Belshazzar' in the biblical sense that David is called the 'father' of Jesus (Lu.1:32). In Semitic usage, the term 'son of' is equivalent to 'successor of'. Too, it is often said that Belshazzar was the 'grandson of Nebuchadnezzar'. But that can't be according to history. Too, some even believe he was not lineally related to Nebuchadnezzar. Yet, the mother of Nabonidus (Belshazzar's father) was the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar. Therefore, Belshazzar was the great-grandson of King Nebuchadnezzar.

- Nebuchadnezzar died in 562BC, after reigning 43 years. Afterwards, he was followed in quick succession by his son Evil-Merodach, who reigned two years (562-560). He was murdered by his brother-in-law, Neriglissar, who then took the throne and reigned 560-556BC. He was succeeded by his son Labishi-Marduk, who reigned but a few months before being overthrown by 'revolution'.

- One of the conspirators in the revolution, Nabonidus, then ascended to the throne (555BC). Not long after, he left Babylon to fight Cyrus on the open field of battle. And while away from home, and engaged in battle, his son Belshazzar was left in command. Then, for the last thirteen years of Nabonidus' reign, he and his son ruled as co-regents.

- 'Belshazzar the king made a great feast'. It was actually a 'drunken party', to which the king invited a thousand of the nobles (princes and lords of the kingdom of Babylon). After much drinking, Belshazzar became daring and boastful, commanding his servants to bring the gold and silver vessels (those taken out of the Temple of God in Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar) that they might drink therein. Note: At this very time, Cyrus, the founder and king of the Persian Empire, along with his army, was besieging the city of Babylon. Therefore, to have a feast at such a time as this, Belshazzar seems to be sending a message to Cyrus to show that Babylon was impregnable. It was a city well fortified, and it could not be taken.

- So they drank wine and praised their gods.

- By drinking from the Lord's sacred and sanctified vessels in honor of the pagan gods of Babylon, Belshazzar and his lords dishonored the God of heaven. In essence, they were mocking the God of Israel. And in so doing, they brought judgment upon themselves.

- Daniel was not present. But since he was part of the nobility of the kingdom, it's almost certain that he had been invited. Yet, he maintained his position of 'absolute separation' from the world, so he would certainly have refused to attend such a drunken orgy.

V.5. Thoughts concerning the 'King's palace':

- Some believe the 'hall' was 300 feet long. Others have declared it to be as much as 1600 feet long.

- But in recent years a huge hall has been excavated on the site of old Babylon that measures 60 feet wide and 172 feet long. (Believed by many to be the 'great hall' of the king's palace.)

- The hall had beautifully decorated walls. Too, some ancient writers tell us that they had 'trained peacocks' that pulled the little wagons across the hall, loaded with liquors, to serve the lords, princes, and wives their alcoholic beverages.

- The king saw fingers of a man's hand writing over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall. (The writing was in an 'unknown language', a supernatural manifestation.) No doubt, thousands witnessed it.

- Note: Some Jewish scholars say it was the angel Gabriel doing the writing. Yet, Dr. Lightfoot, a Jewish rabbi, believes the fingers were those of the 'divine hand' that had written the two tables on Mt. Sinai for a law to his people in the days of Moses. He who wrote the commandments upon stone tablets for Israel, now writes the 'doom' of Babylon and Belshazzar upon the plaster of the wall.

Vs.6,7. 'The king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him'. No doubt, his guilty conscience let him know that all was not well. He had no reason to expect anything good from the writing.

- His face grows pale with fear.
- His mind is agitated and disturbed.
- There is weakness in his joints.
- The whole body trembles and shakes.
- So he cries out in distress (aloud) for the wise men of Babylon to be brought in.
- He promises a 'scarlet robe' and a 'gold chain' (glorious things in the eyes of those who know not God), as well as the 'position as third ruler in the kingdom'. Two thoughts: (1) Third ruler after Nabonidus, the king, and himself, the co-regent. (2) Third ruler after him (Belshazzar) and his heir apparent.

Vs.8,9. All the king's wise men came, but were unable to read the writing or give its meaning.

- 'but they could not' (v.8). A familiar phrase as to man apart from God. Note: Jesus said, 'without me ye can do nothing' (Jn.15:5). And that truth continues, even today, in the lives of all.
- Because of the failure of the wise men, the king becomes agitated.
- No longer was there a jovial mood of merry-making in the hall. For the king, all of that now turned to fear and terror. And his noblemen were equally disturbed.
- The revelry ceased. The happy mood was over. And a death-like silence came over all those present.

Vs.10-12. Then the queen, attracted by the noise made by the king and his noblemen, came into the banqueting hall. Note: It is believed that this queen (queen-mother) was the widow of Evil-Merodach. She had not been present at the feast (possibly because of her age and lateness of the hour). But when she heard what had taken place, she came to tell the king about Daniel and the service he had rendered to Nebuchadnezzar in days gone by. 'He is a man . . . in whom is the spirit of the holy gods'. Too, she assured Belshazzar that Daniel would be able to give the king the interpretation.

Vs.13-17. 'Then was Daniel brought in before the king'.

- At this time he is nearing 90 years of age, and is likely no longer active as one of Babylon's wise men.
- He is offered riches, wealth, and position if he could but tell the interpretation of the writing upon the wall.

- Note: Two things have often hindered servants of God. They are 'gold' and 'glory' (money and the praise of men).

- But Daniel says, in essence, 'I'm not interested in your gifts'. Yet, 'I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation'.

Vs.18-21. Daniel recounts to Belshazzar some of God's dealing with King Nebuchadnezzar, which were intended for a warning. Note: To properly understand what God is doing with us, it is beneficial to review what He has done with others.

- To begin, Daniel describes the great dignity and power given Nebuchadnezzar by the most high God. Yet, he thought his glory was obtained by his own outstanding conduct and courage, ascribing his successes to his own genius. But Daniel tells him that it was the 'most high God', the 'God of gods and Lord of kings' (as Nebuchadnezzar himself had declared) that gave him a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honor.

Vs.22,23. Daniel rebukes Belshazzar.

- You know how God chastised your forefather Nebuchadnezzar, yet you lifted up yourself against this very same God.

- You worshipped idols made with hands.

- The sanctified vessels (taken from God's house in Jerusalem) have been desecrated by you, your lords, wives, and concubines by drinking wine in them.

Vs.25-28. Daniel reads the writing on the wall, and gives the interpretation.

- The writing that was written was: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. Note: These are the Chaldean translations of the original words in the 'unknown language'. Note: If the writing had been in Chaldee, Hebrew, Samaritan, or any other language of the Babylonian Empire some of the lords could have interpreted it without the divine help through Daniel.

- The interpretation: Mene, Mene is written twice by the hand, because it had a twofold meaning: 'numbered' and 'tested'. God hath numbered your kingdom, and finished it. God had tested his kingdom, found it to be wanting, and, therefore, had numbered its days. Important to note: A major reason for Belshazzar's kingdom to be numbered and finished was because he had reached out his hand and touched things that God had consecrated, things sanctified and declared holy by God.

- 'Tekel': 'Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting'. Belshazzar had been weighed on heaven's scales and found seriously defective. Note: The word 'mene' has to do with the kingdom; the word 'tekel', with the king personally.

- 'Peres': 'Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians'. Note: The word 'Upharsin'. 'U' is Aramaic for 'and', and 'pharsin' is the Aramaic plural of 'peres', which has two meanings: 'division' and 'Persia'. It speaks of the division of the kingdom of Babylon and its conquest by the Persians and Medes.

V.29. The king fulfilled his promise to Daniel. Clothed him with scarlet, put a gold chain about his neck, and proclaimed him the third ruler in the kingdom.

Vs.30. The writing on the wall was fulfilled. King Belshazzar was slain that night.

- Three thoughts as to how it all happened:

(1) Belshazzar was killed by two of his own men, Gadatas and Gobrias, who joined forces with Cyrus because they had been wronged at an earlier date by the King.

(2) When Medo-Persian army approached Babylon, the people swung open the gates to admit them in without resistance. Belshazzar may have been the only one slain.

(3) Babylon was built across the River Euphrates. It had a great wall which made it almost impossible for a conqueror to enter the city. The people believed their city could not be taken. They had an adequate supply of food, water, etc., and they were sure Cyrus and his army would not and could not enter. They felt secure. Yet, Greek historians tell us that Cyrus dammed up the river, ran the waters out across the plain, and made a way for him and his troops to enter beneath the walls in the river-bed. The army was able to march underneath the wall and take the city by surprise.

Note: Historians tell us that this happened on October 29, 539BC.

V.31. And Darius the Median took the kingdom. There is much controversy as to who this Darius really was. It's believed that he was the nephew of Cyrus (founder of the Persian Empire and conqueror of Babylon). And since he and Cyrus were partners in war and conquest, Cyrus agreed that he should take the kingdom.