

Writing on the Wall

Daniel 5

By Scott Huckaby

9/6/2020

**BIG BEND
BIBLE
FELLOWSHIP**

Belshazzar's Feast, Daniel 5:1-12

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

⁵ In the same hour the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. ⁶ Then the king's countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other. ⁷ The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. The king spoke, saying to the wise men of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing, and tells me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around his neck; and he shall be the third ruler in the kingdom." ⁸ Now all the king's wise men came, but they could not read the writing, or make known to the king its interpretation. ⁹ Then King Belshazzar was greatly troubled, his countenance was changed, and his lords were astonished.

¹⁰ The queen, because of the words of the king and his lords, came to the banquet hall. The queen spoke, saying, "O king, live forever! Do not let your thoughts trouble you, nor let your countenance change. ¹¹ There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God. And in the days of your father, light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, were found in him; and King Nebuchadnezzar your father—your father the king—made him chief of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers. ¹² Inasmuch as an excellent spirit, knowledge, understanding, interpreting dreams, solving riddles, and explaining enigmas were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar, now let Daniel be called, and he will give the interpretation."

What do we know about King Belshazzar?

King Nebuchadnezzar reigned over Babylon for forty-three years, and was succeeded by his son when he died in 562 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar's son reigned for two years and died at the hand of his brother-in-law because his rule was to arbitrary and licentious (2 Kings 25:27). The brother-in-law ruled for four years when he died a natural death then was succeeded by his son, a child, who reigned for only nine months before he was beaten to death by Nabonidus, who had married another of Nebuchadnezzar's daughters and was the last king of the Babylonian Empire. He resided in Arabia and he appointed a co-regent, his eldest son, Belshazzar, to govern the affairs of the Empire in Babylon. King Belshazzar reigned for seventeen years in Babylon.

How was King Belshazzar mentioned in the prophecy of Jeremiah 27:6-7?

Jeremiah 27:6-7 – And now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant; and the beasts of the field I have also given him to serve him. So all nations shall serve him and his son and his son's son, until the time of his land comes; and then many nations and great kings shall make him serve them.

Belshazzar was Nebuchadnezzar's grandson (his son-in-law's son). After him, a coalition of nations led by the Medes and Persians conquered the Babylonian empire.

Who do we expect to succeed the king of Babylon?

King Cyrus of Persia and King Darius of the Medes joined forces to make war against King Belshazzar of Babylon

- They developed a unique military strategy to conquer the city of Babylon and with it the mighty Babylonian Empire

What was King Belshazzar doing when the Persians and Medes attacked his city?

King Belshazzar was having a lavish party and feast for the Babylonian gods, seemingly unaffected by the threat that war and disaster was at his very door

King Belshazzar had to know the Persians and Medes threatened them because their army was hard to hide... why was he not concerned about them?

He was confident that their city was protected by a substantial wall... The walls around Babylon were wide enough for seven chariots to travel abreast (87 feet) and high enough that ladders could not be used to scale the heights of 350 feet. There was also a 150-foot-wide mote around the outside walls on the larger portion of the city.

- The city of Babylon, was located on both banks of the Euphrates River so it had plenty of water
- The city was stocked with supplies that would last for twenty years, negating an effectual prolonged siege

What was the Persian and Mede strategy for conquest?

Divert the water of the Euphrates River, which ran under the wall gates and through the city – the river gates were unguarded! They could then literally march up the dry riverbed into the city

What mistakes did King Belshazzar make?

- He presided over an opulent Babylon with misplaced confidence in their defenses and leaders who misjudged their enemy
- Many of the Babylonian military officers were drunk having joined in the spirit of the king's banquet
- King Belshazzar was drunk revealing him to be an immature, poor leader
- They had no regard for God as revealed in the violation of God's sacred Temple vessels

What do we know of Cyrus, the king of Persia?

Cyrus the Great, king of Persia, was unique in Bible prophecy in that he was named in Scripture approximately 175 years before he conquered Babylon.

- His role was foretold as the deliverer of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity and the issuing of authorization for restoring the Temple in Jerusalem
Isaiah 44:28 – *“who says of Cyrus, “He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, “Let it be rebuilt,” and of the temple, “Let its foundations be laid”*

God foretold this about Cyrus even though the Persian king did not know about the God of the Jews:

Isaiah 45:4 – *“For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me”*

What do we know about the party King Belshazzar hosted the night of his demise?

- They had a great feast (and perhaps an orgy for there were wives and concubines, among the men)

- It had to be an important large event for thousands of nobles to be present
- Some have suggested that it could have been an annual tribute to the Babylonian gods... There is merit to this theory because of what King Belshazzar did regarding the Hebrew Temple goblets

Given that Nimrod was the original founder of Babylon, what insight does that give us about King Belshazzar?

- Nimrod, the King and founder of Babylon, was not only its political leader, he was its religious leader also. He was a priest-king.
- From Nimrod descended a line of priest-kings: Belshazzar was one.
- Thus, the Feast that Belshazzar held in Babylon was more than a social gathering... It was a celebration of the “Babylonian mysteries” of which Belshazzar was the head at that time...

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

How was Belshazzar's call for the Hebrew temple vessels a disrespectful affront to God?

- He is in a situation where the city was besieged, the enemy is at the gates, his life and kingdom is at stake, and he is out of control because he is drunk!
- His intent was to brag/show that the Babylonian gods were more powerful than the Hebrew God--- showing contempt, condescension, and disrespect toward God!

How was Belshazzar able to call for the Temple vessels?

- King Nebuchadnezzar physically took the Temple vessels from the Hebrew Temple in Jerusalem many years before.
- The Hebrew holy vessels were housed in the Babylonian temple of Bel. To remove them from that place, so that they could be used in a drunken feast, was sacrilege and blaspheming to God

What interrupted Belshazzar's party?

- A mysterious hand writing something on the wall.
- He possibly sobered up instantaneously since the writing on the wall was directly for his benefit and plainly in sight!
- He could not read it and did not know its meaning!

Why was this unsettling to Belshazzar?

It obviously was not the work of ‘man’ and was likely...

- a) A rebuke for sin of revelry and debauchery
- b) For sacrilege in irreverent use of consecrated vessels
- c) Perhaps an indication of some approaching calamity

d) All of the above

NOTE: The crime of sacrilege was regarded among the pagans as one of the most awful that could be committed. They are alarmed at the possibility!

v6 – What does it mean that the king’s continence changed when he saw the writing on the wall?

He was racked with fear

- The party was over for the king & his guests
- His knees knocked
- Possibly his beard, drenched in wine from the vessels, was trembling from the fear

v7 – Who did the king call on to interpret the writing on the wall?

His “wise” men, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers – A large reward was offered; purple robe, gold chain, prestige

Why would the winner of the interpretation challenge become the third ruler of the kingdom?

Belshazzar was only the second ruler, his father Nabonidus was first ruler.

v9 – How did the king react to the “wise” men not being able to interpret the writing on the wall?

The inability of the Babylonian wise men to read the words made King Belshazzar even more terrified.

v10 – Who came to Belshazzar’s rescue?

The queen (probably the queen-mother) who suggested Daniel. Evidentially King Belshazzar had not used Daniel in his service; Daniel’s service seems to have ended with Nebuchadnezzar’s death.

Writing on the Wall Explained, Daniel 5:13-31

¹³ Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king spoke, and said to Daniel, “Are you that Daniel who is one of the captives from Judah, whom my father the king brought from Judah?” ¹⁴ I have heard of you, that the Spirit of God is in you, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you. ¹⁵ Now the wise men, the astrologers, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing and make known to me its interpretation, but they could not give the interpretation of the thing. ¹⁶ And I have heard of you, that you can give interpretations and explain enigmas. Now if you can read the writing and make known to me its interpretation, you shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around your neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.” ¹⁷ Then Daniel answered, and said before the king, “Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another; yet I will read the writing to the king, and make

known to him the interpretation. ¹⁸ O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father a kingdom and majesty, glory and honor. ¹⁹ And because of the majesty that He gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whomever he wished, he executed; whomever he wished, he kept alive; whomever he wished, he set up; and whomever he wished, he put down. ²⁰ But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him. ²¹ Then he was driven from the sons of men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. 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 rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses. ²² “But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this. ²³ And you have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven. They have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your lords, your wives and your concubines, have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know; and the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified. ²⁴ Then the fingers of the hand were sent from Him, and this writing was written.

²⁵ “And this is the inscription that was written:

MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.

²⁶ This is the interpretation of each word. MENE: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it; ²⁷ TEKEL: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; ²⁸ PERES: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.” ²⁹ Then Belshazzar gave the command, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a chain of gold around his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom. ³⁰ That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. ³¹ And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.

v13 – What does it tell us that the king had to ask if the man brought to him was Daniel?

This indicates that the king had nothing to do with Daniel up until this point.

Why does Daniel refuse the gifts of the king?

Given the interpretation of the writing on the wall, the king’s gifts would be meaningless.

What was the history lesson Daniel gave the king?

Daniel told King Belshazzar that even though he knew of the history of King Nebuchadnezzar and his hardened heart and his living like a wild donkey, he did eventually

acknowledge that the Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms... but not Belshazzar (v 22).

Whose hand wrote on the wall?

It had to be from the Creator-God Himself.

Why didn't God give Belshazzar a dream like he did his grandfather?

God does not speak by dream or vision to King Belshazzar because this is a man whom He does not intend to reach. God reached out to King Nebuchadnezzar via his dream and visions.

- God would not endure this impious, irreverent, profane, insult to heaven to continue, so He writes His message on the wall of the banquet hall

On what other occasion have we seen writing by the hand of God?

It is likely the One who wrote this message on the wall is the same One who wrote the message in the sand when they brought a sinful woman before Jesus (John 8:1-11)

How was Daniel able to interpret the writing on the wall and the wise men were not?

It was in a language that Daniel recognized, Aramaic. The language the Babylonians spoke was Akkadian. The interpretation would have been from the Holy Spirit to Daniel's human spirit.

What did "Mene" mean?

It meant numbered... the days of the Babylon Empire was over... their number was up.

What did "Tekel" mean?

It meant weighed... its value had been weighed in the balance and had been found wanting

What did "Parsin" mean?

It was the plural form of "Peres" meaning divided, torn in two pieces to be given to the Medes and Persians.

v29 – How did Belshazzar react to Daniel's interpretation of the writing on the wall?

- He conscience confirmed Daniel had read it right and given the correct interpretation.
- Daniel received his reward; a gold chain around his neck, a purple robe over his shoulders and made "third ruler" of Babylon (a short-lived promotion – one night).

Belshazzar's Fall, Daniel 5:30-31

³⁰ That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. ³¹ And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.

What became of King Belshazzar?

- He was killed by the Medes and replaced by King Darius.
- The world Empires changed, as God said it would. The Empire of the "Silver Arms and Breast" of the great statue had come into existence, the Medes and Persians (539 B.C.).
- It also fulfilled the prophecy in Jeremiah 50...
Jeremiah 50:1-3 – *The word that the Lord spoke against Babylon and against the land of the Chaldeans by Jeremiah the prophet. "Declare among the nations, proclaim, and set up a standard; Proclaim—do not conceal it— Say, 'Babylon is taken, Bel is shamed. Merodach is broken in pieces; Her idols are humiliated; her images are broken in pieces.' For out of the north a nation comes up against her, which shall make her land desolate, and no one shall dwell therein. They shall move, they shall depart, both man and beast.*
- And Isaiah 13, "The burden against Babylon..."
Isaiah 13:17-20 – *"Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, Who will not regard silver; And as for gold, they will not delight in it. Also their bows will dash the young men to pieces, And they will have no pity on the fruit of the womb; Their eye will not spare children. And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, The beauty of the Chaldeans' pride, Will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It will never be inhabited, Nor will it be settled from generation to generation*

Note: the city of Babylon was not destroyed in 539 BC when the Medo-Persian Empire took over political power but it was abandoned after the Grecian Empire superseded them becoming a heap of ruins.

What observations can be made about God from this segment of Scripture and history?

- Sacred things that belong to God should be respected
- No person is exempt from God's judgment
- God is in control of Empires, Kings, and individuals
- The sudden end of the Babylonian Empire, which came on that fateful night, is typical of the end of Gentile power at the Second Coming of Christ
- We are all responsible to honor God according to what revelation we have
- God weighs the actions of all mankind
- If God held Belshazzar responsible for his actions and lack of belief, how much more will he hold enlightened man responsible in this day and age?