

Daniel 5:1-12. Another dream, another nightmare. An ancestor/successor of Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar¹⁰ ["god save/protect the king"] gave a banquet for the oligarchy of Babylonia.¹¹ During their wine tasting,¹² he ordered that the gold and silver goblets stolen from the Lord God Yahweh's temple be used, the very ones Nebuchadnezzar had stolen. As his wives and concubines and the nobles drank from them, they praised the gods of gold & silver, of bronze & iron, of wood & stone.

Suddenly it happened—a human hand's fingers appeared and wrote on the banquet hall. As Belshazzar watched what the hand wrote on the wall, he turned pale—his knees knocked with fear.

As per usual, a call was put out for the magicians and other diviners to interpret. A reward was posted:

Anyone who can read this writing and tells me what it means will be given high status, clothed in purple and draped with a gold chain. He will be the third greatest in the kingdom.

As none of the king's men could read nor interpret, Belshazzar freaked even more. He was terrified; the oligarchy was baffled.

Hearing the fear in their voices, the queen came to the hall and reminded Belshazzar about Daniel, whom King Nebuchadnezzar called Belteshazzar.

Daniel is smart; he has the ability to interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve problematic problems. Text Daniel; he'll tell you what the writing means. He uses ATT&T.

DANIEL 5:1-12

King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them. ²While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father [or *ancestor*] had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them.

³So they brought in the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. ⁴As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.

⁵Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote. ⁶His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way.

⁷The king called out for the enchanters, astrologers [or *Chaldeans*] and diviners to be brought and said to these wise men of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing and tells me what it means will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around his neck, and he will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom."

⁸Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or tell the king what it meant. ⁹So King Belshazzar became even more terrified and his face grew more pale. His nobles were baffled.

¹⁰The queen [or *queen mother*], hearing the voices of the king and his nobles, came into the banquet hall. "O king, live forever!" she said. "Don't be alarmed! Don't look so pale!"

¹¹There is a man in your kingdom who has the spirit of the holy gods in him. In the time of your father [or *ancestor*] he was found to have insight and intelligence and wisdom like that of the gods. King Nebuchadnezzar your father—your father the king, I say—appointed him chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers [or *Chaldeans*] and diviners. ¹²This man Daniel, whom the king called Belteshazzar, was found to have a keen mind and knowledge and understanding, and also the ability to interpret dreams, explain riddles and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means."

Q What was the new king's name? Compare to Daniel's Babylonian name. So?

Q About what was Belshazzar so freaked? Just what was on the wall?

¹⁰"Belshazzar" means "Bel, protect the king!" Belshazzar was the son and viceroy of Nabonidus. He is called the "son" of Nebuchadnezzar (see verse 22), but the Aramaic term could also mean "grandson" or "descendant" or even "successor."

¹¹Nebuchadnezzar died in 562BC; the year is now 539BC.

¹²Ancient Greek historians Herodotus and Xenophon noted the orgy of revelry and blasphemy on such Babylonian occasions.

Q Why would Belshazzar offer such a sumptuous reward? Why so much power for “the winner?”

Q Why did the mother/queen mother proffer Daniel as a solution to Belshazzar’s problem?

Daniel 5:13-21. *A context for the troubling writing*. The summoned Daniel was questioned by the king—are you indeed one of the exiles my father brought from Judah? I’ve heard you have *the spirit of the Gods in you*; you’ve got it all—insight into the “its” of life, intelligence on what they mean, and wisdom on what to do about the “its” of life.

The other knuckleheads were neither able to read this writing nor to interpret it. What say you? Tell me what it means and I’ll make you the third highest ruler in the kingdom, purple and gold chains all around.

Daniel was nonplussed. You may keep your gifts for yourself, or give them to others. I will, nevertheless, read and interpret the writing. But first, you need to know...

King, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty, power, glory and splendor. Because of all He gave him, all people dreaded, and feared Nebuchadnezzar. The king killed who he wanted to kill; he spared who he wanted to spare; he promoted who he wanted to promote. And, those he wanted to humble? He humbled.

But... He developed heart disease; his heart became arrogant, hardened with pride, and he was deposed. Stripped of his title and associated glory, he was driven away, given the mind of an animal and lived with wild animals, eating grass like a cow. He stayed in this state until he acknowledged who is actually sovereign—the Most High God. It is the Lord God Almighty who decides who rules what kingdom when.

Q What was Daniel’s reputation among the Babylonians? What was the presumed cause of this reputation?

DANIEL 5:13-21

So Daniel was brought before the king, and the king said to him, "Are you Daniel, one of the exiles my father [or ancestor] the king brought from Judah?" ¹⁴I have heard that the spirit of the gods is in you and that you have insight, intelligence and outstanding wisdom. ¹⁵The wise men and enchanters were brought before me to read this writing and tell me what it means, but they could not explain it. ¹⁶Now I have heard that you are able to give interpretations and to solve difficult problems. If you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around your neck, and you will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom."

¹⁷Then Daniel answered the king, "You may keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else. Nevertheless, I will read the writing for the king and tell him what it means.

¹⁸"O king, the Most High God gave your father [or ancestor] Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendor. ¹⁹Because of the high position he gave him, all the peoples and nations and men of every language dreaded and feared him. Those the king wanted to put to death, he put to death; those he wanted to spare, he spared; those he wanted to promote, he promoted; and those he wanted to humble, he humbled.

²⁰But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory. ²¹He was driven away from people and given the mind of an animal; he lived with the wild donkeys and ate grass like cattle; and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and sets over them anyone he wishes.

- Q Why did Daniel refuse Belshazzar's gifts/rewards for interpreting the writing on the wall?
- Q What was the purpose of Daniel's introduction to the situation (verses 18-21)? How would you assess the efficacy of his sermon to Belshazzar?



Daniel 5:22-31. *Reading & interpreting the troubling writing*. Daniel didn't mince words.

But, he said, you O Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself, even though you knew you're your father Nebuchadnezzar went through, and what allowed him to return to sanity.

You've used goblets from the Lord God of Heaven; your wives and concubines drank wine from them, praising gods made of stuff which can neither see, nor hear, nor understand. You've gotten on the wrong side of the Lord God, the One who you did not honor, the One who holds your very life in His hand. Indeed, you're not the sharpest knife in the drawer. So? Here it is...

The inscription MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN means simply this —

Mene—God has numbered the days of your reign; He has brought it to an end.

Tekel—You've been weighed on the scales of worthiness—you've come up short.

Persin—Your kingdom is now divided and will be given over to the Medes & Persians.

Wow. At Belshazzar's command, as decreed/promised, against Daniel's wishes, Daniel was nevertheless clothed in purple, given a gold necklace, and proclaimed to be the third highest

DANIEL 5:22-31

"But you his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this. ²³ Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. You had the goblets from his temple brought to you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines drank wine from them. You praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways.

²⁴ Therefore he sent the hand that wrote the inscription.

²⁵ "This is the inscription that was written:

MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN

²⁶ "This is what these words mean:

Mene: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end.

²⁷ *Tekel*: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting.

²⁸ *Pares*: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians."

²⁹ Then at Belshazzar's command, Daniel was clothed in purple, a gold chain was placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom.

³⁰ That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians [or *Chaldeans*] was slain, ³¹ and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, at the age of sixty-two.

ruler in the kingdom. It didn't last long for that very night Belshazzar, King of Babylonia, was killed. Darius the Mede took over.

- Q To what extent was Belshazzar paying attention to Daniel with his rather tough opening?
- Q What was so wrong with Belshazzar using the goblets of the temple in the celebration?
- Q Why did the Lord God Yahweh want Belshazzar to know the meaning of the "writing on the wall?"
- Q Why did Belshazzar give Daniel the purple, the chain, and the new position,¹³ even though Daniel had rejected same? What was Daniel's position after that night? Number two, or banished?

ADVANCED BIBLE COMMENTARY FOR DANIEL 5¹⁴

5:10 The "queen" or "queen mother" could have been

- (1) the wife of Nebuchadnezzar, or
- (2) the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar and wife of Nabonidus, or
- (3) the wife of Nabonidus but not the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar.

5:17 *keep your gifts for yourself.* See Genesis 14:23 for a similar situation...

But Abram said to the king of Salem [Melchizedek],

"I have raised my hand to YAHWEH, GOD MOST HIGH, CREATOR of heaven and earth, and have taken an oath ²³ that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the thong of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich.' ²⁴ I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me—to Aner, Eshcol and Mamre. Let them have their share."

5:26-28 Three weights (mina, shekel, and half mina/shekel) may be intended, symbolizing three rulers (respectively): (1) Nebuchadnezzar, (2) either Evil-Merodach (2Kings 25:27; Jeremiah 52:31) or Nabonidus, and (3) Belshazzar.

5:27 *weighed on the scales.* Measured in the light of Yahweh's standards (cf. Job 31:6; Psalm 62:9; Proverbs 24:12).

5:28 *Medes and Persians.* The second kingdom of the series of four predicted in chapter 2.

5:30 *That very night.* See Proverbs 29:1—"A man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed—without remedy."

5:31 *Darius the Mede.* Perhaps another name for Gubaru, referred to in Babylonian inscriptions as the governor who Cyrus put in charge of the newly conquered Babylonian territories. Or "Darius the Mede" may have been Cyrus's throne name in Babylon (see Daniel 6:28; see also 1Chronicles 5:26 for a similar phenomenon).

took over the kingdom. The head of gold is now no more, just as predicted in Daniel 2:39.



¹³Nabonidus was first, Belshazzar second; Daniel was now "third," at least for awhile.

¹⁴Adapted, corrected, and revised by D. Thomas Porter from Compton's Interactive NIV © 1996.