

October 25, 2020

## God Judges Belshazzar for His Arrogance

### ***Introduction to Chapter 5***

Chapter 4 ended in 570 B.C. and Chapter 5 begins in 539 B.C. so let's catch up on what the Bible omits:

- Nebuchadnezzar dies in 562 B.C.
- Succeeded by his son, Amel-marduk, who reigns for two years (562-560 B.C.)
- Amel-marduk is assassinated by his brother-in-law, Neriglissar, who rules from 560-556 B.C.
- Neriglissar is succeeded by his son, Labashi-marduk, who reigns for a few months in 556 B.C. before a rebellion and assassination.
- One of the rebels, Nabonidus, claims the throne and rules from 556-539 B.C. Nab. is not named in Bible
  - He has an unusual devotion to the moon god Sin
  - Extremely unpopular in Babylon where the "patron god" has been Marduk (or Bel) for centuries
  - Nabonidus installs his son, BELshazzar as "coregent"
  - Nabonidus exiles himself to Tema in the Arabian desert for ten years (~550-540 B.C.)
  - Nabonidus returns to Babylon in 539 B.C. just in time to face Persia and Cyrus the Great
  - Nabonidus leaves Babylon for a two-day battle with Persia at Sippar
  - Babylon's troops are routed by Persia
- The Medes/Persians march into Babylon on October 12, 539 B.C.

### ***Themes from Daniel that we will see (once again) in this chapter***

- Royal arrogance incurs God's wrath
- God can humble even the most proud and mighty
- God keeps His promises
- God governs all human history for the sake of His redeemed people, the Church
- God reveals mysteries to His people that unbelievers cannot understand
- The wise men are incapable of truth for they worship false gods

### ***Read Daniel 5:1-12***

- v. 1 "King"- a disputed title, but one that history and archaeology allow for Belshazzar.  
"Belshazzar" – means "Bel protect the king"  
"great feast" – secular historians Herodotus and Xenophon confirm feasting when Persia enters
- v. 2 "when he tasted the wine" – may imply that he was already intoxicated when he issues his decree  
"the vessels"- God had sent them with in 1:2, now they will be desecrated  
"Nebuchadnezzar his father"- biologically they are not father and son. Attempts to connect their genealogy on Belshazzar's mother's side are speculation and unnecessary.  
What can "father" and "son" refer to?  
In the Bible "father" and "son" can reflect several relationships:  
- Jesus is described as "son of Abraham" and "son of David" (Matthew 1:1) though many centuries separate them.  
- Disciples of a prophet are called his "sons" and he is their "father" (1 Sam. 10:12; 1 Kings 20:35; 2 Kings 2:3, 5, 7, 12, 15; 4:1, 38; 5:22; 6:1; 9:1).  
- The Black Obelisk of Assyrian King Shalmaneser III (c. 830 B.C.) refers to Israel's King Jehu as "son of [king] Omri" even though there was no relation and 2 Kings 10:1-17 shows Jehu killing Omri's family. In this last sense we find "predecessor" and "successor" to be the meaning
- v. 4 "praised the gods of gold..." – they do not even have real ears to hear their praise
- v. 5 "Immediately"- the metal gods cannot hear or react, Yahweh *does* ... immediately!  
Daniel focuses more on describing the king's reaction than the hand itself
- v. 6 "alarmed him" same phrase used of Daniel in 4:19 and 7:18, but Daniel knows God as gracious
- v. 7 "third ruler in the kingdom" – behind Nabonidus (first) and Belshazzar (second)
- v. 8 "could not read...or interpret"- it is in Aramaic, which they would know, more on this below (v. 15)
- v. 10 "the queen" – Nabonidus's wife, Belshazzar's mother, describes Daniel as in 2:48 and 4:8-9, 18  
Daniel's age- if he was 14 when brought to Babylon, he would be 80 years old in this story retired?

***The Main Point-*** *Theologically*, Belshazzar is the spiritual "son" of Nebuchadnezzar. He commits the same sins and ignores similar warnings. He did not heed the letter written by Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4. He brazenly challenges the God of Israel and is humbled.

### ***Read Daniel 5:13-31-***

- v. 14, 16- “I have heard...if you can”- Belshazzar seems cynical and reluctant
- v. 15 “they could not show the interpretation”- several theories as to why:
- The words were written vertically instead of horizontally (The Jewish *Talmud*) Rembrandt
  - The words were written in code like a cryptogram
  - The words were written in cuneiform marks and Daniel translates as well as reads/interprets
  - The wise men *could* read, but not interpret (this theory contradicts 5:8)

**\*\*It’s much simpler than the theories think-** at Daniel’s time there were two ways of writing Aramaic inscriptions. (1) Longer inscriptions would be written out fully with word dividers (spaces, dots, lines). (2) Shorter inscriptions (like the one in Daniel 5) were often written without dividers. Also, Aramaic does not write the vowels down for words or punctuation for sentences. So it would have been written: **MN’<sup>o</sup>TQLPRS**. So which letters make which words? There are many options when you divide into words and add the vowels

Daniel’s reading and interpretation: MN’ \_ TQL \_ PRS and his interpretation includes a play on words

- v. 16 Belshazzar tries to incentivize Daniel and thinks he, the man, has a special power
- v. 17 Daniel is terse, direct, and forceful. He does not greet Belshazzar as the queen had (5:10). He refuses the gifts and rewards, his wisdom is not for sale, nor is his God
- v. 23 Daniel’s accusation highlights that Belshazzar praised lifeless gods by profaning the living God

### **v. 25-28 Daniel Interprets the Divine Writing**

All three words are weight measurements (also used for money before coins were invented)

Mina (*mene*), Shekel (*tekel*), Half-Mina (*peres*)

Daniel interprets each with a play on words, the Noun for weight becomes a Verb of same letters

- v. 26 “Mene, God has **numbered** (*m’na*) the days of your kingdom and *brought it to an end*” a pun at the end
- v. 27 “Tekel, you **have been weighed** (*tekilta*) in the balances and *found wanting*” a pun at the end
- v. 28 “Peres, your kingdom is **divided** (*perisat*) and given to the Medes and **Persians** (*paras*)” double pun
- v. 31 Darius the Mede received the kingdom – from whom?

Jeremiah 25:11-12 and 29:10 – Babylon will rule over Israel for (only) 70 years

Jeremiah 51:11, 28 – the Medes would be God’s instrument to punish Babylon

This also begins to corroborate Daniel’s interpretation of the statue in Daniel 2

“being sixty-two years old”- meaning he was born four years **after** Daniel and friends are taken to Babylon, God had already begun His plan to end the exile in Babylon as promised (Is. 44:24–45:8)

***The Main Point:*** “God’s revelation of mysteries to his people far outstrips the humanly devised wisdom of pagan diviners. In this way, God’s revelation to Daniel is but a foretaste of his ultimate revelation of his grace in Christ, which is the mystery revealed to all of God’s people by the power of the Holy Spirit, who works through the Gospel to grant and sustain saving faith in Christ.” (A. Steinmann, p. 258)