

The Book of Daniel: the Key to Bible prophecy

Chapter 5



Introduction to Chapter 5

Chapter five is a drama that unfolds before the readers eyes. There are several concurrent events taking place. While Belshazzar is busy feasting with his nobles, wives and concubines, the armies of Persia are outside the walls of Babylon planning their assault on the impregnable city, the pride and glory of the Babylonian kingdom.

This chapter takes place at the close of the Babylonian kingdom; in the year 539 B.C., Chapter 4 is at the close of the life of Nebuchadnezzar in 562 B.C., chapter 5 is 23 years later.

Chronologically chapter 7 and 8 take place before chapter 5. The reign of Belshazzar begins about the 553 B.C., so chapter 7 takes place in the first year and chapter 8 in the third year, or about 547 B.C.

This chapter until recently was one of the most attacked chapters in Daniel, because no confirmation outside the bible of existed verifying Belshazzar, as king of Babylon. However, the discovery of the *Nabonidus Chronicle* changed all this. The *Nabonidus Chronicle* verified the Belshazzar as the son of Nabonidus, who was the known king of Babylonian Empire.

According to Berosus, a Chaldean historian, preserved by Josephus, Nebuchadnezzar died after a reign of 43 years, he was followed by his son Evil-Merodach. Evil-Merodach was assassinated by Neriglissar, his sisters husband, after two years of rule, because his rule was arbitrary and licentious. Neriglissar occupied the throne for four years. After his death, his son, Laborosarchod, a child, reigned for nine-months, until he was beaten to death as a result of a conspiracy. The conspirators appointed Nabonidus, who was one of them, he ruled for 17 years, until he was defeated by Cyrus the great in 539 B.C. Josephus writes quoting from the Chaldean historian Berosus,

"Nabuchodonosor, after he had begun to build the forementioned wall, fell sick, and departed this life, when he had reigned forty-three years; whereupon his son Evil-merodach obtained the kingdom. He governed public affairs after an illegal and impure manner, and had a plot laid against him by Neriglissoor, his sister's husband, and was slain by him when he had reigned but two years. After he was slain, Neriglissoor, the person who plotted against him, succeeded him in the kingdom, and reigned four years; his son Laborosarchod obtained the kingdom, though he was but a child, and kept it nine months; but by reason of the very ill temper and ill practices he exhibited to the world, a plot was laid against him also by his friends, and he was tormented to death. After his death, the conspirators got together, and by common consent put the crown upon the head of Nabonnedus, a man of Babylon, and one who belonged to that insurrection. In his reign it was that the walls of the city of Babylon were curiously built with burnt brick and bitumen; but when he was come to the seventeenth year of his reign, Cyrus came out of Persia with a great army; and having already conquered all the rest of Asia, he came hastily to Babylonia. When Nabonnedus perceived he was coming to attack him, he met him with his forces, and joining battle with him was beaten, and fled away with a few of his troops 1833 with him, and was shut up within the city Borsippus. Hereupon Cyrus took Babylon, and gave order that the outer walls of the city should be demolished, because the city had proved very troublesome to him, and cost him a great deal of pains to take it. He then marched away to Borsippus, to besiege Nabonnedus; but as Nabonnedus did not sustain the siege, but delivered himself into his hands, he was at first kindly used by Cyrus, who gave him Carmania, as a place for him to inhabit in, but sent him out of Babylonia. Accordingly Nabonnedus spent the rest of his time in that country, and there died."

Chapter 5 documents the transition between the Babylonian and Persian kingdoms. Daniel chapters 6, 9-12 take place during the Persian Empire, which followed the Babylonian Empire. These chapters took place within a few years of the defeat of Babylon.

Belshazzar's feast

DA 5:1 Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine

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in the presence of the thousand.

DA 5:2 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.

DA 5:3 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.

DA 5:4 They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone.

Belshazzar the king... Belshazzar's existence is no longer in question and has been verified by Babylonian and Persian documents. What is at question is his relationship to Nebuchadnezzar. In verse 2, Nebuchadnezzar is called his father. The problem with this is the timing Nebuchadnezzar

Babylonian Kings	Reign	Relation to Nebuchadnezzar	Book of Daniel
Nabopolassar	621- 605	Father	
Nebuchadnezzar	605-562 B.C.	Self	Chapters 1 to 4
Evil-Merodach	562-560 B.C.	Son	
Neriglissar	560-556 B.C.	Son-in-law	
Laboroarchod	556-556 B.C.	Grandson	
Nabonidus	556-539 B.C.	Son-in-law	
Belshazzar	553-539 B.C.	Grandson	Chapters 7,8, 5

died in 562 B.C. Belshazzar's father, Nabonidus, came to power in 556 B.C., following the murder of Laboroarchod, Nebuchadnezzar's

grandson.

Daniel's informs us that Nebuchadnezzar is Belshazzar's father. In Aramaic and in Hebrew there is no word for grandfather or for grandson. So it very likely that Nebuchadnezzar was the grandfather of Belshazzar, this seems to be affirmed in verse 11. Here the queen comes out to talk to Belshazzar, she probably is the queen mother, the wife of Nabonidus, the father of Belshazzar. In verse one, Belshazzar's wives and concubines are present at the feast, this would exclude the queen mother who arrives in verse 11. She is most likely, Nebuchadnezzar's daughter, Nabonidus' wife and Belshazzar's mother.

According to the *Nabonidus Chronicle* we know the following events took place in Babylon as reported in the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia.



Nabonidus Cylinder

return to Babylon from his new capital in Teima in northern Arabia. The wording of two legal documents, from his twelfth and thirteenth years, in which oaths are sworn not only by his name but also by that of Belshazzar suggests that Nabonidus was no more than a nominal ruler, in Babylon at least. He did return to Babylon in 539 B.C., a few months before the city fell to the Persians, but whether he relieved Belshazzar of his responsibility we do not know.¹



Nabonidus Chronicle

In the third year of his reign (553 B.C.) Nabonidus "entrusted the 'Camp' to his oldest son Belshazzar, the first-born....He let everything go, entrusted the kingship to him, and himself, he started out for a long journey". So although Belshazzar is never called "king" in the cuneiform sources, and was unable to replace Nabonidus in the New Year Festival ritual, he clearly exercised many of the functions of kingship. He was still theoretically subordinate to Nabonidus, a situation reflected correctly in Daniel 5:16, where he offers Daniel a position as "third ruler in kingdom" or perhaps a "member of a triumvirate".

Nabonidus seems to have remained absent from Babylon for nearly ten years. We know from the Nabonidus Chronicle that the New Year Festival was cancelled in the seventh to the eleventh years of his reign because he did not

Great feast... Having a great feast was not uncommon for kings, when all those loyal to him are gathered under the king's roof. According to the ancient historian Ktesias, Persian monarchs

¹ International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, William B. Eerdmans Publishing, Volume one, pg 455.

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frequently were known to dine daily with 15,000 people.

The timing of the feast, is the more amazing feature. Babylon had pretty much been defeated by the armies of Cyrus the great, only the city of Babylon was still undefeated. The nobles had retreated to the city and had planned to wait out the Persians in the safe confines of the city of Babylon.

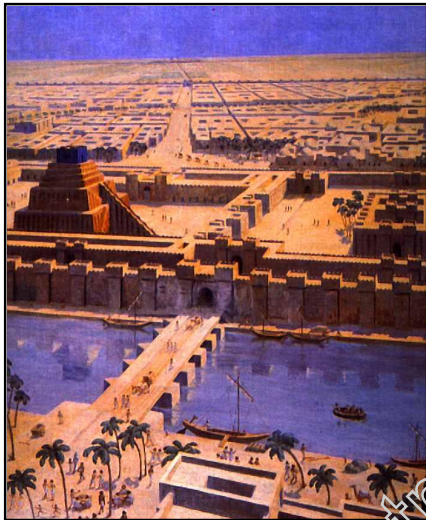
Drank wine... Wine caused Belshazzar to do things never before done. He was given a certain boldness, which caused God to judge his kingdom.

The command... Belshazzar challenged the God of Jerusalem, by ordering the vessels taken from Jerusalem, by Nebuchadnezzar to be brought to the party. Belshazzar would have been familiar with the stories of Daniel and his companions according to verse 22. The wine caused him to boldly challenge the God of Israel.

His lords... The party was not an ordinary party, but was wild drinking party involving both his **wives** and **concubines**, the king's harem. Try to imagine the scene, music and singing, food of great abundance, dance and revelry combined with drunken proud men and their wives and girlfriends. Add to this the bold challenge to the God of Israel, and you can imagine what results.

Praised the gods... By using the items from Solomon's Temple to praise the Babylonian god's, Belshazzar was making a direct challenge to god, literally daring Him to do something.

He rested himself in the power of the city of Babylon to protect him, his nobles, wives and paramours (concubines). The city as described by Herodotus, had 350 foot high walls, 87 feet thick, with 100 brass gates, 14 miles to a side, spanning the Euphrates river, by most accounts one of the greatest cities ever built.



Most modern view these figures as an exaggeration of the city. They feel the real dimensions to be only ¼ of the size described by Herodotus with the city only measuring 17 miles around rather than 56 miles. The city at this time is only partially excavated, and based upon the location of the mounds the city limits are more or less indicated, but this is complicated by the Euphrates River change in course.

Within the walls of Babylon there would have been parks, straight roads, palaces and temples. The streets were lined with buildings three and four stories high. The temple of Bel was an eight-story structure, and the king's palace was a complex of buildings now excavated. A bridge spanned the Euphrates river, and later a tunnel mentioned by Diordorus, connected both parts of the city.

Belshazzar and his revelers praised the god's of the materials that built Babylon.

Handwriting on the Wall

DA 5:5 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.

DA 5:6 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.

DA 5:7 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."

DA 5:8 Now all the king's wise men came, but they could not read the writing, or make known to the king its interpretation.

DA 5:9 Then King Belshazzar was greatly troubled, his countenance was changed, and his lords were astonished.

Same hour... The same hour men arrived with the articles from the Temple in Jerusalem, at that very hour. A mysterious event occurred, a man's hand with no body, just a hand started writing on the plaster illuminated by the lamp behind the king. The lamps were the light source since this party was taking place at night, and this lamp was located near the king the scene would have been hard to miss.

Nebuchadnezzar's palace has been excavated, and a large room measuring 173-feet by 56-feet

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has been found. This room is probably the scene of this banquet described in the 5th chapter. In the middle of the long hall was a spot behind which was covered with white plaster as described in the book of Daniel.

King's countenance... The king was just moments earlier boldly challenging the God of Israel, drinking toasts from the Temple vessels. Now his bold appearance has totally changed.

Joints of his hips... Literally he lost control. A very humiliating event for a proud king, challenging God, now in front of his guests, wives and concubines he could not control himself, today was not going to be Belshazzar's day.

Knees knocked... The king was utterly terrified of the hand and what it meant.

Clothed with purple... Purple was the royal color, signifying ruler ship.

Third ruler... This statement demonstrates the accuracy of the book of Daniel, compared to the critics. The mention of Belshazzar as king of Babylon, caused many critics to question Daniel, and its authenticity. The reason Belshazzar could promise someone the to be third ruler was because his father Nabonidus was first ruler and he was second. Nabonidus dwelt in Teima, north of the Arabian desert as recorded in the *Nabonidus Chronicle*.

All the king's wise men... Again, the wisdom of the world is pitted against the wisdom of God, championed by Daniel. The wise men could not read the writing or understand what it meant.

In an application sense, the same goes with the Bible today. The wise men of this world cannot read the Bible and understand the words. The meaning is hidden from the skeptic who chooses to reject God's word.

1:18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." 20 Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

1 Corinthians 1:18-21

Interpretation... Paul with all his knowledge and understanding of scripture could not understand the idea of the Messiah dying until God choose to reveal Himself to Paul. In the same way, people cannot see Christ until God chooses to reveal Himself.

God's plan for the end of days is also hidden from the world but revealed to his people, the wicked do not understand but the wise will understand.

9 And he said, "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.

10 "Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand.

Daniel 12:9-10

Daniel suggested as interpreter

DA 5:10 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.

DA 5:11 "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.

DA 5:12 "Inasmuch as an excellent spirit, knowledge, understanding, interpreting dreams, solving riddles, and explaining enigmas were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belshazzar, now let Daniel be called, and he will give the interpretation."

The queen... This is the queen mother, not the wife of Belshazzar. Most probably her name is Nitocris, the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar, mother of Belshazzar, wife of Nabonidus. Some also speculate she is the wife of Nebuchadnezzar, the grand-mother queen. Because of the commotion being made she was called into the room.

There is a man... The nobility of Babylon had forgotten Daniel at this time. We last see Daniel about 562 B.C. near the final years of Nebuchadnezzar's life. Twenty-three years later, he makes his appearance before the Babylonian government, again representing the God of Israel against the gods of Babylon.

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She is reminding the young and impetuous king of what went on in the kingdom before him. He either forgot because he was so caught up in the world. Choosing to ignore the lessons of his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel Called before the King

DA 5:13 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?"

DA 5:14 "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.

DA 5:15 "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.

DA 5:16 "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."

Are you Daniel... Belshazzar had some knowledge of Daniel and his circumstances. The memory seemed distant by the king's questioning. Belshazzar is a young king when he took power, the oldest son of Nabonidus, his father's reign lasted 17 years and his co-reign about 14 years. So if Belshazzar took power at the age of 20 he would be about 34 years old at this point.

My father... In Aramaic there is no separate word for grand-father. More than likely Nebuchadnezzar is his grand-father, father of Nitocris, his mother.

Daniel's rebuke of Belshazzar

DA 5:17 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.

DA 5:18 "O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father a kingdom and majesty, glory and honor.

DA 5:19 "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.

DA 5:20 "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.

DA 5:21 "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.

DA 5:22 "But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this.

DA 5:23 "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.

Daniel answered... Daniel's chief concern was God's holiness. Daniel at this point is probably close to eighty years of age. Taken as a boy of around 14 to 15 years of age, he had remained in Babylon from 605 B.C. to 539 B.C., 66 years until this time. Daniel had no need for the king's reward, Daniel sought God's reward.

Again, God delivered to Daniel, a room full of souls to hear a message from God. If we could imagine a room full of music, revelry, drinking, boasting and lewdness brought to a sudden halt. Then transitioning to a king who loses control in front of his guests cries out in fear. Then Daniel is called, to deliver a sermon about God's plan.

Similar stories can be seen on the Titanic, moments before it struck an iceberg people in revelry unconcerned about eternity. Moments later all this changed, people were struck with fear as their security was destroyed by an iceberg.

hardened in pride... Nebuchadnezzar had a similar problem of pride, but was humbled and learned the lesson, God rules over men, the Most High God of Israel, as opposed to the gods of the

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material world.

You knew... Daniel reminds the king, if fact he hints that Belshazzar was a witnesses to the events in Nebuchadnezzar's life. Maybe he was a young boy, who witnessed what his grandfather's ordeal. He however, choose ignore that part of his life, and was filled with his own pride.

Lifted up yourself against the Lord of Heaven... Belshazzar was not only filled with pride, but choose to challenge heaven itself.

God who hold your breath... Belshazzar like most who choose to ignore God forget the very breath they breath is from God, let alone our possessions.

Daniel's interpretation of the writing

DA 5:24 "Then the fingers of the hand were sent from Him, and this writing was written.

DA 5:25 "And this is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.

DA 5:26 "This is the interpretation of each word. Mene: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it;

DA 5:27 "Tekel: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting;

DA 5:28 "Peres: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians."

Fingers of the hand... These fingers could have belonged to an angel,

Inscription... The inscription seemed to be unreadable to the wise men of Babylon. It very well might have been in an unfamiliar script. Daniel however could read and interpret the writing.

Mene מנא Mene' A weight of measurement usually 50 shekels

Tekel תקל T@qal To weigh, to be weighed

Upharsin פֶּר P@rac (P'al) to break in two, divide n m

On

Daniel's Reward and the Prophecy fulfilled

DA 5:29 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.

DA 5:30 That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain.

DA 5:31 And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.

They clothed Daniel... Eighty year old Daniel, was clothed with purple whether he like it or not. That very night while the party was in progress, Persian soldiers had entered the city and were in the process of taking control, even while Daniel was in throne room with the Babylonian nobles.

Darius the Mede... Darius the meade, is made governor by the conquering Persian and Meade armies. Cyrus however is the king, Darius ruled over the province of Babylon. Heroditus gives us details not covered in the Bible of how Cyrus defeated Babylon.



Tomb of Cyrus

before a swamp, he made the ancient channel fordable by the sinking of the river. When this took place, the Persians who were appointed to that purpose close to the stream of the river, which had now subsided to about he

Cyrus...then advanced against Babylon. But the Babylonians, having taken the field, awaited his coming; and when he had advanced near the city, the Babylonians gave battle, and, being defeated, were shut up in the city. But as they had been long aware of the restless spirit of Cyrus, and saw that he attacked all nations alike, they had laid up provisions for many years, and therefore were under no apprehensions about a siege. On the other hand, Cyrus found himself in difficulty, since much time elapsed, and his affairs were not well advanced. Whether, therefore, someone else made the suggestion to him in his perplexity or whether he himself devised the plan, he had recourse to the following stratagem. Having stationed the bulk of his army near the passage of the river where it enters Babylon, and again having stationed another division beyond the city, where the river makes its exit, he gave order to his forces to enter the city as soon as they should see the stream fordable. Having stationed his forces and given these directions, he himself marched away with the ineffective part of his army; and having come to the lake, Cyrus did the same with respects to the river and the lake as the queen of the Babylonians had done; for having diverted the river, by means of a canal, into the lake, which was

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middle of a man's thigh, entered Babylon by this passage. If, however, the Babylonians had been aware of it beforehand, or had known what Cyrus was about, they would not have suffered the Persians to enter the city, but would have utterly destroyed them; for, having shut all the little gates that lead to the river, and mounting the walls that extend along the banks of the river, they would have caught them as in a net; whereas the Persians came upon them by surprise. It is related by the people who inhabited this city, that by reason of its great extent, when they who were at the extremities were taken, those of the Babylonians who inhabited the centre knew nothing of the capture (for it happened to be a festival); but they were dancing at the time and enjoying themselves, till they received certain information of the truth. And thus Babylon was taken for the first time



The Cyrus Cylinder also sheds light on the fall of Babylon. In Cyrus own word he tells how Babylon came into his possession.

Marduk, the great lord, a protector of his people/worshippers, held with pleasure his (i.e. Cyrus) good deeds and his upright mind (lit. heart) (and therefore) ordered him to march against his city Babylon...He made him set out on the road to Babylon...going at his side like a real friend. His widespread troops—their number, like that of the water of a river, could not be established—strolled along, their weapons packed away. Without any battle, he made him enter his town Babylon...sparing Babylon...any calamity. He delivered into his (i.e. Cyrus') hands Nabonidus, the king who did not worship him (i.e. Marduk)

