

Daniel: *Dual Book of History & Prophecy*

Another way to gain a time perspective on the early chapters of Daniel is to consider Daniel's age:

Chapter 1: 13-15 years old, Chapter 2: 15-16, Chapter 3: ~21-33, Chapter 4: 48-55, Chapter 5: 79

Following the death of King Nebuchadnezzar in 562 B.C., his son Evil-Merodach ^{2 Kings 25:27, Jeremiah 52:31} (Amel-Marduk) ruled for two years. In an army coup in 560 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar's son-in-law Neriglassar (Nergal-Sharezer ^{Jeremiah 39:3}) reigned for four years, but was ousted by N's weak son Labashi-Marduk, who ruled for less than a year. A *coup d'état* resulted in Nabonidus, another son-in-law of N, being placed on the throne. Although he was the official king of Babylon 556-539 B.C., Nabonidus was unpopular, so he named his son (N's grandson), Belshazzar, his co-regent (vassal king) in Babylon from 553-539 B.C., while Nabonidus spent most of his time in Palestine and Northern Arabian. The events in Daniel Chapter 5 (i.e., the fall of Babylon) occurred during 539 B.C.

Chapter 5 – Babylon's Final Feast and Fall

Belshazzar's Feast in Honor of the gods of Babylon (Verses 1-4)

1 King Belshazzar ^{Daniel 7:1, 8:1} held a "great banquet" ^{1 Kings 3:15} for a thousand of his noblemen.

The festivity was intended to lift morale, because while the people believed Babylon was impregnable and they had plenty of supplies, at that very time, they were under siege by the Medo-Persian army.

It is easy to confuse Daniel's Babylonian name, Belteshazzar ^{Daniel 1:7} ("may Bel protect the king"), with the name of the Babylonian king, Belshazzar ("Bel, protect the king"), who is described here ^{Chapter 5}.

2-4 While drinking wine, the king (not Nebuchadnezzar's son, but his grandson ^{see note above}) ordered the gold and silver goblets ^{Esther 1:7} that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem in 605 B.C. ^{2 Kings 24:13, Jeremiah 52:19, Daniel 1:2} be brought out for his feast. The king, his nobles, his wives and his concubines committed a great act of sacrilege, because as they drank from the goblets dedicated to God, they praised their pagan gods ^{Judges 16:24}.

There was not a word for grandfather in Aramaic (or in Hebrew). The word translated "father" can refer to any of the previous generations. Other Biblical passages, extra-Biblical documents and context must be used to determine the number of generations meant in the text being considered.

It seems that Belteshazzar intended for the use of the sacred vessels to be a sign of confidence in, but at the same time a call to, their many pagan deities to deliver them from the attacking armies.

The Handwriting on the Wall (Verses 5-9)

5-6 God responded quickly to Belshazzar's blasphemy by creating fingers that wrote a message on a plaster wall in the dimly lit palace near the lampstand ^{Hebrews 9:1-3}. The king watched anxiously and in great terror ^{Daniel 4:5}, with knees knocking and weak legs (supernatural visions from and appearances of God always result in great awe & fear ^{Job 4:12-15, Luke 1:12, 29}).

Daniel 5

7-9 The king did the obvious (as God expected ^{Isaiah 19:3}): he called out the wise men ^{Genesis 41:8} of Babylon ^{Daniel 2:2, 4:6} to tell him what the writing said and what it meant. Belshazzar even offered them a reward ^{Daniel 2:6} which included fine clothes, expensive jewelry and becoming the third highest ruler in Babylon (after Nabonidus and Belshazzar) ^{Genesis 41:41-43, Daniel 2:6,48}. However, the wise men could not even read the writing, let alone interpret it ^{Daniel 2:10-11, 4:7}. This was God's way of embarrassing and shaming the false prophets of Babylon ^{Isaiah 44:24-25}. The king became pale with fear ^{Isaiah 21:3-4} and his nobles confused by the strange events. Belshazzar's fear ^{v.6,9} was for Babylon's fall, but was also a foreboding of the final (End Times) destruction of Babylon, as described by Isaiah ^{Isaiah 13-14}, Jeremiah ^{Jeremiah 50-51} and John ^{Revelation 17-18}.

Daniel Suggested as Interpreter (Verses 10-12)

10-12 Hearing the commotion, the queen (not Belshazzar's wife, but probably his mother or more likely his grandmother) came into the palace, greeted Belshazzar ^{Nehemiah 2:3, Daniel 3:9}, and saw that his countenance showed great alarm. The queen attempted to calm him down by offering a solution to his crisis. She told her grandson to call for Daniel who had great wisdom ^{Ezekiel 28:1-3, Daniel 1:17}, in fact "wisdom like that of the gods" ^{Genesis 41:38, Daniel 4:8,9,18}, and who had shown the ability to interpret such supernatural phenomena ^{Daniel 2:48}.

The queen's apparent first-hand knowledge of specific characteristics of Daniel attributed to him by King Nebuchadnezzar ('spirit of gods', 'insight/intelligence', 'wisdom of gods', and 'ability to interpret supernatural phenomena') gives credibility to the suggestion she was the widow of Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel Called Before King Belshazzar (Verses 13-16)

13-16 King Belshazzar called Daniel and questioned him to be sure he was the right man by asking if he was "one of the exiles" ^{Esther 2:5-6, Ezekiel 1:1, Daniel 2:25}. The king then repeated what the queen told him about Daniel and explained to Daniel that the other advisors could not tell him the meaning of the writing. Belshazzar offered Daniel the same incredible reward (clothes, jewelry, rank) he had earlier made available for reading/interpreting the writing ^{v.7}.

Daniel Rebuked Belshazzar for His Proudful Arrogance (Verses 17-24)

17 Similar to Elisha's refusal to take a gift from Naaman for doing the Lord's work ^{2 Kings 5:15-16}, Daniel told King Belshazzar that he would not accept the gifts. However, Daniel assured the king that he was going to "read the writing" for him and provide the correct interpretation.

18-21 Even though he knew Belshazzar was fully aware of every aspect of the events ^{v.22}, Daniel related the story of King Nebuchadnezzar's life of greatness, pride, humility and redemption ^{Daniel 4}. Daniel started with the king's earthly sovereignty ^{Jeremiah 28:14} (which God provided ^{Daniel 4:17,35} and also promised to his descendants ^{Jeremiah 27:6-7} who would carry on the legacy of humility). However, Nebuchadnezzar lost his "royal authority" ^{Daniel 4:29-31},

Daniel 5

because of his arrogant pride ^{Isaiah 14:13-15}. Daniel completed the story with a quick review of Nebuchadnezzar's demise ^{Daniel 4:33}, his humble testimony of the sovereignty of the Most High God ^{Daniel 4:34-35} and God's gracious restoration of him to his earthly throne ^{Daniel 4:36}.

22 Despite Belshazzar knowing what happened to his grandfather, he had not learned the lesson of humbling himself before the sovereign God. He had the same stubborn pride as Pharaoh had, who even after 7 plagues, still refused to show humility before God ^{Exodus 10:3}.

This type of unwillingness to be humbled before God is not limited to pagan individuals or nations. For example, this was the sin of the Hebrew Nation and the Jews in Judah ^{Jeremiah 44:7-10} that led to God's judgement, enforced by Nebuchadnezzar when he attacked/destroyed Jerusalem ^{Jeremiah 25:1-14}.

23-24 Daniel pointed out to the king that he not only chose to ignore the life-changing events Nebuchadnezzar experienced, Belshazzar (and his wives and concubines ^{Jeremiah 44:9}) shamelessly defied God ^{Jeremiah 50:29} by taking the God-dedicated, Temple goblets to drink wine from as they praised and worshipped the Babylonian pagan gods of created materials (i.e., gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood and stone ^{Psalms 115:2-8, Habakkuk 2:18-19, Revelation 9:20-21}). Daniel concluded his address to Belshazzar by saying he had not given "honor to the God" who holds all life ^{Job 12:10, Acts 17:24-28, Colossians 1:16-17} and all man's ways ^{Job 31:4} in His hand. As a result of his actions, God "sent the hand that wrote the inscription" directed to the king. *Man's hands* had taken (from the Temple in Jerusalem) and misused (by drinking from) *God's goblets*, and in response to these blasphemous acts, *God sent His hand* of judgement.

Daniel Read and Interpreted the Writing (Verses 25-28)

25 Daniel told Belshazzar the reading of the inscription was: *MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPARSIN*.

The NIV1984 has *PARSIN* ^{v.25}, whereas most other translations have *UPARSIN*. The U means "and".

26 Then Daniel explained: *MENE* (meaning 'numbered') indicated God's sovereignty over life. The omnipotent God knew the number ^{Psalms 39:4} and end ^{Lamentations 4:18} of Belshazzar's days. Most scholars believe the repetition of the word *MENE* was apparently for strong emphasis.

27 *TEKEL* (meaning 'weighed') God weighs (judges) each person to see how they measure up to His expectation ^{1 Samuel 2:3}. Belshazzar's 'weight' was "nothing" ^{Psalms 62:9} ("wanting").

28 *PERES* (meaning 'divided') Daniel announced Belshazzar's kingdom would be divided "and given to the Medes and the Persians". The plural form of *PERES* is *PARSIN* ^{v.25}.

Point to ponder: Belshazzar's advisors not being able to interpret the writing is understandable; however, their not being able to "read" the writing is curious. Many ancient Jewish (and Christian) scholars assume the inscription was written purposely in a way the advisors could not understand. The Talmud asserts that the message was written vertically and backward. Others suggest it was written in a code. For example, a common code used by the ancient Jews is called the Atbash cipher, Please forward questions/concerns about these notes to ron price, pricegang@integrity.com, 505-294-4743.

Daniel 5

where the first letter in the 22 letter Hebrew (or Aramaic) alphabet is replaced by the last letter, the second replaced by the second to last, etc - as shown here (using English letters for clarity):

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
↓↑	↓↑	↓↑	↓↑	↓↑	↓↑	↓↑	↓↑	↓↑	↓↑	↓↑	↓↑	↓↑
Z	Y	X	W	V	U	T	S	R	Q	P	O	N

Example: Using the Atbash cipher, the encryption of the word "DANIEL" (in English) is "WZMRVO". Atbash encryptions are actually found in the Bible: the phrase "Leb Kamai" ^{Jeremiah 51:1} is code for the word "Kasdim" (Chaldeans) and "Sheshach" ^{Jeremiah 25:26, 51:41} is an encryption of the word "Babylon". So, because the "wise men" could not even read the writing, but Daniel was able to both read and interpret the writing, many scholars believe he was first able (with God's help) to decode the writing.

Daniel was Rewarded and the Prophecy Fulfilled (Verses 29-31)

29 Even though Daniel had refused the rewards ^{v.17} and the interpretation of the writing spelled the immediate doom of Belshazzar's reign, Daniel was given the gifts anyway ^{Genesis 41:42}.

30-31 However, the judgement of God was still carried out, in that Belshazzar lost his life (probably by the sword ^{Jeremiah 50:35}), and his kingdom was taken over by "Darius the Mede".

There are many theories as to who Darius the Mede was. Perhaps Darius was appointed as the vassal ruler of Babylon by Cyrus. However, the most credible idea seems to be that Darius the Mede and Cyrus II (also known as Cyrus the Great) are one and the same person (see the next two notes).

In his writings, Greek historian Herodotus stated General Ugbara conquered Babylon without a battle.

The Persians diverted the River Euphrates into a canal upriver so that the water level dropped "to the height of the middle of a man's thigh", which thus rendered the flood [moat] defenses useless and enabled the invaders to march through the river bed to enter by night.

The army of Cyrus captured Babylon in October 539 B.C., while he waited with small force a few miles away. After a couple of weeks, Cyrus made his grand entrance. At that time, Daniel presented Cyrus with an ancient scroll of Isaiah containing what amounts to a personal letter from God that addressed Cyrus by name ^{Isaiah 44:27-28, 45:1-5} (Josephus, *Antiquities*, XI, I, 2). Biblical skeptics cannot explain how Isaiah was able to compose historical facts concerning the fall of Babylon, including the Lord proclaiming Cyrus His anointed, because Isaiah died more than 150 years before the events occurred.

Following his defeat of Babylon and his reading the Isaiah scroll, the life of Cyrus attested to the positive effect of God's call on his life. For example, soon after establishing the Medo-Persian Empire, Cyrus issued a proclamation ^{Ezra 1:1-4} stating that "The Lord ... has appointed me to build a temple for him in Jerusalem...". To help make that happen, Cyrus' proclamation also freed any of the Jewish captives who wanted to return to build the temple and he commanded Babylonians to provide "freewill offerings" for the temple. In addition, Cyrus returned all "5,400 articles of gold and silver" taken from the temple by King Nebuchadnezzar almost 70 years earlier ^{Ezra 1:7-11}.

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