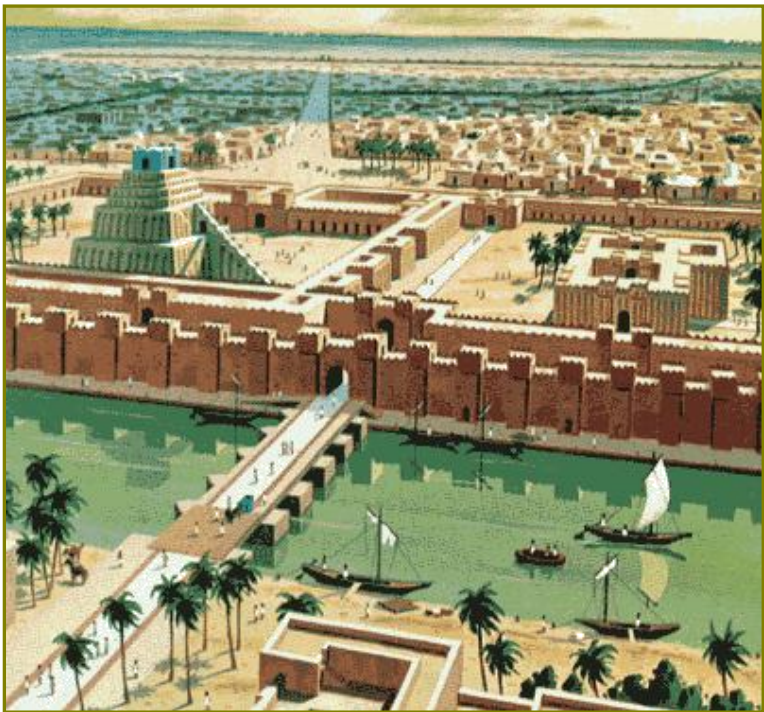


# Daniel Chapter 5

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## Introduction:

1. Daniel's previous episodes have been about Nebuchadnezzar, the empire builder whom God had cut down to size.
2. This story is about Belshazzar, a local king. The Lord simply terminated him. **Belshazzar** may have been a name assigned to indicate his relationship with the idol gods, much like that of Daniel, who was known in Nebuchadnezzar's court as **Belteshazzar** in 1:7.
3. This king was the son of Nabonidus. Chapter 5 opens with Belshazzar, the king of the city of Babylon (not the empire) giving a party while the armies of the Medes and the Persians were camped outside of town trying to penetrate its defenses. Belshazzar should have been leading his troops, not surfeiting.



4. The brick wall of Babylon was 10 miles long, 300 feet high, 25 feet thick with another wall 75 feet behind the first wall, and the wall extended 35 feet below the ground.
5. There were two hundred fifty towers that provided excellent look-out points and combat stations for the skilled Babylonian archers.
6. A wide and deep moat encircled the city. The Euphrates River also flowed through the middle of the city. There was the great Tower (Ziggurat) and 53 temples including the Great Temple of Marduk. One hundred eighty altars to Ishtar, golden image of Baal and the Golden Table (both weighing over 50,000 lbs of solid gold.) Two golden lions, and a solid gold human figure (18 feet high).

**(5:1.) Many years later King Belshazzar gave a great feast for 1,000 of his nobles, and he drank wine with them. (2.) While Belshazzar was drinking the wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver cups that his predecessor, Nebuchadnezzar, had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem. He wanted to drink from them with his nobles, his wives, and his concubines.**

- **Belshazzar** felt safe inside the great walls of Babylon. He believed that getting over these walls was impossible.
- The food and drinks were “on the house.” To show his contempt for the God of Israel, the vessels from the **Temple in Jerusalem** were brought in as table service.
- **Barnes** observes:
  - “In his sober moments it would seem probable that he would have respected the vessels consecrated to the service of religion, and would not have treated them with dishonor by introducing them for purposes of revelry.”
- A **concubine** was a mistress with legal standing but without inheritance rights. Her children were not included in the husband’s will unless they had been adopted by the wife in the family. It is likely the feast was originally given for the **nobles**,

but when the alcohol had flowed for a while, the **king's** women were also brought in.

- Most translations call **Nebuchadnezzar Belshazzar's** father in verse 2, but the word *father* is used very loosely and we agree with the translators in simply using **predecessor** to avoid extensive discussion about the relationship.

**(3.) So they brought these gold cups taken from the Temple, the house of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. (4.) While they drank from them they praised their idols made of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.**

- While Nebuchadnezzar was guilty of *pride*, this man was guilty of *insolence to God*. They had a praise service for the **idols** of their own making. Perhaps they toasted the dumb deities and then drank the wine to prove their devotion.



“The king was on his throne,  
 The satraps filled the hall,  
 A thousand bright lamps shone  
 At that high festival:  
 A thousand cups of gold,  
 In Judah deemed divine,  
 Jehovah's vessels hold  
 The godless heathen's wine.”

-- Bryon

**(5.) Suddenly, they saw the fingers of a human hand writing on the plaster wall of the king's palace, near the lampstand. The king himself saw the hand as it wrote, (6.) and his face turned**

**pale with fright. His knees knocked together in fear and his legs gave way beneath him.**

- God's move came quickly. Evidently Belshazzar was sitting on a raised platform looking out at his subjects and the wall used for writing was behind the drunks.
- **Albert Barnes** writes:  
 Not a man writing; not even an arm, but fingers that seemed to move themselves. They appeared to come forth from the walls, and were seen before they began to write. It was this that made it so impressive and alarming. It could not be supposed that it was the work of man, or that it was devised by man for the purpose of producing consternation. It was perfectly manifest to all who were there that this was the work of some one superior to man . . . .
- Belshazzar turned **pale**. The blood left his **face**. He realized that Someone was present that he could not control.

**(7.) The king shouted for the enchanters, astrologers, and fortune-tellers to be brought before him. He said to these wise men of Babylon, "Whoever can read this writing and tell me what it means will be dressed in purple robes of royal honor and will have a gold chain placed around his neck. He will become the third highest ruler in the kingdom!"**

- The official advisers were still on the job, collecting their pay and failing all significant tests.
- Terror is a horrendous experience and this king was **shouting**. He had less poise than normally because of the wine.
- The playboy king made unfulfillable promises for the **wise man** who could explain the **writings**.
- A successful interpreter was offered the rank of third ruler, showing that Belshazzar was second ruler. Someone else, probably Nabonidus, was top man in the empire. Belshazzar just ruled in the city of Babylon.

**(8.) But when all the king's wise men had come in, none of them could read the writing or tell him what it meant. (9.) So the king grew even more alarmed, and his face turned pale. His nobles, too, were shaken.**

- As any believing reader knows, the coy counselors would fail. The party wasn't fun any longer.

“The monarch saw and shook,  
 And bade no more rejoice:  
 All bloodless waxed his look,  
 And tremulous his voice:  
 ‘Let the men of lore appear,  
 The wisest of the earth,  
 And expound these words of fear,  
 Which mar our royal mirth.’ ”

From *In and Around the Book of Daniel* by Charles Boutflower



- It is clear that one guest came uninvited and he was raining on the parade. This famous painting by the Dutch artist Rembrandt in 1635 depicts Belshazzar at the moment the fingers write. See

the shock on his face. While his bewildered eyes are fixed on the sinister glowing text, his left arm rises to protect himself, as if he faces a physical rather than a spiritual attack.

His costume - the gold and silver threads, the chains, the turban with its little crown top - is one of Rembrandt's most luxurious concoctions of dress.

Belshazzar sends a vessel of wine flying with his right arm as he involuntarily jerks backwards. The woman to the right, lowering her body to shield herself behind his massive arm, lets the pitcher of wine spill like a waterfall. The man and woman on the far side of the table express almost as much horror as the king. Only the woman at the left seems indifferent.

**(10.) But when the queen mother heard what was happening, she hurried to the banquet hall. She said to Belshazzar, "Long live the king! Don't be so pale and frightened. (11.) There is a man in your kingdom who has within him the spirit of the holy gods. During Nebuchadnezzar's reign, this man was found to have insight, understanding, and wisdom like that of the gods. Your predecessor, the king -- your predecessor King Nebuchadnezzar -- made him chief over all the magicians, enchanters, astrologers, and fortune-tellers of Babylon. (12.) This man Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar, has exceptional ability and is filled with divine knowledge and understanding. He can interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means."**

- The **queen mother** was not a wife (vs. 2) of **Belshazzar**. She may have once been the wife of **Nebuchadnezzar** because she had a memory of **Daniel**.
- **Daniel** had not been prominent, or even active, in government for a while. Even this polytheistic **queen mother** identified the holiness of God when compared with the wickedness of the idols (vs. 11).



- This man **Daniel** had once served as the chief of the advisers to **Nebuchadnezzar**. **Daniel** has the connections and qualifications to interpret this **writing** (vs. 12).
- The **queen** was quite directive toward **Belshazzar** and fully convinced that **Daniel** could handle the interpretation (vs. 12).

**(13.) So Daniel was brought in before the king. The king asked him, "Are you Daniel, one of the exiles brought from Judah by my predecessor, King Nebuchadnezzar? (14.) I have heard that you have the spirit of the gods within you and that you are filled with insight, understanding, and wisdom. (15.) My wise men and enchanters have tried to read the words on the wall and tell me their meaning, but they cannot do it. (16.) I am told that you can give interpretations and solve difficult problems. If you can read these words and tell me their meaning, you will be clothed in purple robes of royal honor, and you will have a gold chain placed around your neck. You will become the third highest ruler in the kingdom."**

- **Daniel** was first asked his identity. This is standard procedure still for speaking in court or legislature.
- Belshazzar knew something of **Daniel's** religious heritage and that he was from **Judah**. He may have known something about the God he served as well.
- Belshazzar repeats the exact words of the queen, but omits one word: holy. He did not want to deal with a God who is set apart from the idols.
- Since all of his usual advisers had failed, the king was now willing to reward this Hebrew if he could tell him the interpretation of the words on the wall.

**(17.) Daniel answered the king, "Keep your gifts or give them to someone else, but I will tell you what the writing means. (18.) Your Majesty, the Most High God gave sovereignty, majesty, glory, and honor to your predecessor, Nebuchadnezzar. (19.) He made him so great that people of all races and nations and languages trembled before him in fear. He killed those he wanted to kill**

and spared those he wanted to spare. He honored those he wanted to honor and disgraced those he wanted to disgrace. (20.) But when his heart and mind were puffed up with arrogance, he was brought down from his royal throne and stripped of his glory. (21.) He was driven from human society. He was given the mind of a wild animal, and he lived among the wild donkeys. He ate grass like a cow, and he was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he learned that the Most High God rules over the kingdoms of the world and appoints anyone He desires to rule over them. (22.) "You are his successor, O Belshazzar, and you knew all this, yet you have not humbled yourself.

- Even though the **king's** minutes on earth were drawing to an end, **Daniel** still spoke honorably to the **king**.
- **Belshazzar** now received his lesson in political science and history. It was really just a review according to verse 22.
- **Nebuchadnezzar's** case is paralleled to **Belshazzar's** (vs. 18-22).

(23.) For you have proudly defied the Lord of heaven and have had these cups from His Temple brought before you. You and your nobles and your wives and concubines have been drinking wine from them while praising gods of silver, gold, bronze, iron, wood, and stone -- gods that neither see nor hear nor know anything at all. But you have not honored the God who gives you the breath of life and controls your destiny! (24.) So God has sent this hand to write this message.

- The highest evidence of rebellion was profaning the sacred vessels from the **Temple** in Jerusalem. (Verse 23). The vessels created to be used in the worship of the Lord of Heaven were used to praise the gods of earth.
- **Belshazzar** had not glorified God even though God had supplied his very breath.
- Now comes the judgment event. Daniel knew what the **hand** wrote even if it was no longer present.



**(25.) "This is the message that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, and PARSIN. (26.) This is what these words mean: Mene means 'numbered' -- God has numbered the days of your reign and has brought it to an end.**

- The words were in Aramaic, the language of commerce, instead of the the cuneiform language of Babylon.
- **MENE** is the past participle of Menah and here means *to fix the limit of*. **Mene** (vs. 26) means "your time is up" to Belshazzar.
- **TEKEL** is from an Aramaic root meaning *to weigh*.
- **PARSIN**, a reference to the Persians who are outside of the gates of Babylon as Daniel spoke.

**(27.) Tekel means 'weighed' -- you have been weighed on the balances and have not measured up. (28.) Parsin means 'divided' -- your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and Persians."**

- **Tekel** means that Belshazzar is a very light-weight ruler on God's moral scales.
- **Charles Boutflower** expresses the words on the wall as: NUMBERED NUMBERED WEIGHED and DIVIDED. The repetition of *numbered* expresses its certainty, *weighed* expresses the reason for what is coming and *divided* shows that the kingdom of Babylon is doomed to being dissolved, which it was that very night.

**(29.) Then at Belshazzar's command, Daniel was dressed in purple robes, a gold chain was hung around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom.**

- **Purple** has long been the color designating royalty.
- All of this transpired that same evening, because **Belshazzar** didn't make it through the night (vs. 30).

**(30.) That very night Belshazzar, the Babylonian king, was killed. (31.) And Darius the Mede took over the kingdom at the age of sixty-two.**

- Within minutes, the play-boy king was killed.
- Jeremiah 51 reads:

**Sharpen the arrows! Lift up the shields! For the LORD has inspired the kings of the Medes to march against Babylon and destroy her. This is His vengeance against those who desecrated His Temple. Raise the battle flag against Babylon! Reinforce the guard and station the watchmen. Prepare an ambush, for the LORD will fulfill all His plans against Babylon. You are a city by a great river, a great center of commerce, but your end has come. The thread of your life is cut.** (Jeremiah 51:11-13 NLT)

- Very soon, a new **62-year-old king** took over Babylon and its environs. Verse (31).

**Destroying armies come against Babylon. Her mighty men are captured, and their weapons break in their hands. For the LORD is a God who gives just punishment; He always repays in full. I will make her officials and wise men drunk, along with her captains, officers, and warriors. They will fall asleep and never wake up again!"** says the King, whose name is the **LORD of Heaven's Armies.** (Jeremiah 51:56-57 NLT)

What happened to Babylon? The stories vary some. While Belshazzar was having his drinking party, the armies of the Medes and the Persians were trying to get inside. Two from the Babylonian troops defected and showed the engineers how to take the city. The river was deflected around the metropolis



(notice the blue moat in the green area of the drawing) so the river bed would be available for troop entry. The river was walled, too, but defectors let down the bridge across the river, making an access route into the city. There were classes of people that wanted to rid the city of Babylonian rule and this was their opportunity.

- Cyrus, the Persian king, destroyed the Babylonian Empire in 538 B.C. In the same year he issued a decree permitting the Jews to return to their native land. As many as wished to could return, and the temple could be rebuilt, partially financed by the royal

treasury. The temple vessels also were returned. The number of those returning was 49,697 led by Zerubbabel.

**"This is what King Cyrus of Persia says: "The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth. He has appointed me to build Him a Temple at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Any of you who are the LORD's people may go there for this task. And may the LORD your God be with you!"**

(2 Chronicles 36:23 NLT)

In 539 B.C., a year after Cyrus had beaten the army of Nabonidus, the Babylonian *national* king, the occupation of Babylon by the Persians settled the fate of the last great empire of Mesopotamia. The time had come of which it was said:

**This is what the LORD says: "You will be in Babylon for seventy years. But then I will come and do for you all the good things I have promised, and I will bring you home again." (Jeremiah 29:10 NLT)**