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**C1231 – September 19, 2012 – Daniel 5:1-31**  
**Handwriting On The Wall**

Tonight we come to Daniel 5 and Nebuchadnezzar is no longer the king. Belshazzar is the king and by the end of the chapter he's no longer the king but a kingdom shift has occurred and Darius the Mede is king. So a lot of movement tonight and I want to introduce it by pointing out that we are through with Nebuchadnezzar. Dan 1-4 dealt with events during the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar and was organized sequentially, chapter 1 occurred in 605BC, chapter 2 in 603BC, chapter 3 probably occurred in 594/593BC and chapter 4 is the most uncertain, but it was probably in the 570'sBC when Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom was solidified and flourishing. This man was the greatest Gentile king in the history of the world. He reigned for 43 years, dying in 562BC and Daniel was high in his administration. After him a series of much weaker kings came to rule Babylon. Evil-Merodach ruled from 562-560BC, only two years and he was killed, then came Neriglissar from 560-556BC, he was a son-in-law of Nebuchadnezzar who died of natural causes, then Labashi-Marduk came to the throne in 556BC, he was a grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, a young boy of nine years old when he came to the throne and he was conspired against and beaten to death within a few months of taking the throne. Then came Nabonidus and he is going to rule from 555-539BC. And we have the strange figure, Belshazzar, the Book of Daniel presents him as co-rex with Nabonidus, his father, from the years 553-539BC.

## Kings and Kingdoms Daniel Continued Under

Kingdom	King	Regal Years
Babylon	Nebuchadnezzar	605-562BC
Babylon	Evil-Merodach	562-560BC
Babylon	Neriglissar	560-556BC
Babylon	Labashi-Marduk	556BC (3 or 9 months??)
Babylon	Nabonidus/co-rex Belshazzar	555-539/553-539BC
Media-Persia	Darius the Mede	539-537BC
Media-Persia	Cyrus the Persian	536-530BC

Chart 5: The two kingdoms and seven governments that Daniel continued under.

The events in Dan 5 occur in the last regal year of both Nabonidus and Belshazzar, a fateful night in the year 539BC when an enigmatic hand wrote a message on the wall.<sup>1</sup> The 'handwriting is on the wall' they say, and as we'll see, it was. So Dan 5 is still sequential and Dan 6, the lions den will also be sequential. But Dan 7 is not sequential, it's going to take us back to events that occurred before Dan 5. So understand that what we have not studied yet in Dan 7 was known to Belshazzar and this deals with the depiction of the four Gentile kingdoms again. We saw the first depiction in the four metal statue of Dan 2 where Babylon was symbolized by the head of gold and would be succeeded by Medo-Persia symbolized by the breast and arms of silver. That chapter depicts the course of Gentile kingdoms from the human stand point, from the view point that man is building a glorious kingdom. Dan 7 depicts the same course of Gentile kingdoms but from the divine view point, from the view point that man is building a destructive, oppressive kingdom of man that is not fit for man. Rather than four metals there are four beasts. Babylon is depicted as a lion with wings of an eagle, whose wings are plucked and the lion is picked up and made to stand on two feet like a man and it was

given a human mind. Medo Persia is depicted as succeeding this kingdom, it is another beast, resembling a bear raised up on one side and having three ribs in its mouth.

What we are going to see tonight, the fulfillment of the prophecy of Babylon's fall and the rise of Medo-Persia, was predicted in both Dan 2 and 7 prior to its occurrence, prior to 539. And so both these chapters were already revealed. We have only studied Dan 2 but I've given you a few details of Dan 7 in order to prepare you for Dan 5.

Now I want to try to connect Dan 5 to Dan 4 because I think there's a connection. Most commentators don't point out much of a connection. They point out that there is a chiastic connection in that the theme of Dan 4 and 5 is parallel, the arrogance of Gentile rulers. And that much is true but I think there are other connections and so I'll try to draw those out for you. Dan 4 was Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the Great Tree. Nebuchadnezzar, as he was lying on his bed had a dream of a Great Tree and this alarmed him because he sensed that what he saw and heard had to do with him and his kingdom, something dreadful was going to happen. What he saw was a tree growing up, growing larger and larger; lifting up into the sky and its branches reaching out to what was then the inhabited earth. The tree produced an abundance of fruit and the fruit fed the beasts that were under it and the birds that dwelt in it. So it was a source that supplied the needs of all who were associated with the tree. And then an angelic being came and chopped down the tree, but the tree didn't fall as a unit, it wasn't just one cut, it was a series of cuts that removed the branches from the main trunk. So the birds that were in the branches flew away; the beasts that were under its shade ran away because there was a disruption of the tree's ability to provide their needs. And all that was left was a stump in the ground and the angel came and put a band of bronze around it signifying the tree would not be totally destroyed. In the meantime the mind of the tree would be changed from that of a man into that of a beast and would roam around eating grass and sleeping outside for seven periods of time. This is what alarmed Nebuchadnezzar; the idea that the tree had the mind of a man but was given the mind of a beast and the kingdom went into disarray. I think Nebuchadnezzar had a pretty good idea what the dream signified. And Daniel confirmed that he was the tree and his kingdom grew great like the tree, he conquered many kingdoms and brought them under his dominion

and he was providing all the needs of these kingdoms but suddenly his kingdom was disrupted because the leader of the kingdom would go into a frightening condition, a condition known in modern medical terms as therianthropy, where a person thinks they are an animal and they go around acting like an animal, eating grass and walking around on all fours. And during that time the kingdoms that he had conquered would break out in civil war trying to regain their freedom.

Now Daniel didn't like that this was scheduled to happen to Nebuchadnezzar but he had grown too big for his britches, he was a very arrogant man and as his kingdom grew his arrogance grew with him. And as we all know the Scripture, pride cometh before a fall. So this therianthropy was designed to teach Nebuchadnezzar theology, the theology that God is the ruler over mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes, that human beings do not build their kingdoms by their own power, might and majesty, but they are given to them by God. So God must be honored and given thanks.

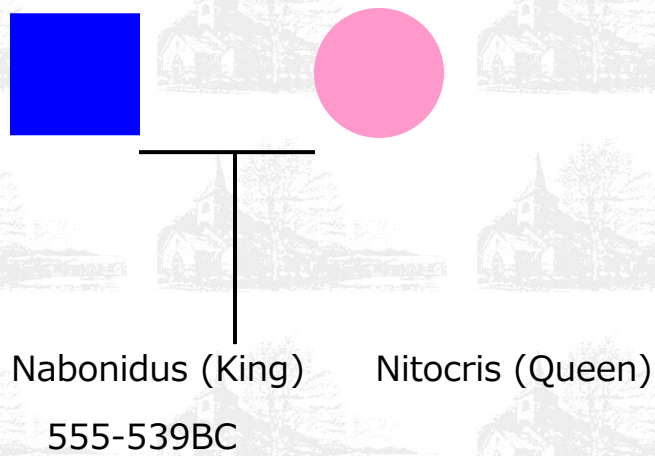
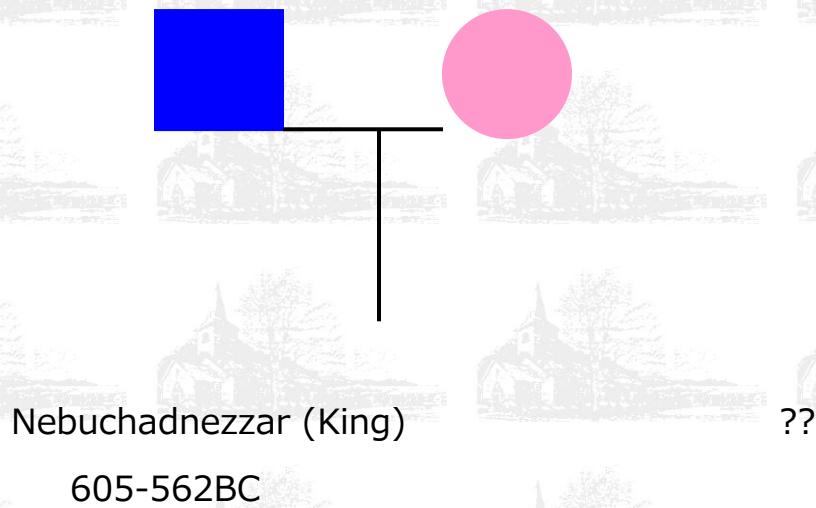
Nebuchadnezzar was taught this theology and he went around on all fours, eating grass, his hair growing out like eagles feathers, his nails like bird claws until he raised his eyes toward heaven and when he did that I take it this man was believing and his reason returned to him, his splendor was restored to him, his nobles started seeking him out again and his kingdom was restored. When we humble ourselves God exalts us. So by the end of Dan 4 Nebuchadnezzar had learned the theology, his pride was crushed and he humbled himself, recognizing that God's dominion is an everlasting dominion and God's kingdom endures from generation to generation, that God is calling the shots in history, not man.

The connection with Dan 5 is Nebuchadnezzar's grandson, Belshazzar, and whether he had learned this theology from his grandfather. Did this truth which got lodged up at the high level it did, in King Nebuchadnezzar, and written as a formal decree deposited in the royal records of Babylon, did it trickle down to his children and grandchildren? How did the truth of God's dominion fare once it got into this family? Did they remain humble or did they turn back to arrogance?

Now to follow this question I want to introduce the three main players in Dan 5. Daniel you already know, and all I want to add about Daniel in this chapter is that since it's 539BC he's an old man now; he's in his early 80's and he wasn't in the top echelons of governmental administration anymore. He enjoyed that high rank under Nebuchadnezzar, but it's been almost 25 years and they've had a whole series of kings. Daniel is not a high ranking official anymore, it's unclear if he's even in the government anymore. He's certainly not personally known by the king, but he lives in Babylon and he may be serving in a lower governmental position, but he's certainly not in a position of influence like he was 25 years before.

The second person I want to introduce you to is the queen or probably more properly, the queen mother. You're going to meet her in verse 10. She was a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar named Nitocris and I've given you a possible family tree to help you keep track of the relationships.

## Relationships of Daniel 5



She apparently is not the wife of Belshazzar but the queen mother of Belshazzar because in verse 2 all of Belshazzar's wives were present for the great feast but the queen doesn't come in until later. So I take it she's his

mother and wife of the other co-king, Nabonidus. In any case she's evidently someone of great importance in the kingdom because she waltzes in like she owns the place and speaks to the king in a commanding way. She also seems to be older from the fact that she is very familiar with what happened during Nebuchadnezzar's reign, she did personally know Daniel, she knew what he had done for her father in interpreting the dreams and she knew both of his names. Further I take it from some of the things she says that she is a believer, that she followed in the faith of her father, Nebuchadnezzar. And so when the queen is mentioned in this passage it's a reference to the queen mother, she was Belshazzar's mother, a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar which gave Belshazzar his royal blood and she was married to the co-king at the time, Nabonidus.

The third person we meet in this chapter is Belshazzar himself and he's the most troubling figure in the Book of Daniel because for a long time there was no extrabiblical evidence of this man even existing. The liberals used this for many, many decades, to criticize Daniel because if Daniel is truly prophesying these things from the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC then their anti-supernaturalist philosophy must be rejected. However when archaeologists discovered the Nabonidus cylinder Belshazzar's name was found. And to put a long story to rest it is not inconceivable at all that Belshazzar was co-rex with his father Nabonidus.

Now we're going to move into Dan 5, the Handwriting on the Wall, and if I'm not mistaken that expression of 'imminent doom' that we still use in our own day, came from God himself who wrote MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN on the plaster walls of the great banquet hall of Belshazzar. And so this expression has come down to our own time and people use it to express the certainty of the future. For example with the economic situation in the US, you can see the handwriting on the wall, it's just a matter of time, the future is determined. Well, what was certain was that Babylon was coming to an end as a kingdom and the rise of a new kingdom, Medo-Persia, was on the brink.

So the chapter starts off with the kingdom of gold, it ends with the kingdom of silver. Beginning in verse 1, **Belshazzar the king held a great feast for a thousand of his nobles**, the situation was that Belshazzar lived and ruled from Babylon, his father Nabonidus was co-rex but he lived in the city



of Teima and only came to Babylon occasionally for official governmental matters. As of verse 1 it's apparent he was not in the city. However, secular history reports that he had recently come to the city and set out from Babylon with his armies to fight off the Medes and the Persians. Darius the Mede<sup>ii</sup> and Cyrus the Persian had allied to defeat Babylon. Nabonidus and his armies were routed by Cyrus and he took flight to Borsippa and shut himself up. So Nabonidus is not in the picture and we don't know his spiritual status, but Belshazzar was in the city of Babylon holding a great feast and Darius and his armies were just outside, surrounding the city.

The city of Babylon is reported by Herodotus, probably in exaggerated terms, but to have been a fantastic fortress city, it was double walled with a moat in between, the outer walls he says were 87 feet thick, 350 feet tall and four chariots in breadth, with occasional towers reaching another 100 feet in the air. The Euphrates River flowed into the city through arched gateways as a water source. And with these resources and defenses you get an idea of why Belshazzar was holding **a great feast for a thousand of his nobles** with Darius and his armies right outside. He's arrogant and he's sending a message to Darius that we are untouchable, we are housed within an impenetrable fortress, so secure are we within our fortress city that we're having a blast inside. So it's a grand display, ultimately, of a false sense of security arising from arrogance. That's the key characteristic of Gentiles rulers, they always place their trust in their own devices, whether it be a fortress city or their military or their geographical position or hidden under the rocks of the earth, anywhere but in God. They wouldn't want to trust Him, they always trust their own devices.

Now you notice there in verse 1 he is **drinking wine in the presence of the thousand**. The scene is the king is in the pre-eminent position, (they've discovered in Babylon a large room with a single niche in the wall and it may be the very room), he is seated on an elevated platform in this niche in the wall and the majority of the torches are burning in his presence so he can be seen by the thousand and what's he doing? He's getting drunk on wine. The Babylonians were infatuated with wine and wine makes a man haughty, it makes a man arrogant, it makes a man overconfident in his abilities.<sup>iii</sup> So understand what happens in these verses is happening because the wine is doing the talking. So now the arrogance is going to come out.



Verse 2, **When Belshazzar tasted the wine**, meaning it had taken hold of him, not that he taken the first sip but when the wine had gotten a hold of him look what he does. **He gave orders to bring the gold and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar his father<sup>iv</sup> had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them.** So now he's done it, his arrogance has crossed the line just as his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar's had done years before. Only this time it's going to be a different ending. The vessels here were taken from the temple, remember how those got down to Babylon? **Nebuchadnezzar his father** had taken them in 605BC when, on his military campaign after the Battle of Carchemish, he got word that his father had died so he turned back to go receive the crown but before he went back he stopped at Jerusalem. He had heard the reports of the contents of the temple from back in Hezekiah's day and the temptation was too great, so he stopped, took some of the vessels from the Temple of God along with some of the royal family and nobles including Daniel and his friends. Now that incident if you recall Nebuchadnezzar interpreted as a demonstration that his gods were superior to Israel's God. Nebuchadnezzar placed those vessels in the house of one of his gods but I imagine that when he learned better in Dan 4 he removed them, they've been kept somewhere safe, and now for the first time they're being taken out for use.

Verse 3, **Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God which was in Jerusalem; and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them**  
**4They drank the wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.** So they're praising the gods of Babylon with the vessels of God, and they're all drunk and toasting to these pagan gods. We have a Gentile king making a very strong statement that the gods of Babylon are superior to the God of Israel. This isn't just grabbing a few nice glasses; this is a deliberate attack on the God of Israel. This man is rebellious toward one God in particular, the God of Israel and while you may not see it clearly yet, later in the passage you'll see it very clearly, this man hates the God of the Jews.

Now don't be surprised when Gentile kings get arrogant and hate the God of the Jews. It's part and parcel of Satan's program. Satan is the ruler of this world and the prince of the power of the air and he hates God and the Jews

more than anybody. And the reason he hates the Jews more than anybody is because God made promises to the Jews and those promises involve the seed, the seed that would come and save the world and overturn Satan's program. So Satan is always stirring up pagan Gentile rulers to hate the Jews and the God of the Jews. So that's what we have here with the taking of the vessels, a deliberate attack on God, a purposeful aggression against the Most High God.

Now I don't know about you but that's not what I think you'd want to do with Darius and his armies outside the city walls. But that's what he's doing. And the reason he's doing this type of thing is because arrogance always oversteps its bounds. Arrogance gives you such a distorted view of reality. It's self-exaltation is what it is, it's an over evaluation of self and the very fact he's having this great feast and getting drunk with all his top officials and his wives and concubines is because he's got an over-evaluation of himself and his kingdom. So now with the security of his fortress city and the security of his gods he's making this aggressive move against the God of Israel.

And verse 5, God shuts him down in one moment. **Suddenly the fingers of a man's hand emerged and began writing opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, and the king saw the back of the hand that did the writing.** Now what happened exactly is the fingers of a man's hand emerged, not the hand, the hand of a man wasn't observed, it was just the fingers of a man's hand and the fingers were pressing down into the plaster wall like you would in wet concrete and leaving a message and it was right near the king, where the torches were burning the brightest, so this is out in the open, everyone sees this.

And in verse 6 you have about as graphic a picture of terror, fear, as you will find anywhere in literature. **Then the king's face grew pale and his thoughts alarmed him, and his hip joints went slack and his knees began knocking together.** Now I dare say his entire worldview was shattered right there. This man who was drunk is now sober. He can barely stand up. He knows exactly who is talking to him. I always find it interesting when the pagan argues that God can't speak to us, God is such a blubbering fool, He's so inept that He can't communicate to His own creatures. And then you see a scene like this when He does talk to one of His creatures and the creature is drunk and do you see God having a problem getting through? God

has no problem communicating with us, we have a problem responding appropriately to Him, we don't like to give thanks for all He's given.

Here's a man like all Gentile rulers, a man who hasn't given thanks to God for his kingdom, acting as if I built my kingdom, I solidified my kingdom, I administer my kingdom. Baloney. So in verse 7 the king is screaming for the wise men to come in, literally screaming for them, the same procedure all the kings of Babylon follow, bring in the wise men, standard operating procedure, it's in all the pagan manuals, these guys can explain enigmas, they've got the credentials. **The king called aloud to bring in the conjurers, the Chaldeans and the diviners. The king spoke and said to the wise men of Babylon, "Any man who can read this inscription and explain its interpretation to me shall be clothed with purple and have a necklace of gold around his neck, and have authority as third ruler in the kingdom."** **third** because he and his father Nabonidus were the first two, which is another evidence of a co-rex going on at the time. So he offers this reward and you can see from this he's no where near as strong a ruler as his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar dealt in rewards but he also dealt in punishments, I'll have you torn limb from limb! But Belshazzar is much weaker and I just point it out to show you the kingdom was nothing like it was when Nebuchadnezzar ruled.

So here we are again with the wise men, the men who supposedly had access to the gods, they're summoned and in verse 8 they couldn't do a thing, what's new? It makes you wonder how these characters could ever hold their professions when time after time they draw blanks.

Verse 9, **Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, his face grew even paler, and his nobles were perplexed.** So we have a situation and God is intensifying the situation. One of the worst things to a pagan is not being able to access information, having a mystery out there that no one can solve, it's an unknown and chaos starts to reign in the heart. They don't know the One who controls the future. From their point of view it's all chance and if chance is ultimate then the future is completely up in the air, anything could happen and that's a very scary thought. So he's even more scared now and his nobles are **perplexed**. How can this be, our own wise men can't explain this?

But then verse 10, **The queen entered the banquet hall.** Now remember, this is not Belshazzar's wife because all his wives were already in the banquet hall, verse 2, so this must be the queen mother, Nitocris, who was actually his mother and the wife of his father, Nabonidus who had already been routed by Cyrus. And you can tell she's powerful because she just walks into the room, no problem, and she says, "**O king, live forever!**" Standard greeting. **Do not let your thoughts alarm you or your face be pale.** **11 There is a man in your kingdom in whom is a spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of your father, illumination, insight and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods were found in him.** Now the first thing you can tell is that this lady knows her history, she lived this history and she's filling him in on the details of this history or at least reminding him of the history, he apparently did know some of this, he had a few history courses. **And King Nebuchadnezzar, your father, your father the king, appointed him chief of the magicians, conjurers, Chaldeans and diviners.** She had been taught by her father about the dream in Dan 2, the four metal statue and she'd been taught the interpretation of the dream, the course of Gentile history was all mapped out by Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar was impressed by that so he put Daniel over this entire class of wise men that always draw blanks.

He did this because verse 12, **an extraordinary spirit, knowledge and insight, interpretation of dreams, explanations of enigmas and solving of difficult problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belshazzar.** But notice she's not calling him **Belshazzar**. She knows the name but by what name is she referring to him? **Daniel**. She says, **Let Daniel now be summoned and he will declare the interpretation.** Now I think that's an indication that this woman was a believer like her father Nebuchadnezzar, otherwise she would have expressed her loyalty to the Babylonian gods by referring to him as **Belshazzar**. So I think she was loyal to the God of Daniel. We can reconstruct the scenario. When Nitocris was a little girl she probably saw what happened to her father when he was struck with therianthropy and went around on all fours eating grass like an animal. And that had to be a very powerful influence on a little girl, especially when God restored his reason and splendor and he was able to explain to her later that he was so arrogant and God had to teach him some theology. God had to shatter his pride and that's why he went around on all fours, but when he looked up to heaven he had learned the lesson, God was

the one whose dominion is an everlasting dominion and God's kingdom is the kingdom that endures from generation to generation. And I think this girl got the picture and I think she believed. So you have the transmission of truth from one generation to the second generation. The only question is, what about the third generation? What about Belshazzar?

One of the things you are having to watch here, one of the terrible things, is this breakdown in the family. There's been a failure to take the truths of God and pass them on to the third generation. It was passed from the first generation to the second, Nebuchadnezzar taught these things to his daughter Nitocris, she received them, then comes Belshazzar and I'm sure she and her husband taught them to this boy but he rejected him. What's going to be interesting is to find out who's fault it is. Always this question looms, does a child turn out the way he turns out because of the parents or because of himself? Who's to blame? I hope to answer that question tonight. It's obvious there's been a failure somewhere? Belshazzar is as arrogant as you could possibly be. He's taken the vessels out of the house of God and is drinking wine out of them and praising the pagan gods of gold, silver, bronze, wood and stone.

Let's see what happens. Verse 13, and apparently Daniel wasn't over this school of wise men anymore, we don't know what transpired, but the king doesn't seem to know him personally. **Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king spoke and said to Daniel, "Are you that Daniel who is one of the exiles from Judah, whom my father the king brought from Judah?"** He asks the question and the question reveals that he did know about Daniel because he asks are you that Daniel who is one of the exiles from Judah? The queen mother didn't say that in her history lesson. So he did know of him from his history lessons and this means that at least he knew at this point that the very vessels he and his nobles were drinking wine from were from the house of Daniel's God.

Verse 14, **Now I have heard about you that a spirit of the gods is in you, and that illumination, insight, and extraordinary wisdom have been found in you.** Now you can just hear Daniel, yeah, yeah, I've heard all this before, I'm not impressed, and don't be impressed with me, but be impressed with the God who made this known to me, I didn't do anything. Verse 15, **"Just now the wise men and the conjurers were brought in**

**before me that they might read this inscription and make its interpretation known to me, but they could not declare the interpretation of the message.”** Well surprise, surprise, I’m sure Daniel was real surprised at their failure. I think, after looking at this for the third time, this failure among the wise men of Babylon, that God is telling us something, namely, that God reveals himself verbally through the Jews and only the Jews. You can have all the wise men you want but the only way to know what God thinks is to look at the inspired writings that come through the Jews.

Verse 16, **“But I personally have heard about you, that you are able to give interpretations and solve difficult problems. Now if you are able to read the inscription and make its interpretation known to me, you will be clothed with purple and wear a necklace of gold around your neck, and you will have authority as the third ruler in the kingdom.”**

So he repeats his reward, he’s going to make him third in the kingdom, third behind himself and his father Nabonidus, give him a big gold necklace and a purple robe, signifying royalty. Daniel would be royalty. And it’s statements like these that make me think he was no longer holding a high office in the administration of Babylon at this time, he may have held an office of some lower status, but it was not like it was in the days of King Nebuchadnezzar. Somewhere along the way he’d lost his rank.

Verse 17, **Then Daniel answered and said before the king, “Keep your gifts for yourself or give your rewards to someone else;”** You know he’s an old guy, what does an old guy need all this stuff for? He doesn’t really want it. He’s not doing it for the accolade. He’s a humble man. **However, I will read the inscription to the king and make the interpretation known to him.”** He’s not in it for the money or the power.

Now in verse 18 he’s going to review his grandfather’s kingdom, he’s going to give a little history lesson of his own, he’s going to trace the course of Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom which was revealed in the dream of the Great Tree; there was some great theology that tree was supposed to teach Nebuchadnezzar and Nebuchadnezzar learned the lesson. But had Belshazzar learned the lesson from his grandfather? He was responsible too. Nebuchadnezzar taught him the theology. But how did he respond to it? **O king, the Most High God granted sovereignty, grandeur, glory and majesty to Nebuchadnezzar your father.** <sup>19</sup>**“Because of the grandeur**



which He bestowed on him, all the peoples, nations and *men of every* language feared and trembled before him; whomever he wished he killed and whomever he wished he spared alive; and whomever he wished he elevated and whomever he wished he humbled.

Nebuchadnezzar was great, this kid was a pip-squeak. <sup>20</sup>“But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit became so proud that he behaved arrogantly, he was deposed from his royal throne and *his* glory was taken away from him. <sup>21</sup>“He was also driven away from mankind, and his heart was made like *that of* beasts, and his dwelling place *was* with the wild donkeys. He was given grass to eat like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until he recognized that the Most High God is ruler over the realm of mankind and *that* He sets over it whomever He wishes. <sup>22</sup>“Yet you, his son,<sup>v</sup> Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this, now that’s the clincher. He knew all this, he had been taught all this, but he rejected all of it. It didn’t matter to him if God had made his grandfather walk around on all fours and eat grass for seven periods of time. His attitude was, “That was my grandfather but I am stronger than my grandfather, that could never happen to me! The God of Israel could never bring me down from my throne!” So he failed to learn the lesson and in just two generations the truth was totally rejected. Verse 23, **you have exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines have been drinking wine from them; and you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which do not see, hear or understand.** You know the story. Humans must worship and you’re either going to worship the God of Creation or you’re going to worship some aspect of creation. There are no other options. Everybody worships one or the other. And the end of paganism is you will worship the creation, things that neither see, nor hear nor understand. **But the God in whose hand are your life-breath and all your ways, you have not glorified.** There are no other options; worship the Creator or the creature. Belshazzar had made his choice.

Verse 24, **Then the hand was sent from Him and this inscription was written out. 25 Now this is the inscription that was written out: ‘MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.’<sup>vi</sup> The word MENE means ‘number’. TEKEL means ‘weighed’ or ‘evaluated.’ UPHARSIN means divided.<sup>vii</sup> Just**



the three words; numbered, weighed, divided. And then Daniel gives the interpretation, verse 26, **This is the interpretation of the message: 'MENE'—God has numbered your kingdom and put an end to it. 27'TEKEL'—you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient. 28'PERES'—your kingdom has been divided and given over to the Medes and Persians.** So the kingdom would be removed from him. And when Daniel gives the interpretation he changed it from UPHARSIN to PERES, which is a change in form of the same word, so that PERES looks at it as having already been accomplished. The picture is that while this was going on in the banquet hall Darius and his armies were already in the city on their way to the banquet hall.

Greek history records that Darius and his armies diverted the Euphrates River where the river ran under arches in the walls to deliver water to the city of Babylon. With the waterways dried up he and his soldiers could march into the city unnoticed. The Nabonidus Chronicle states that they entered "Babylon without a battle." They proceeded immediately to the banquet halls where they found the Babylonians feasting in a drunken revelry. On that night, as verse 30 tells us, **Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain.** So as Daniel made this interpretation you can picture the soldiers as already under the arch, down the dried waterway, on their way to the royal banquet hall. The days of his kingdom had been numbered, Belshazzar had been weighed and found wanting, the kingdom was divided.

In verse 31, **Darius the Mede received the kingdom.** The Medes and the Persians had an alliance to overthrow Babylon, and in this overthrow the political power that had been in Babylon passed to the Medes and the Persians. We'll have a little more of that when we get into chapter 7. But this records the downfall of the Babylonian kingdom. Why did it fall? Because of the rejection of the theology lesson that God had given to Nebuchadnezzar, that it was God's right to rule and give the kingdom to whomever he wishes. So it is God's plan, God's purpose that is being worked out during the times of the Gentiles and God expected the Gentile rulers to recognize His sovereign authority. Nebuchadnezzar did, Belshazzar did not. So God did with Belshazzar what Nebuchadnezzar said that God would do, He would depose kings and set up kings. We now change from Babylon to Medo-Persia.

What lessons can we learn from this passage? First, that God rules kings. He raises kings and lowers kings, He raised Belshazzar and he lowered him. He replaced him with Darius. God does this over and over in Gentile kingdoms. Second, that God rules kingdoms, He raises kingdoms and lowers kingdoms. He raised Babylon, He lowered Babylon. He replaced it with the Medes and the Persians. He's done it before, He'll do it again. What is your response to this? Third, that arrogance will characterize Gentile kings. Nebuchadnezzar was arrogant and he learned his lesson. Belshazzar was taught the lesson but he rejected it, he exalted himself. Overconfidence in one's self, one's abilities and one's accomplishments is never something that should be part of our life. But we can expect much of the same among Gentile rulers throughout this time so be prepared. Fourth, that there is a parental responsibility and a child responsibility. The responsibility of the godly parent is to train his children in theology. Nebuchadnezzar did that as evidenced by his own daughter, Nitocris' salvation. At the same time the child has the responsibility of responding properly to theology. Nitocris was responsible to believe and follow the teachings of God and she did. Belshazzar however did not. We can assume that he was taught theology because of his awareness of Daniel and his relationship to his grandfather, but he rejected the lessons God taught his grandfather and he died in his sins. So it shows you there is both a parental responsibility and a child's responsibility. Children do not necessarily turn out like their parents. But this does not negate the parent's responsibility to train them in theology. What they do with the theology however is between the child and God. May we all fulfill our responsibilities and respond positively to God. Fifth, the interplay between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. God had clearly numbered the days of the Babylonian kingdom, yet at the same time Belshazzar's arrogance was the human circumstance that prompted the end of the kingdom. They are not pitted against one another. God has sovereignly decreed to carry out His purposes by means of human choices. Finally, I think there is hope for Israel here in that Daniel survived this change in kingdoms and became a part of the Medo-Persian administration. This shows that God will preserve the nation Israel during the times of the Gentiles, assuring them that one day they will be restored in the great stone kingdom. Alright, next time Daniel and the Lion's den.

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<sup>1</sup> Harold Hoehner dates this event to Saturday, October 12, 539BC. Andy Woods, *Introduction to Daniel*, fn 53, p 28.

ii Darius the Mede is said to be unknown from secular history and therefore a historical mistake by Daniel who confused him with Darius son of Hystaspes. The identification of Darius the Mede will be given some attention in the next chapter.

iii See Hab 2:4-20 that deals with both the near and far defeat of Babylon, with particular mention of arrogance as evidence of a soul not right with God, wine and its revealing of arrogance and the false trust of those in Babylon upon idols carved out of gold, silver, wood, et. al.

iv The word “father” has been shown by Robert Dick Wilson to have been used seven ways in the time of Nebuchadnezzar (cf Wood, 133) so the relationships assumed by this author are not in any way inconceivable.

v The word “son” has been shown by Robert Dick Wilson to have been used twelve ways in the time of Nebuchadnezzar (cf Wood, 133) so the relationships assumed by this author are not in any way inconceivable.

vi The words in the biblical text are in Aramaic, a language that was known to the Chaldeans. I suspect that the words were in a language other than Aramaic and Daniel is here translating them. They could not be known by natural means, they had to be revealed to Daniel by supernatural means.

vii These are all monetary denominations; MENE = 50 shekels, TEKEL = 1 shekel, UPHARSIN = ½ shekel

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