

BOOK OF DANIEL
BELSHAZZAR-THE HANDWRITING ON THE WALL
DANIEL 5

Introduction

Here in Daniel chapter 5, we meet a Babylonian king by the name of Belshazzar. He was the grandson of King Nebuchadnezzar. His name meant, “*Bel protect the King.*” “*Bel,*” was a god of the Chaldeans, but we will see that “*Bel*” could not protect this King!

The story of King Belshazzar is a short one. He comes on the stage here and then he disappears! All that we know about him comes from this brief chapter and some historical documents.

I. BELSHAZZAR’S FOLLY! (Read Daniel 5:1-4)

A. He Was Feasting When He Should Have Been Fasting!

What we know about Belshazzar from is that he made a great feast to which the Bible says that a thousand of his lords were invited!

History tells us that drunkenness was common in all ranks of the Babylonians!

We see that a drunk Belshazzar led his guests in **mocking** the most high God, the God of Israel, as they drank out of the vessels of gold and silver that his grandfather, King Nebuchadnezzar, had taken from the temple back when he invaded Jerusalem!

We also see that these partygoers went so far as to toast to their own heathen gods in what were **God’s holy vessels that had been sanctified for God’s particular purpose in the worship of Him and service for Him!**

1. **The Prophet Isaiah Predicted The Fall Of Babylon Over 200 Years In Advance. (Isaiah 21:1-10)**
2. **God Had Decreed That The City Would Be Taken By A Man Not Then Born, Cyrus, Who Was “Knocking At The Gates” Of City Babylon! (Isaiah 44:28–45:4)**

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3. **His Life And His Kingdom Lay At Stake, Yet He Was Feasting!**

B. He Was Confident When He Should Have Been Concerned!

1. **His Confidence Was In His Strength!**

(i.e. A virtually impregnable city!)

2. **His Concern Should Have Been His Vulnerability!**

(i.e. The Euphrates River!)

C. He Was Stoned When He Should Have Been Sober!

1. His city was being besieged, yet he partied on!

2. His drunkenness furthered his folly! (Vs 2)

Belshazzar, however, just like his grandpa, Nebuchadnezzar was a man who was **full of pride and apparently feared neither God nor man!** Here we see that he manifested **his vanity, his profaneness, and his pride** in the sacrilegious use of these holy vessels of God!

D. He Desecrated What God Intended To Be Dedicated! (Vs 3)

E. He Was Praising What He Should Have Been Purging! (Vs 4)

II. MANKIND’S FOLLY!

A. Many Are Feasting When They Should Be Fasting!

1. **God Has Predicted The Fall Of Those Who Live In Sin And Rebel Against God!**

Ezekiel 18:20–“The soul that sinneth...”

Romans 6:23–“The wages of sin...”

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Revelation 21:8—“But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.”

2. God Has Already Decreed That This Flesh Shall Fall Prey To Death Which Is Knocking At The Gates!

Hebrews 9:27—“...it is appointed...”

Psalms 89:48—“What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave? Selah.”

Ecclesiastes 3:20 All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.”

B. Many Are Confident When They Should Be Concerned!

1. Man’s Confidence Is In His Strength!

(Physical, Financial, Intellectual...)

2. Man’s Concern Should Be His Vulnerability!

(Disease, Economic Collapse, All Kinds Of Calamity!)

Proverbs 16:18—“Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.”

e.g. Luke 12:16-20 – The Parable Of The Rich Fool.

C. Many Are Stoned When They Should Be Sober!

1. Intoxicants Are Not Limited To Drinking!

Alcohol and Drugs—A major worldwide problem!

Worldly Music—Filling the mind with sex, drugs, rebellion, adultery, and all kinds of debauchery!

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Television—Talk about debauchery. Has some folks living in an unreal “reality” and others in a dream world!

Pleasure—“*If it feels good, do it*” mentality!

2. Man’s Intoxication Furthers His Folly!

D. Many Are Desecrating What God Intended To Be Dedicated!

1. His Body—Romans 12:1-2

2. God’s House—Making a mockery out of it! Social hour!

E. Many Are Praising What He Should Be Purging!

Clinging to the god’s that keep him from serving the living God...clinging to the god’s that are no profit in light of eternity!

III. BELSHAZZAR’S FEAR! (Vs. 5-16)

A. Fear Came In The Hour Of Folly! (Vs 5)

We see that the festivities were interrupted by the fingers of a man’s hand writing out some mysterious words on the palace wall.

B. Knees Knocked At That Which Was Known! (Vs 6)

Although Belshazzar could not decipher the writing on the wall we see that **he became visibly shaken**. Do you think that possibly Belshazzar had an idea that the message might spell out his doom?

C. Uneasiness Came At That Which Was Unknown! (Vs 7-9)

The king was anxious to find out the interpretation of what had been written. We see that he summoned all the wise guys he could find to try to interpret the dream. None of them could tell him the interpretation.

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There is a great lesson here! Don't go to the world to get an interpretation of God's Word! They don't know what it means!

We find that the king became terribly upset at the inability of the wise guys to give him an interpretation!

- D. Belshazzar Went Last Where He Should Have Gone First!**
The queen comes in to Belshazzar and points him in the direction of Daniel. **(Daniel 5:10-12)**

Then, we see that Daniel is summoned to appear before King Belshazzar. **(Daniel 5:13-16)**

IV. MANKIND'S FEAR! (Similar to Belshazzar...)

- A. Fear Will Come In The Hour Of Folly! (Proverbs 11:2-7)**

1. Drugs and Alcohol. (Loss of family, freedom, life...)
2. Immorality. (Aids, STD's, unwanted pregnancy)
3. Other Sins. (The fear is there.)

- B. Knees Will Knock At That Which Is Known! (i.e. Guilt!)**
Numbers 32:23—"Be sure, your sin will find you out."

- C. Uneasiness Will Come At That Which Is Unknown!**
(Proverbs 1:20ff)
Proverbs 28:9—"He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination."

1 Corinthians 2:14—"But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

- D. Man Usually Goes Last Where He Should Go First!**
(Psalm 1:1) Advice columnists, Psychiatrists, Dr. Phil...others

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V. BELSHAZZAR'S FATE!

- A. The Writing Came In Response To Wickedness!**

- 1. He Would Be Judged According To What He Knew!**

Daniel begins by reminding Belshazzar of how God dealt with his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar!
(Daniel 5:17-21)

- 2. He Would Be Judged By How He Responded To The Knowledge He Had! (Vs 22-23)**

Daniel tells Belshazzar that he knew of all this and yet he did not respond properly to that knowledge!

- a. He Responded With Rebellion!
- b. He Responded With Pride!
- c. He Responded With Idolatry!

Belshazzar **should have been humble and should have submitted himself to the most high God!** Instead, as a result of his own pride, he was guilty of mocking the God of heaven and now God was going to deal with him!

- B. The Writing Revealed God's Message Of Wrath!**

As Daniel reads and interprets the writing on the wall, we see here that he reveals that as a result of Belshazzar's pride, God will judge him by taking away his kingdom and dividing it between the Medes and Persians. **(Read Daniel 5:25-28)**

- 1. God Revealed His Time Was Up!**
("Numbered, Numbered!")

- 2. God Revealed He Had Missed The Mark!**
("Weighed")

- 3. God Revealed He Was Doomed For Destruction!**
("Divisions") (Read Daniel 5:29-31)

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The fall of Babylon as recorded by the ancient historians (Herodotus, Berosus and Xenophon) verifies that this indeed did happen: *"Cyrus then dug a trench and diverted the flow of the Euphrates river into the new channel which led to an existing swamp. The level of the river then dropped to such a level that it became like a stream. His army was then able to take the city by marching through the shallow waters ... The Babylonians at the time were celebrating intensely at a feast to one of their gods and they were taken totally by surprise."*

So there you have the end of the one called Belshazzar!

VI. MANDKIND'S FATE!

A. God's Revelation Comes In Response To Wickedness!

1. Man Will Be Judged According To What He Knows!

Romans 2:12—"For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law;"

2. Man Will Be Judged By How He Responds To The Knowledge He Has!

**a. Many Respond With Rebellion!
(Proverbs 1:22-33)**

b. Many Respond With Pride!

Psalm 10:4—"The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts."

c. Many Respond With Idolatry!

B. God's Revelation Reveals His Message Of Wrath!

Romans 1:18—"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;"

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1. God Says Man's Days Are Numbered!

Psalm 90:12—"So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

2. God Reveals Man Has Missed The Mark!

Romans 3:23—"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;"

3. God Reveals That Apart From Christ, Man Is Doomed For Destruction!

John 3:36—"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

Conclusion

Are you living in the folly of sin?

Are you living in the fear of where sin will lead you?

What would be your fate if you were to meet God right now?

Now I want to point out that Bible critics love to use this story to show some apparent historical errors in the text, trying to disprove the accuracy of the Bible.

There are three points of contention with these critics:

1. They say that the last king to rule the empire of Babylon before being destroyed by the Medes and Persians, was a man by the name of Nabonidus not Belshazzar.

2. They say that Belshazzar was never a king of Babylon.

3. They say that the Bible refers to Nebuchadnezzar as the father of Belshazzar, which he wasn't.

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The statements made by these Bible critics are full of half truths.

- 1. Belshazzar's name IS found in history, and he just happens to be the son of King Nabonidus, making him a crown prince in the kingdom of Babylon.**

The problem in archaeology was that Belshazzar's name was for a long time not found anywhere outside of the book of Daniel. This led many to say that the whole story was just made up to encourage the Jews. They went on to claim that Daniel had no historical foundation at all. But then things changed.

In 1854 a British consul was exploring ancient ruins in southern Iraq.

He dug into the great tower built there and found several clay cylinders inscribed with Babylonian writing. Sir Henry Rawlinson, who was one of the ones who had deciphered the Babylonian cuneiform script, was able to read the inscriptions. These clay cylinders were, in fact, very significant.

The inscriptions were written at the time of Nabonidus, king of Babylon from 555-539 B.C. These cylinders commemorated the repairs that the king had made to the tower. They included a prayer for the long life of Nabonidus ... and his oldest son. This name of this son was clearly inscribed: Belshazzar.

The inscription reads: *"May it be that I, Nabonidus, king of Babylon, never fail you. And may my firstborn, Belshazzar, worship you with all his heart."*

This proved that there was an important man at this time called Belshazzar; he was not just an imaginary character. The problem in relating this to Daniel, however, was that Belshazzar was only referred to as the crown-prince, not the king. Daniel clearly calls Belshazzar the king.

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Other records indicate that Nabonidus was the last native king of Babylon, and that Belshazzar never completely came to the throne. Once again, skeptics concluded that Daniel made a historical blunder in calling Belshazzar the king (though it wasn't as bad as they first thought). But there is more.

Look again at what Belshazzar told Daniel. In verse 16, he said that if Daniel could interpret the writing on the wall, then he would give him authority as the third ruler in the kingdom.

Why third? This points to the fact that Belshazzar himself was not the first ruler of the kingdom, but that he was in a secondary position.

Belshazzar offered to Daniel only what he could offer: third position. Babylonian texts support this point. In fact there is another piece of evidence for Belshazzar's reign in the city of Babylon that comes from an inscription where he is referred to as the son of Nabonidus and is given authority to rule. It says, *"Putting the camp under the rule of his oldest son . . . His hands were now free; He entrusted the authority of the royal throne to him."*

Yet even another piece of evidence comes from a tablet dating back to the sixth century in Babylon, where he is mentioned in the same light as his father:

"In regards to the bright star which has appeared, I will undertake to interpret its meaning for the glory of my lord Nabonidus, Babylon's king, and also for the crown prince, Belshazzar"

What is interesting to note is that on this oath, the man swore by both Nabonidus and Belshazzar. While on oaths dating back to other times, generally only the king is mentioned.

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This seems to indicate that Belshazzar had a co-reigning authority that was second only to his father throughout all the Empire.

And this backs up the Bible completely in **verses 7, 16, and 29.**

Nabonidus was eccentric, and for several years during his reign he did not live in Babylon, but in a distant oasis in northern Arabia called Teima. While he was gone, he entrusted the kingship to his son, Belshazzar.

Keep in mind that the book of Daniel was not an official document of Babylon, so it would be in order for him to be called "*king*," since he was acting as the king in his father's place.

We also know that at the time the Medes and Persians captured the Babylon, Nabonidus was not living in the city of Babylon, but was in fact staying in Teima. He had left his son Belshazzar back home in charge of governing Babylon.

King Cyrus of Persia also refers to Belshazzar when he conquered Babylon in his writings. He says of him, "*A coward was put in charge as the king of this country. . .With evil intents he did away with the regular offerings to the gods. . .and desecrated the worship of the king of his gods, Marduk.*"

Cyrus's statement that Belshazzar desecrated the worship of his god Marduk matches very closely to the story in the book of Daniel. Although it wasn't Marduk whose handwriting appeared on the wall, but the one true God of Israel.

2. **Although the Bible states that Nebuchadnezzar was his "father", the Hebrews word for "father" also as meant "a grandfather or ancestor."**

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And in fact, Belshazzar was a blood line descendent of Nebuchadnezzar. He was a grandson.

3. **The same goes for the fact that the Bible calls Belshazzar a "king."**

Even though historical records may not mention that he was a king, the Hebrews word for "*king*" is also used for "*governors or royal princes.*" And history records that he was both.

Final Thoughts:

I want to share a few parting thoughts:

We should learn the lessons from our ancestor's mistakes!

Someone said that "*those who disregard the past are bound to repeat it.*"

Someone else said, "*The worst thing about history is that every time it repeats itself the price goes up.*"

We should realize it takes time for archaeology and science to catch up with the Bible!