

Daniel

Leon L. Combs, M.A., M.Div., Ph.D.

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Chapter Five

Introduction

Nebuchadnezzar had died in 563 B.C. and was succeeded by his son Evil-Merodach (“man of Marduk”) who had released the Jewish king, Jehoiachin, from prison and gave him an honorable place at the court:

2Kings 25:27-30 Now it came about in the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, that Evil-merodach king of Babylon, in the year that he became king, released Jehoiachin king of Judah from prison; (28) and he spoke kindly to him and set his throne above the throne of the kings who were with him in Babylon. (29) Jehoiachin changed his prison clothes and had his meals in the king's presence regularly all the days of his life; (30) and for his allowance, a regular allowance was given him by the king, a portion for each day, all the days of his life.

Evil-Merodach continued to display the virtuous attitude of his father. There is considerable discussion among historians as to the rulers after this time. It seems that only two years later (560) he was assassinated by his brother-in-law, General Neriglissar. The general had served under Nebuchadnezzar when Jerusalem was destroyed (587-586 B.C.). He died four years later (556) when his son Labashi-Marduk succeeded him but he was killed only nine months later. The leader of the revolt, Nabonidus, was placed on the throne with his son Belshazzar in control of Babylon itself. This situation remained until the final year of the Chaldean Empire, 539 B.C. The Babylonians thought that their city could not be conquered due to its position and the great walls about it. We noted the comparison with the walls around Babylon and those around the New Jerusalem as Satan tried to duplicate God’s work. But the Persians changed the water channel so that the river under the wall fell to the point that their soldiers could wade into the city and it was captured before the guards knew what had happened. Thus history confirms the ending of this chapter of Daniel. It is important to remember that while Belshazzar was enjoying himself the Median army under the command of Gobryas was besieging the city from without. Belshazzar had such a false sense of security that he seems to not be concerned about the invasion.

Dan 5:1-4

Belshazzar the king held a great feast for a thousand of his nobles, and he was drinking wine in the presence of the thousand. (2) When Belshazzar tasted the wine, he gave orders to bring the gold and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar his father 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. (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. (4) They drank the wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.

Belshazzar would have known at this point that an army of Medes and Persians were encamped outside of the city but he thought Babylon was not vulnerable to such an attack. The city was surrounded by huge walls with some of them being 300 feet high and there were numerous defense towers around the city. There were also fortified bronze gates and the Euphrates River flowed through the city from north to south so that water plus their food supply led to his false confidence in the security of the city. Belshazzar would have known about the dream of Nebuchadnezzar and its interpretation by Daniel but no doubt he did not think the Babylonian kingdom would fall during his reign of the city. Perhaps the gates were made of bronze for mocking the dream.

Chapter seven of Daniel occurs during the first year of the reign of Belshazzar and that chapter records Daniel seeing the Babylonian lion defeated by the Medo-Persian bear (7:1-5) but Belshazzar refused to believe the prophesies. The chapters not being arranged chronologically makes their interpretation difficult.

Belshazzar was rewarding his success by having a feast with a thousand of his nobles during which he and the others were drinking wine. No doubt they were all drinking to excess and probably enjoying other aspect of their heathen lifestyle. With so many important people around he decided to do something special. They had taken the gold and silver goblets and bowls from Solomon's temple forty seven years previously and he thought that this special occasion could be amplified by using those vessels of the God Yahweh that he had defeated. Nebuchadnezzar had decreed that everyone was to respect the God of the Jews (3:29) and he had praised the Lord for His sovereignty and greatness (4:34-7). But the great king's words had been forgotten over the years as the rulers trusted themselves and their powers. This would be a special occasion to praise his gods Marduk, Bel, Nebo, Ishtar, and others. The entire crowd then drank from these vessels. No doubt there were many more than a literal thousand people present as the king, his nobles, his wives and his concubines all drank from them. Archeologists inform us that there were halls large enough to take care of such a large crowd.

Dan 5:5-9

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. (6) Then the king's face grew pale and his thoughts alarmed him, and his hip joints went slack and his knees began knocking together. (7) 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." (8) Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the inscription or make known its interpretation to the king. (9) Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, his face grew even paler, and his nobles were perplexed.

There is only one God and He now intervened in this party as a reply to this mockery of Him. The king only saw the back of the hand that began writing on the wall. There were only four words written as stated in verse 25 below: 'MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN'. Hebrew and Aramaic are read from the right to the left and the vowels had to be supplied by the reader. So the writing may have appeared as NSRHPLKTNMNM. Some people think the One who wrote on the wall was the same One who wrote in the sand when a sinful woman was brought before Him (John 8:1-11). The party stopped as this scene brought terror to all present. We see several references to the finger of God in Scripture such as:

- The finger of God defeated the Egyptians when Pharaoh refused to let the people go
"Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said." (Exo 8:19)
- The finger of God wrote the holy law for Israel: "When He had finished speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God." (Exo 31:18)

The description of the king's reaction is particularly vivid! The king called in all his wise men and asked for an interpretation. He offered clothing of purple that indicated royalty, a necklace of gold to be placed around their neck, and the rank of third ruler in the kingdom. That was as high a government position as he could promise for he was viceroy under his father, Nabonidus. All the wise men came in and discussed the matter but could not determine the meaning of the words. Their reaction was similar to that when asked to tell a king's dream but here they have the message but cannot interpret it. Since the king could not determine the meaning of the words, he grew even paler and all the nobles were also perplexed.

Dan 5:10-12

The queen entered the banquet hall because of the words of the king and his nobles; the queen spoke and said, "O king, live forever! 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. And King Nebuchadnezzar, your father, your father the king, appointed him chief of the magicians, conjurers, Chaldeans and diviners. (12) "This was because an extraordinary spirit, knowledge and insight, interpretation of dreams, explanation of enigmas and solving of difficult problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belshazzar. Let Daniel now be summoned and he will declare the interpretation."

This queen was the queen of the Babylonian Empire and the wife of Nabonidus so she was the mother of Belshazzar. The king's mother could have been the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar and she recommended Daniel and told the king to not worry. She referred to Nebuchadnezzar as the king's father but strictly speaking his father was Nabonidus. It seems that Nabonidus had married a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar to legitimize his taking of the throne so Nebuchadnezzar would be the grandfather of all his daughter's children. In this era grandfathers were often referred to as fathers.

Daniel was probably about 82 years old at this time if he was 16 when taken to Babylon in 605 B.C. and Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians in 539. It had been some time since Daniel had

been one of the wise men and a ruler in the kingdom so he apparently had been “retired”. Verse 27 of chapter eight implies that he had been in service to Belshazzar for about three years but that he had been in poor health. The queen remembered him and had probably read some of the memories of Nebuchadnezzar and had been impressed with the possibility that Daniel could determine the meaning of the words. She also had no reason to suspect that the words would bring about bad news so she told Belshazzar not to worry or let his face be pale.

She certainly had the information correct about Daniel in that he had a spirit of the holy God dwelling in him. In the days of Nebuchadnezzar he brought illumination, insight, and wisdom to the kingdom. She reminded Belshazzar that Nebuchadnezzar had appointed him chief of all the wise men because of the great insights found in Daniel. Actually all this insight was really from God and Daniel was always quick to give the glory to God. She confidently suggested Daniel be summoned and he will give the proper interpretation.

Dan 4:13-16

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? (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. (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. (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."

We know from Dan 8:1, 27 that Daniel had “done the king’s business” in the third year of the reign of the king that would have been in 554 B.C. But the king only knew Daniel by name and reputation and not personally. What a shame that he thought so highly of himself that he did not spend time learning from Daniel. Belshazzar showed his lack of understanding of Daniel’s relationship to God as he stated that he knew that Daniel had a spirit of the gods in him. Evidently Belshazzar believed in many gods but that there was one exceptional spirit present in the gods that could offer such wisdom as had been demonstrated previously by Daniel. He told Daniel that the wise men could not interpret the writing but that his personal knowledge of Daniel indicated that he was able to give interpretations and solve difficult problems. The king flattered Daniel but Daniel was not interested in such flattery. Belshazzar then offered Daniel the same rewards he had offered the wise men.

Dan 5:17-21

Then Daniel answered and said before the king, "Keep your gifts for yourself or give your rewards to someone else; however, I will read the inscription to the king and make the interpretation known to him. (18) "O king, the Most High God granted sovereignty, grandeur, glory and majesty to Nebuchadnezzar your father. (19) "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. (20) "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. (21) "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.

Daniel was also not interested in the treasures offered him by the king. Like other prophets, Daniel was not for sale. However God had again revealed to Daniel an interpretation that he was free to give to the king. He began by reminding Belshazzar of his last interaction with Nebuchadnezzar. It seems the reason he started this interpretation with his reminder of what happened to Nebuchadnezzar was because the same prideful state of Nebuchadnezzar was now exhibited by Belshazzar and an even worse fate was about to fall on him. Nebuchadnezzar showed his prideful state in taking credit for all that God had done (4:29-30). Now Belshazzar showed his pride by using the vessels from the temple to serve wine to his guests. Belshazzar was guilty of blasphemy and idolatry and then by showing and then he showed ignorance of Babylonian royal history.

Dan 5:22-28

"Yet you, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this, (23) but 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. But the God in whose hand are your life-breath and all your ways, you have not glorified. (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.' (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."

Belshazzar seemed to have known what Daniel repeated concerning Nebuchadnezzar but that knowledge had no effect on his decisions. Many people today have no understanding of the results of decisions made in the past, cannot interpret the conditions of the present, and have no ability to prepare for the consequences of the future. Belshazzar had even further exalted himself against God by taking the vessels from the house of God and using them in praise and worship of his idols that cannot be seen, they cannot hear, and they have no cognitive abilities. He does not recognize that all aspects of his life are in the hand of this only God whom he has not glorified. Because of his actions the hand was sent from God to reveal this inscription.

Anyone who knew Aramaic could have read the inscription but not any could give the interpretation. A general interpretation could have been made that “mene” could be “mina”, that was a measure of money or the word “numbered”. Tekel could mean “shekel” that was another

unit of money or the word “weighed”. Peres could mean “half-shekel” or the word “divided” and it could refer to Persia. Because of God’s enlightenment, Daniel could give the intended meaning from God. The word “mene” was taken to mean “numbered” and the repetition meant that the numbering was over. The word “tekel” indicated that Belshazzar had been measured by God and found wanting. Then God wrote the word “upharsin” which indicated “and halves or divisions”. Daniel used the singular form of this word in verse 28 and interpreted it to mean that the kingdom had been divided and given to the Medes and Persians. So the wise men might have looked at the words and used normal Aramaic interpretations to say that the words referred to some sort of monetary scale but that would not have made any sense so they simply decided to say they could not interpret the words. Daniel was given the meaning by God and this would have brought considerable horror to Belshazzar since the interpretation meant his imminent doom.

One day everyone will have the same words spoken to them. Mene means that our deeds will have been numbered and they fail according to God’s standards. Tekel will signify that the book will be opened and the deeds measured by God. Peres will indicate that God’s judgment is the final dividing of ways for the person with one way going to heaven and the other going to hell. Only those people with their wrath of God imputed to Jesus for their sins and the righteousness of Jesus imputed to them will go to heaven. That path is decided before death.

Dan 5:29-31

Then Belshazzar gave orders, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a necklace of gold around his neck, and issued a proclamation concerning him that he now had authority as the third ruler in the kingdom. (30) That same night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain. (31) So Darius the Mede received the kingdom at about the age of sixty-two.

Daniel received the rewards from Belshazzar even though Daniel did not choose to inform us of the king’s reaction to the interpretation. However the reward was very short-lived as the king was killed that very night and Darius took over the kingdom. Thus the silver portion of the statue interpreted by Daniel for Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. Historians give the date for this conquest as October 12, 539 B.C.

The conquest of Babylon was made certain by Cyrus, king of Persia (1:21; 6:28; 10:1; 2 Chron 36:22-23; Ezra 3-5). We are not certain as to the identity of Darius the Mede as stated by Daniel. Many historians believe him to be actually Gubaru or Gobryas who was an important officer in the army whom Cyrus made ruler of the province of Babylon. It seems that the name “Darius” may have been a title like “Caesar” in the Roman Empire. This man mentioned by Daniel was 62 when he took over the kingdom. Cyrus seems to have been away on other urgent kingdom business at this time and apparently Cyrus gave the authority temporarily to Gubaru. The statement in verse 28 of chapter six indicates that they may both have been ruling simultaneously. It is important to not identify him with Darius I who ruled from 522 to 486 and encouraged the restoration of the temple (Ezra 1:5-6). Darius I was a young man who was under 30 when he became ruler.

The conquest of Babylon and its ultimate destruction had been prophesied by Isaiah (Isa 13-14; 21; 47) and Jeremiah (Jer 50-51). Although that specific city no longer exists, the concept of Babylon as an evil system of government still exists as the city of man in opposition to Jerusalem, the city of God. When one compares Jeremiah 50-51 with Revelation 18 one sees many similarities between the Babylon of history and the Babylon of future prophecy. Chapters 17 and 18 of Revelation describe the rise and fall of the Babylon system in the end times. But Satan's kingdom will be destroyed by Jesus Christ when He returns to reign (Rev 19:11-21).

Belshazzar refused to humble himself and God caused the city to fall as well as that earthly kingdom. If we refuse to humble ourselves and our leaders refuse to acknowledge God as Sovereign then our country could similarly be defeated. Hopefully this study of Daniel will help us all to know how to live in a pagan society and to pray for our leaders to repent and submit to God.