



Chapter 5

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Chuck Smith Introduction: There is a gap of perhaps 20 years between the preceding chapter and this one. King Nebuchadnezzar died and was replaced by a succession of men who were removed by their enemies. His grandson, Belshazzar, was co-ruler with another man when the events in this chapter took place. Cyrus, the King of the Persians and nephew of Darius (King of the Medes), was besieging Babylon. Belshazzar felt safe within the city's walls, because Babylon was extremely well-fortified and supplied with enough food and water to withstand many years of siege.¹

Deffinbaugh Introduction: Announcement of the king's coming judgment begins by a mysterious hand writing on the wall of the banquet hall. Crying aloud, the king summons the wise men of Babylon. Their inability to fulfill his instructions only adds to his frustration. When his ability to interpret such matters is made known to the king, Daniel enters the scene.

It was in chapter 2 of the Book of Daniel that king Nebuchadnezzar had a distressing dream, which he demanded that his wise men reveal and interpret; they could not do so. Daniel revealed the dream and its meaning to king Nebuchadnezzar, and in so doing spared the lives of the wise men. In chapter 4, Nebuchadnezzar had yet another dream. Once again, the king first sought the meaning from the other wise men of Babylon. When all others failed to explain the king's dream, Daniel revealed its meaning and called on the king to repent, so that the threatened outcome might be delayed or prevented. Another king now sits on the throne in Babylon. His name is Belshazzar, and Nebuchadnezzar was his "father." For years, the skeptics pointed to this chapter as yet another evidence of the late date and fictitious character of the Book of Daniel. More recent findings have led many Bible scholars, even some of the more liberal ones, to agree with the facts presented in this chapter.

Recent archaeological findings have named Belshazzar and identified him as the son of Nabonidus. Now, conservative scholars generally agree that Belshazzar shared a co-regency with his father, especially in his father's absence from Babylon. This could explain how Belshazzar offered the man who could interpret the writing on the wall the position of third ruler of the kingdom (Daniel 5:16).²

Nearly 25 years have passed since the events of chapter 4 and over 70 years since chapter 1. Now advanced in years, Daniel is a senior statesman in Babylon. He has outlasted a number of kings and in his time Belshazzar, the last of the Chaldean kings of Babylon, will be killed and Babylon will pass from Chaldean rule to rule by Darius the Mede.

In chapters 1-4, we have an account of the life of Nebuchadnezzar, the first Babylonian king to rule over the captive Jews. The account looks at several events in the life of this great king, which eventually bring him to his knees in worship and praise of the God of Israel. Daniel then passes over several kings, giving us this brief account of the last day in the reign of Belshazzar, the last of the Chaldean kings.

¹ Chuck Smith Sermon Notes, Book of Daniel, Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa, CA

² For further information concerning the identification of Belshazzar in recent archaeological findings see John F. Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), pp. 113-115, and Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1949), pp. 115-118.

The death of Belshazzar at the hand of Darius is a partial fulfillment of the prophecy revealed to king Nebuchadnezzar by his dream in chapter 2. There, Daniel informed Nebuchadnezzar that his kingdom was the first of four kingdoms to precede the coming of Messiah. His was the kingdom of gold, to be followed by a lesser kingdom of silver (Daniel 2:39). The kingdom of silver is introduced in Daniel 5, when Darius captures Babylon, and Belshazzar is put to death. The Medo-Persian kingdom is born, fulfilling the first part of the prophecy revealed through Daniel.³

Daniel 5:1

Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand.

[Belshazzar] Belshazzar was the son of Nabonidus and grandson of Nebuchadnezzar. The inscriptions show that he was coregent while his father went to meet Cyrus in battle. This chapter follows Daniel 7-8 in chronology, for the vision of Daniel 7 was seen in the first year and that of Daniel 8 in the third year of Belshazzar. The author no doubt put the message of this chapter here in order to keep the prophetic sections of Daniel 7:1-12:13 together.

[great feast] The hall in which this feast was held has been recently excavated. It was 60 x 172 feet. The walls were beautifully decorated with painted stucco designs.

[lords] *raberban* Aramaic, (H7261), great ones (Daniel 4:36; Daniel 5:1,9,10,23; Daniel 6:17).

Belshazzar the king made a great feast—This chapter is out of its place, and should come in after the seventh and eighth. There are difficulties in the chronology. After the death of Nebuchadnezzar, Evil-merodach his son ascended the throne of Babylon. Having reigned about two years, he was slain by his brother-in-law, Neriglissar. He reigned four years, and was succeeded by his son Laborosoarchod, who reigned only nine months. At his death Belshazzar the son of Evil-merodach, was raised to the throne, and reigned seventeen years, and was slain, as we read here, by Cyrus, who surprised and took the city on the night of this festivity. This is the chronology on which Archbishop Usher, and other learned chronologists, agree; but the Scripture mentions only Nebuchadnezzar, Evil-merodach, and Belshazzar, by name; and Jeremiah, 27:7, expressly says, “All nations shall serve him (Nebuchadnezzar), and his son (Evil-merodach), and his son’s son (Belshazzar), until the very time of his land come;” i.e., till the time in which the empire should be seized by Cyrus. Here there is no mention of Neriglissar nor Laborosoarchod; but as they were usurpers, they might have been purposely passed by. But there remains one difficulty still: Belshazzar is expressly called the son of Nebuchadnezzar by the queen mother, verse 11: “There is a man in thy kingdom, in whom is the spirit of the holy gods: and in the days of THY FATHER light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, was found in him: whom the

³ Robert Deffinbaugh, Biblical Studies Press, www.bible.org, 1995

king NEBUCHADNEZZAR THY FATHER, the king, I say, thy father, made master of the magicians.” The solution of this difficulty is, that in Scripture the name of son is indifferently given to sons and grandsons, and even to great grandsons. And perhaps the repetition in the above verse may imply this: “The king, Nebuchadnezzar thy father, the king thy father.” The king thy father’s father, and consequently thy grandfather. If it have not some such meaning as this, it must be considered an idle repetition. As to the two other kings, Neriglissar and Laborosoarchod, mentioned by Josephus and Berosus, and by whom the chronology is so much puzzled, they might have been some petty kings, or viceroys, or satraps, who affected the kingdom, and produced disturbances, one for four years, and the other for nine months; and would in consequence not be acknowledged in the Babylonish chronology, nor by the sacred writers, any more than finally unsuccessful rebels are numbered among the kings of those nations which they have disturbed. I believe the only sovereigns we can acknowledge here are the following:

1. Nabopolassar;
2. Nebuchadnezzar;
3. Evil-merodach
4. Belshazzar; and with this last the Chaldean empire ended.⁴

To a thousand of his lords—Perhaps this means lords or satraps, that were each over one thousand men. But we learn from antiquity that the Persian kings were very profuse in their entertainments; but it does not follow that the Chaldeans were so too. Besides, one thousand lords and their appropriate attendants would have been very inconvenient in a nocturnal assembly. The text, however, supports the common translation. Literally, “Belshazzar the king made bread for his lords a thousand; and against the thousand he drank wine.” That is, say some, he was a very great drinker.

Sixty-six years have elapsed since Daniel 1, which tells of Nebuchadnezzar’s strike against Jerusalem in 605 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar died in 562 B.C. after a reign of 43 years. His son, Evil-Merodach, ruled from 562-560 B.C.; his brother-in-law Neriglissar reigned four years from 560-556 B.C. After a two-month reign by Labashi-Marduk in 556 B.C., the Babylonian empire continued from 556-539 B.C. under the command of Nabonidus. Belshazzar was the son of Nabonidus. He co-reigned with his father from 553-539 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar is called Belshazzar’s “father.” The term could also mean “ancestor.”⁵

Archaeologists have recently discovered Belshazzar’s name on several documents. He ruled with his father, Nabonidus, staying home to administer the affairs of the kingdom while his father tried to reopen trade routes taken over by Cyrus and the Persians. Belshazzar was in charge of the city of Babylon when it was captured.

The introduction of Belshazzar into the narrative has for years provided liberal interpreters with a classic case of supposed biblical error. No such character existed in Babylonian records, and liberal scholarship concluded that Belshazzar was a figment of the author’s imagination. However, numerous relatively recent archaeological discoveries of unearthed tablets clearly establish not only the existence of Belshazzar but also his

⁴ Adam Clarke’s Commentary

⁵ Life Application Notes

association with his father Nabonidus, king of Babylon. The following outline of the Babylonian monarchy can now be established. Nebuchadnezzar died in 562 B.C. and was succeeded by his son, Evil-Merodach (Babylonian Amel-Marduk; cf. 2 Kin 25:27), who was then assassinated by Neriglissar, his own brother-in-law. Neriglissar reigned four years, then died in 556 B.C., leaving the throne to his infant son, Labashi-Marduk. After nine months, Labashi-Marduk was deposed by an anti-Marduk priestly revolution, and Nabonidus was made king in 556 B.C. He was a scholar and antiquarian, and a worshiper of the moon-god Sin, rather than of Marduk, the god of Babylon. Most of his time was spent in Tema in northern Arabia trying to placate his god, who he believed had been offended. Although Nabonidus was officially king, he left Babylon and the rule to his son Belshazzar in 550 B.C. Belshazzar promised Daniel a post as “third” ruler in the land (vv. 16, 29). Why not make him second? The answer verifies again the astonishing accuracy of the biblical materials. Nabonidus was first, Belshazzar second, and Daniel would have to be third. Therefore, the events of ch. 5 must be dated in 539 B.C. Nabonidus had fled, leaving Belshazzar to rule in Babylon. Believing the city to be impregnable (Herodotus says they regarded the Persian siege “with indifference,” since they had stocked the city well with provisions), on a day memorializing some noteworthy event, Belshazzar ordered a momentous celebration, which quickly degenerated into a drunken orgy. Amid this celebration the king ordered the use of the sacred vessels from the temple in Jerusalem for the drinking of wine and the praising of pagan deities. According to Herodotus, when the city was taken (by secretly diverting the Euphrates River which ran through it) “there was a festival going on, and they continued to dance and enjoy themselves, until they learned the news the hard way.”⁶

Daniel 5:2

Belshazzar, while he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem; that the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, might drink therein.

[golden and silver vessels] See Daniel 1:2; 2 Kings 25:15; Jeremiah 52:19.

[father Nebuchadnezzar] His grandfather. There is no word in Aramaic for grandfather. The word "father" is often used of ancestors (1 Kings 15:11-13; 2 Kings 14:3; 2 Chron. 34:1-2; Romans 9:10). Jeremiah settles the controversy of this statement by saying, "all nations shall serve him (Nebuchadnezzar), and his son (Nabonidus), and his son's son (Belshazzar), until the very time of his land come" (Jeremiah 27:7).

⁶ Believer's Study Bible

Daniel 5:3

Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God which *was* at Jerusalem; and the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, drank in them.

“...father”: rather, grandfather.

It was sinful enough for such drinking to be going on, but to use the sanctified vessels from the house of God in Jerusalem in such a drunken brawl was going too far (Daniel 5:23). God remembered the times when they were used only for His service. He had been waiting for time to bring about the fulfillment of His word before taking vengeance for such desecration of holy things. The time had now come so He began writing on the wall (Daniel 5:5).⁷

Daniel 5:4

They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone.

Deffinbaugh: Understanding how things went from bad to worse in these verses is not difficult. As a college student, I worked several months for a caterer. One night we catered a banquet for a group of socialites in the city of Seattle. As the night wore on and the alcohol flowed freely, I saw and heard things I never would have expected or believed from people normally very proper and dignified.

Such seems to have been the scene at Belshazzar’s banquet.⁸ One thousand of the king’s nobles were invited, along with their wives or other women. The king was responsible for what happened, and too much wine seems to have contributed to his poor judgment. A false sense of pride and self-sufficiency seems to have dominated the dinner party. The king remembered the expensive vessels which Nebuchadnezzar, his father,⁹ had taken when he defeated and captured Jerusalem. How much more impressive the evening would be if they drank their wine from the gold and silver vessels from the temple in Jerusalem.¹⁰

And so the vessels were brought in. The wine continued to flow freely, and toasts began to be offered. That these pagans were engaged in a kind of drinking bout with the sacred temple vessels was bad enough, but the ultimate blasphemy was toasting the gods of gold, silver, brass, iron, wood, and stone.¹¹

God has a limit to how far He will allow men to go in their sin. In His longsuffering and mercy, God may allow men to continue in their sin for a time. But there is a time for

⁷ Dake’s Study Notes, Dake’s Study Bible

⁸ For similar events, recorded in the Bible, see Esther 1 and Mark 6:14-29.

⁹ It is generally understood and accepted that the term “father” was used more loosely in the Old Testament of one’s forefather, who may have been a grandfather or even a more distant “father.”

¹⁰ See Daniel 1:2; 2 Kings 24:13; 25:15; Ezra 1:7, 11.

¹¹ It is interesting that the descending order of these metals is the same as that found in Daniel 2 for the metals which represented the various kingdoms. See Daniel 2:32.

judgment.¹² The king and his Babylonian dinner guests crossed the line that fateful night in the banquet hall of Babylon. Judgment day had come, and the writing on the wall announced its arrival.¹³

(Guzik)

a. Belshazzar the king: When we come to Daniel 5, Nebuchadnezzar is no longer the king of Babylon. How did it come from Nebuchadnezzar to **Belshazzar**? The ancient historian Berossus gives us the following order of events:

- *Nebuchadnezzar* dies after a 43-year reign
- His son, *Evil-Merodach* (described in 2 Kings 25:27-30 and Jeremiah 52:31-34) rules for only two years when he is assassinated by his brother-in-law Neriglassar, because his rule was arbitrary and licentious
- *Neriglassar* (mentioned as Nergalsharezer in Jeremiah 39:3, 13) rules for four years until he dies a natural death
- His son, *Laborosoarchod*, only a child and of diminished mental capacity, rules for only nine months when he is beaten to death by a gang of conspirators
- The conspirators appoint *Nabonidus*, one of their gang, to be king. He rules until Cyrus the Persian conquers Babylon

Belshazzar the king: For a long time, historians and archaeologists knew that Nabonidus was said to be the last king of Babylon, not **Belshazzar** (who was Nabonidus' eldest son). The solution to this so-called discrepancy was apparent when evidence was uncovered indicating not only Belshazzar's association with Nabonidus on the throne, but also demonstrating that during the last part of his reign Nabonidus lived in Arabia and left the conduct of the kingdom of Babylon to his eldest son **Belshazzar**.

- i. There was no additional mention of **Belshazzar**, the eldest son and co-regent with Nabonidus, until the *Nabonidus Cylinder* was discovered in this century. It is now displayed in the British Museum.
- ii. According to Babylonian records, Belshazzar became coregent in the third year of Nabonidus' reign (553 B.C.) and continued in that capacity till the fall of Babylon (539 B.C.).

c. It is most likely that at the time of Daniel 5, Nabonidus had gone out to fight the Medo-Persian army, and had been already captured. Those armies now surrounded Babylon, and were looking for a way into the strongly defended city.

d. **Made a great feast for a thousand of his lords:** Belshazzar was not afraid of the siege surrounding the city. He was confident because of Babylon's impressive defenses and his vast supplies.

i. Conservative calculations set the dimensions of the ancient city of Babylon like this:

- The outer walls were 17 miles long
- These walls were 22 feet thick and 90 feet high
- The outer walls had guard towers another 100 feet high
- The city gates were made of bronze

¹² See Genesis 15:12-16; 18:16-33.

¹³ Robert Deffinbaugh, Biblical Studies Press, www.bible.org, 1995

- A system of inner and outer walls and moats made the city very secure

e. Which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple: Nebuchadnezzar was not the direct father of Belshazzar. Either he was his grandfather through his mother's side, or he was his father in the sense of having previously occupied the throne Belshazzar now sat on. Either usage of the term **father** was accepted in ancient times.

f. They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone: The scene of partying while a hostile army surrounds the city reminds us of the spirit of our age. Many today carry the idea that the best response to the seeming danger of the times is to forget about it and escape into the pursuit of pleasure.

i. God does not condemn having a good time, but can He be glorified in it? Can God be invited to your party?

ii. In Ephesians 5:18 Paul calls drunkenness *dissipation*; drunkenness is a *waste* of resources that should be submitted to Jesus. John Trapp writes of drinking "all the three outs" – "that is, ale out of the pot, money out of the purse, and wit out of the head." (Trapp's commentary on Galatians 5:21)¹⁴

Daniel 5:5

In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote.

[the same hour] The hour at the height of the revelry at the feast when idols were praised and the sacred vessels of the true God were desecrated (Daniel 5:2-4). It was the hour to end the 70 years' captivity and for God to deliver His chosen people so that their nation might be restored (Daniel 9:24-27; Jeremiah 25).

[saw the part of the hand that wrote] Men saw the hand of God with their own eyes. Thousands saw the handwriting on the wall as visible as any other writing (Daniel 5:7-9,16,24-25).

(Guzik) In the same hour the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote.

a. **The fingers of a man's hand appeared:** God can and sometimes does communicate to man in unexpected and even shocking ways. Here, a hand mysteriously appears and writes on the wall.

b. **The king saw the part of the hand that wrote:** This, of course, is where we get our proverbial phrase *the writing on the wall*.¹⁵

¹⁴ David Guzik's Commentaries on the Bible are reproduced by permission of David Guzik, Germany.

¹⁵ David Guzik's Commentaries on the Bible are reproduced by permission of David Guzik, Germany.

Daniel 5:6

Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another.

Story of Lord Nelson -

Daniel 5:7

The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. And the king spake, and said to the wise *men* of Babylon, Whosoever shall read this writing, and show me the interpretation thereof, shall be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about his neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.

[The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers] Belshazzar followed the pattern of his grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar, in calling for the so-called wise men of Babylon (cp. Daniel 2:2-19; Daniel 4:6-9).

[Whosoever shall read this writing] Threefold promise of reward: He shall:

1. Be clothed in scarlet.
2. Have a chain of gold on his neck.
3. Be third ruler in the kingdom.

[shall read this writing] This proves that the writing was not in the ordinary language of the lords from the empire. Had it been in Hebrew, Aramaic, or some common language of the empire many could have read and interpreted it. The original may have been a heavenly language of angels or one of any number of earthly languages not known to men in the Babylonian Empire. Whatever it was it took a man gifted by the Holy Spirit, one possessing the gift of interpretation, to read and interpret it (cp. 1 Cor. 12:10-11,30; 1 Cor. 13:1; 1 Cor. 14:5,12-14,26-28). There is no indication here that Daniel could read this because he was acquainted with a particular language. This would be doing away with the supernatural element in the interpretation. It was done by the Holy Spirit as much as the previous interpretations were (Daniel 2:19,22-23,28-30,47; Daniel 4:8-9,19).

[clothed with scarlet] This refers to being clothed in royal robes of purple (Aramaic: argvan (HSN-711), purple, Daniel 5:7,29).

[chain of gold about his neck] The working of metals into various ornaments, household articles, and even deities is as old as Tubal-Cain (Genesis 4:22). Chains of gold around the neck indicated political dignity (Daniel 5:7,15,29; Genesis 41:42).

[third ruler in the kingdom] Rule as one of three, that is, be the third. Nabonidus, the king, was the first ruler. Belshazzar, as coregent, was the second ruler. This would make Daniel the third ruler of Babylon; but he did not get to exercise this power due to the overthrow of Babylon that very night (Daniel 5:29-31).

Belshazzar served as co-regent with his father Nabonidus. Thus, Nabonidus was the first ruler and his son Belshazzar, the second. The person who could read the writing would be given third place, which was the highest position and honor that Belshazzar could offer.

Daniel 5:8

Then came in all the king's wise *men*: but they could not read the writing, nor make known to the king the interpretation thereof.

As usual the wise men failed the king while Daniel became of service (Daniel 5:8-9; Daniel 2:2-19; Daniel 4:7-9).

Daniel 5:9

Then was king Belshazzar greatly troubled, and his countenance was changed in him, and his lords were astonished.

[Then was king Belshazzar greatly troubled, and his countenance was changed in him, and his lords were astonished] Threefold effect of the handwriting:

1. It produced great agitation in the king (Daniel 5:6,9).
2. It changed the jovial mood of the king to one of fear and terror (Daniel 5:6,9).
3. The lords were dumbfounded (Daniel 5:9).

Deffinbaugh: Knowing the power of the Babylonian kings,¹⁶ Belshazzar must have seen many men stand in fear and trembling before him. Now it was his turn to tremble. In that torch-lit banquet hall, the revelry had reached its peak, doubtlessly with loud boasting and toasting, laughter and celebration. Likely, the king was the life of the party. Perhaps he was closest to the sudden emerging of the mysterious hand in the light of the nearby lamp.

One might have thought the king was having a heart attack. Barely able to stand, his face was ashen and seized with terror. The raucous laughter turned to deafening silence with all eyes on the king. The king's eyes were fixed upon the hand as it wrote. As a sense of foreboding and panic fell on the crowd, all eyes turned to the mysterious writing on the wall. The king's actions alarmed all who were present.

One can only imagine the scene. Already affected by too much wine, the king's terror robbed his legs of all strength. The lower part of his body seems to have lost control. Crying aloud in fear, his speech probably slurred, the king immediately summoned his wise men to the banquet hall. What did these words on the wall mean? He must know. A tempting reward was offered to anyone who could interpret the meaning of the handwriting on the wall.

Some think the king did not recognize the words, while others believe he only failed to understand their meaning. Since the words seem to be written in Aramaic, and there are only three, it may be that he recognized the words but did not understand their

¹⁶ See Daniel 5:19.

meaning. Unable to decipher their meaning, the wise men come and go. The king's fear and distress intensifies while the others remain terror stricken.¹⁷

(Guzik) . **The joints of his hips were loosed and his knees knocked:** Daniel's vivid description shows us that Belshazzar was terrified. His carefree partying was so shallow that it turned from merry to terrified in a moment. This shows that his conscience was active beneath his energetic partying.

i. After all, if Belshazzar could not *understand* the writing, why should it trouble him so? It troubled him because his own conscience testified against him.

ii. "The writing on the wall he could neither read nor understand; but his conscience had written bitter things against him, which now being held to the fire of God's wrath become legible." (Trapp)

b. **Whoever reads the writing, and tells me its interpretation:** "For the king the difficulty was not to give the 'dictionary definition' of the terms, but to see what significance they had for him." (Baldwin).

c. **He shall be the third ruler in the kingdom:** Archaeologists have discovered why Belshazzar offered the interpreter of the dream the **third** place in the kingdom. The real king was Nabonidus, and his some Belshazzar ruled as *second* in the kingdom. Belshazzar couldn't give away the second place in the kingdom, because he was the second in the kingdom at the time. The best he had to offer was the **third** place.

d. **The could not read the writing, or make know to the king its interpretation:** When Daniel comes to interpret these words, it doesn't seem so hard to figure out. It may be that God deliberately put a veil over the minds of these men so Daniel would be called. Others - like Adam Clarke - suppose that the Babylonian wise men could not read the writing because it was in Hebrew.¹⁸

Daniel 5:10

Now the queen, by reason of the words of the king and his lords, came into the banquet house: and the queen spake and said, O king, live for ever: let not thy thoughts trouble thee, nor let thy countenance be changed:

The merrymaking ceased, the revelry stopped, and a death-like silence came over the banquet hall because of the handwriting. The queen broke the silence by informing the king of Daniel (Daniel 5:10-12).

The queen—came—This is generally allowed to have been the widow of Nebuchadnezzar; if so, she was the queen Amiyt, daughter of Astyages, sister of Darius the Mede, and aunt of Cyrus, according to Polyhistor, cited by Cedrenus. See Calmet. Others think that Nitocris was the person who is said to be queen when Cyrus took the city; and is stated to have been a lady of eminent wisdom and discretion, and to have had the chief direction of the public affairs. She was the mother of Labynithus; and, if this be the same as Belshazzar, she must be the person here introduced.¹⁹

¹⁷ Robert Deffinbaugh, Biblical Studies Press, www.bible.org, 1995

¹⁸ *David Guzik's Commentaries on the Bible* are reproduced by permission of David Guzik, Germany.

¹⁹ Adam Clarke's Commentary

Daniel 5:11

There is a man in thy kingdom, in whom *is* the spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of thy father light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, was found in him; whom the king Nebuchadnezzar thy father, the king, *I say*, thy father, made master of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, *and* soothsayers;

Note Daniel's exalted position...

[There is a man in thy kingdom] It is always good to have a man of this type in any kingdom. It is even good to have such men in the church. They were plentiful in early times (1 Cor. 1:7; 1 Cor. 12:4-11).

[in whom is the spirit of the holy gods] The queen (Daniel 5:10-12), Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4:8-9,18), and others (Daniel 5:14-16) recognized that the Holy Spirit was in Daniel.

[made master of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers] This was done by Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2:48).

Daniel 5:12

Forasmuch as an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, interpreting of dreams, and showing of hard sentences, and dissolving of doubts, were found in the same Daniel, whom the king named Belshazzar: now let Daniel be called, and he will show the interpretation.

She also uses Daniel's Hebrew name...

Sevenfold testimony of Daniel:

1. He had the Holy Spirit in him (Daniel 5:11).
2. He had an excellent Spirit (Daniel 5:12).
3. He was full of knowledge.
4. He had great understanding.
5. He had the gift of interpreting dreams.
6. He could solve hard sentences.
7. He could dissolve all doubts.

[now let Daniel be called, and he will shew the interpretation] The queen had absolute faith in Daniel for he had never failed (Daniel 2:19-49; Daniel 4:8-30).

The queen mother²⁰ does not seem to have attended the banquet, but eventually the cries of those in the banquet hall reach her ears, and she arrives on the scene. Taking note of

²⁰ Various theories attempt to identify the "queen" in this text. The best seems to be that this was not the king's wife but rather his mother. Her words sound more like that of a mother than a wife, and she seems to have a better knowledge of previous history than Belshazzar. Furthermore, she was not present at the banquet, which would not have been unusual if this were the king's mother (who wants his mother to see

Belshazzar's appearance and demeanor, she tries to calm him. She informs the king that in the past a man named Daniel had successfully dealt for many years with such difficult matters. Daniel could decipher the words and their meaning.

The queen has great confidence in Daniel's ability based upon his track record in the history of Babylonian affairs. Her summary of Daniel's accomplishments in verse 12 suggests that Daniel performed other amazing tasks throughout the lifetime of king Nebuchadnezzar. Those recorded in the Book of Daniel are but a sampling of Daniel's ministry to the king.

Sadly, we must observe that the queen mother's confidence in Daniel does not seem to have been related to any personal faith in his God. She refers to Daniel and his great wisdom in pagan terms and makes no reference to Daniel's God as the God of the Jews. She simply refers to his wisdom as having its source in "the gods." His wisdom was extraordinary, but not the wisdom of a sovereign God. Her knowledge of Daniel and his God is superior to that of Belshazzar, but inferior to that of Nebuchadnezzar's final assessment (see Daniel 4:2-3, 34-37). Her confidence does seem to produce a calming effect on the king and his guests. The king summons Daniel to appear before the king and his guests that very night.²¹

(Guzik) a. The queen . . . came to the banquet hall: This **queen** (or queen mother) is hard to identify with certainty. Probably it is Belshazzar's mother, the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar.

b. There is a man in your kingdom: When the wise men were called to explain the writing on the wall to Belshazzar, Daniel apparently was not called. It seems that Daniel was semi-retired, still holding a government office yet "out of the loop."

c. This Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar: The queen refers to Daniel by his Jewish name, showing respect for his faith and background.²²

Daniel 5:13

Then was Daniel brought in before the king. And the king spake and said unto Daniel, Art thou that Daniel, which art of the children of the captivity of Judah, whom the king my father brought out of Jewry?

Daniel was now about 88 years old. He apparently had been retired for some time and wasn't known in Belshazzar's court. The queen-mother spoke highly of Daniel and his wisdom. He had managed to lead a pure and godly life in the pagan court of Babylon.²³

him drunk and disorderly?). It would have been a social blunder if it were his wife; it was, after all, a banquet at which the king, his nobles, wives and concubines were present (see verse 2).

²¹ Robert Deffinbaugh, Biblical Studies Press, www.bible.org, 1995

²² David Guzik's Commentaries on the Bible are reproduced by permission of David Guzik, Germany.

²³ Chuck Smith Sermon Notes, Book of Daniel, Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa, CA

Daniel 5:14

I have even heard of thee, that the spirit of the gods *is* in thee, and *that* light and understanding and excellent wisdom is found in thee.

[heard of thee] This was a true report (Daniel 5:14-16).

Daniel 5:15

And now the wise *men*, the astrologers, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing, and make known unto me the interpretation thereof: but they could not show the interpretation of the thing:

[they could not shew the interpretation of the thing] "They could not" is a familiar phrase in connection with man apart from God.

Twenty-one Things that People Could Not Do: (Dake)

1. Dwell together because of the abundance of their stock (Genesis 13:6).
2. Speak peaceably unto Joseph (Genesis 37:4).
3. Produce lice (magicians, Exodus 8:18).
4. Stand before Moses (magicians, Exodus 9).
5. Drink of waters of Marah (Exodus 15:23).
6. Stand before their enemies (Joshua 7:12; Judges 2:14).
7. Drive them out (Joshua 15:63; Joshua 17:12).
8. Follow David to battle (1 Samuel 30:21).
9. Recover themselves in defeat before Israel (2 Chron. 14:13).
10. Cause Israel to cease work on the temple (Ezra 5:5).
11. Drink of the bloody waters (Psalm 78:44).
12. Spread the sail (Isaiah 33:23).
13. Read the writing (Daniel 5:8).
14. Show the interpretation (Daniel 5:15).
15. Bring the boat to land (Jonah 1:13).
16. Cure someone (Matthew 17:16; Mark 9:18; Luke 9:40).
17. Answer Him again (Luke 14:6).
18. Take hold of His words (Luke 20:26).
19. Believe, because they hardened their own hearts and refused to do so (John 12:39).
20. Enter into rest because of their unbelief (Hebrews 3:19).
21. Endure the voice of God (Hebrews 12:20).²⁴

²⁴ Dake Study Notes, Dake Study Bible

Daniel 5:16

And I have heard of thee, that thou canst make interpretations, and dissolve doubts: now if thou canst read the writing, and make known to me the interpretation thereof, thou shalt be clothed with scarlet, and *have* a chain of gold about thy neck, and shalt be the third ruler in the kingdom.

Dissolve doubts—Untie knots—unbind what is bound. An expression used in the east to signify a judge of eminent wisdom and skill.

When Daniel arrived, the king was eager to assure himself that this was the man the queen mother had recommended with the credentials to perform the task at hand. His questions all pertain to Daniel's ministry during the reign of his "father" Nebuchadnezzar. They will, to some degree, become the basis for Daniel's indictment of the king's sin in the verses which follow. The question then will not be whether Daniel demonstrated divine wisdom, but what this king did with the knowledge of such wisdom.

The failure of all the other wise men in the kingdom is reported to Daniel in the words of verse 15. Daniel was being asked to do what no other wise man in Babylon could do, all having failed before Daniel was summoned. If Daniel was able to fulfill the king's request, there would be a reward. The king promised royal clothing, a gold necklace, and a position of power directly under him. Obviously, the king was eager to know what those words on the wall meant.²⁵

Daniel 5:17

Then Daniel answered and said before the king, Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation.

[Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another] The true answer of a man of God who renders service to his fellowmen.

The king offered Daniel beautiful gifts and great power if he would explain the writing, but Daniel turned him down. Daniel was not motivated by material rewards. His entire life had been characterized by doing right. Daniel was not showing disrespect in refusing the gifts, but he was growing older himself and knew the gifts would do him little good. Daniel wanted to show that he was giving an unbiased interpretation to the king. Doing right should be our first priority, not gaining power or rewards. Do you love God enough to do what is right, even if it means giving up personal rewards?²⁶

²⁵ Robert Deffinbaugh, Biblical Studies Press, www.bible.org, 1995

²⁶ Life Application Notes

Daniel 5:18

O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour:

Daniel 5:19

And for the majesty that he gave him, all people, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him: whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down.

This interprets the type of kingdom represented by the head of gold—an absolute monarchy (Daniel 2:38).

Daniel 5:20

But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him:

[when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride] Pride always goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall (Job 33:14-29; Proverbs 16:18).

Daniel 5:21

And he was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling *was* with the wild asses: they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and *that* he appointeth over it whomsoever he will.

[they fed him] This suggests that men protected and cared for Nebuchadnezzar more or less during his insanity. Although he did live with the animals he had some human care until he became sane again.

5:21-23 Belshazzar knew Babylonian history, and so he knew how God had humbled Nebuchadnezzar. Nevertheless, Belshazzar's banquet was a rebellious challenge to God's authority as he took the sacred goblets from God's temple and drank from them. No one who understands that God is the Creator of the universe should be foolish enough to challenge him.

5:22 Often kings would kill the bearer of bad news. But Daniel was not afraid to tell the truth to the king even though it was not what he wanted to hear. We should be just as courageous in telling the truth under pressure.

Daniel 5:22

And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this;

[his son] Literally, his grandson.

[O Belshazzar] Daniel preached to Belshazzar giving him the exact cause of his ruin. His sin was the same as that of Nebuchadnezzar (cp. Daniel 4:25-36 with Daniel 5:22-30).

[hast not humbled thine heart] Six sins of Belshazzar:

1. Did not humble himself in his heart.
2. Did not profit by the dealings of God with his grandfather (Daniel 5:22)
3. Exalted himself against God (Daniel 5:23)
4. Desecrated the sanctified vessels of the house of God (Daniel 5:23)
5. Praised idol gods (Daniel 5:23)
6. Refused to glorify the true God who gives life to all (Daniel 5:23)

Daniel 5:23

But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose *are* all thy ways, hast thou not glorified:

[which see not, nor hear, nor know] Compare Psalm 115:4-8; Psalm 135:15-17; Isaiah 37:19; Isaiah 46:6-7; Habakkuk 2:18-19; 1 Cor. 8:4.

[and the God in whose hand thy breath is] Compare Genesis 2:7; Job 12:10; Job 34:14-15; Psalm 104:29; Psalm 146:4; Isaiah 42:5; Acts 17:25-29.

[whose are all thy ways] Compare Job 31:4; Psalm 139:3; Proverbs 20:24; Jeremiah 10:23; Hebrews 4:13.

(Guzik) a. **Let your gifts be for yourself:** Remember that Daniel was troubled when he had to give Nebuchadnezzar bad news (Daniel 4:19). This isn't the case here. Daniel is not impressed with this successor of Nebuchadnezzar.

b. **You his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this:** Why is Daniel so harsh? Because Belshazzar should have known better. Even if he was not raised in a godly home, Romans 1 reminds us that all men know of God through creation. Belshazzar should have known even more through God's dealings with and through Daniel. We are all responsible to honor God according to what revelation we have.

c. **The God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified:** It would be easy for Belshazzar to think that he never did anything against the God of Israel - at least nothing *too bad*. Yet at the very least, he had **not glorified** the true God, and every creature is obligated to give glory to their Creator.

i. The **breath** of the creature should praise the Creator, but Belshazzar blasphemed God with his breath. The **ways** of the creature should glorify the Creator, but Belshazzar used his **ways** to mock and offend God. Every creature owes something to the Creator.

ii. "If God held Belshazzar responsible, my friend, for the ray of light which shone across *his* pathway, what will He say to men living in the blaze of light which illuminates the world today? Every unconverted man in this country has more light than Belshazzar had." (Talbot)²⁷

Daniel 5:24

Then was the part of the hand sent from him; and this writing was written.

[**Then was the part of the hand sent from him**] It appears from this that the hand still appeared on the wall up to this point. If so, then it was there for some time, until the wise men failed to make the mystery known and Daniel was called, as in Daniel 5:13-24.

Belshazzar used the goblets from the temple for his party, and God condemned him for this act. We must not use for sinful purposes what has been dedicated to God. Today this would include church buildings, financial donations, and anything else that has been set apart for serving God. Be careful how you use what is God's.

Daniel begins by turning down Belshazzar's reward. Let the king keep his gifts or give them to someone else. Why would he decline Belshazzar's offer? Daniel knows that the king's gifts are virtually useless. What good would it do Daniel to be given the third highest office in the administration of Belshazzar when his reign would end that very night? Daniel was God's servant, divinely gifted to interpret dreams. He would not prostitute his gift by using it for his own gain. His was a gift of grace, and he would use it that way. Finally, Daniel was not "for hire." As God's prophet, Daniel spoke to men for God. He was not like Balaam, whose ministry could be bought. When the king pressed Daniel to take the gifts, Daniel did so, knowing he had faithfully carried out his task as God's servant.

Verses 18-24 are fascinating. In these verses Daniel explains the guilt of king Belshazzar. The writing on the wall, explained in verses 25-28, speak of the imminent judgment of God which will fall upon Belshazzar and his kingdom, due to sin. Daniel spends more time on the king's guilt than on his punishment, as he devotes more time to explaining the reason for the writing than the meaning of the writing.

Verses 18-24 are intriguing also because they focus on Belshazzar's father, Nebuchadnezzar. Belshazzar's sin is attributed to his failure to learn from history. The great head of gold was Nebuchadnezzar, the one into whose hand God gave king Jehoiakim, the king of Judah. He was the one who had brought the vessels from the

²⁷ *David Guzik's Commentaries on the Bible* are reproduced by permission of David Guzik, Germany.

temple in Jerusalem to Babylon (1:1-2; 5:2). Under his reign, Daniel's divinely bestowed wisdom became evident and was displayed on various occasions. The queen mother's words in 5:10-12 focus on Daniel's wisdom during the days of Nebuchadnezzar. Now, when Daniel rebukes this king, he does so because he ignored the lessons he should have learned from the past, through his father's experiences with Daniel and his God.

The events of Daniel 4 are now repeated, as a lesson which not only Nebuchadnezzar learned but which Belshazzar his son should have learned as well. God sovereignly granted Nebuchadnezzar power, glory, and majesty, and he exercised that power and authority over mankind. But his heart became proud, and he acted arrogantly. God temporarily took away his power and his kingdom, and he became like the beasts of the field, eating grass and living in the elements without shelter. All this happened so that he might recognize God as the ruler over mankind and recognize that all human authority is delegated to men by God, from whom all authority is derived.

Belshazzar knew these things, and yet he had not learned from them. His heart was now proud and haughty like that of his forefather Nebuchadnezzar. He exalted himself *against* the God of heaven, as evidenced in his profaning the holy vessels taken from the temple. His sin was shared by those who ate and drank toasts with him that night. Rather than glorifying the God of heaven, whom he had heard about in relationship to his forefather, Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar blasphemed the name of God by profaning the temple vessels. This was the reason for the writing on the wall. The blasphemous use of the vessels and the writing on the wall were inseparably related. Judgment day had arrived.²⁸

McGee: Daniel preaches a very pointed and powerful sermon to Belshazzar. God had given the kingdom to Nebuchadnezzar, and he had been an absolute sovereign whom no man could question or hinder and whose wishes and whims were the law of the realm. However, when Nebuchadnezzar became filled with pride, God humbled him to a tragic episode. When Daniel reminds Belshazzar of Nebuchadnezzar's humiliating experience, you wonder if Daniel is rubbing it in. Perhaps he is. He is reminding this young proud king that if he is lifted up by pride, it is either because of his drinking or because he is insane.

Belshazzar was a proud and vain man. Although he knew of his grandfather's insanity and of his descent to the level of a beast, he had not profited by this experience. Instead, he had committed sacrilege in using the vessels taken from God's temple in Jerusalem. He had defied the living and true God; and, by the profane use of that which had been holy, he had mocked God and insulted Him. Knowing the truth, he yet rejected it.

God destroys only those who have known the truth and have refused it. During the Great Tribulation Period those who will be deluded are those who have rejected the light. Paul writes in 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12, "Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." Daniel is telling Belshazzar the principle by which God operates and which Paul has also since confirmed. The Lord Jesus also made this very

²⁸ Robert Deffinbaugh, Biblical Studies Press, www.bible.org, 1995

clear when He said: “I am come in my Father’s name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive” (John 5:43).

The people in Germany who accepted Hitler were the same people that had rejected the Word of God in Christ. When you turn your back on the truth, you are wide open for any cult or ism which comes along. Why is it that cults and isms are growing today? Why is it that we hear so much about demonism and the worship of Satan? These things are being manifested in our nation because it is a nation that has had the Word of God and has rejected it.

We desperately need the *teaching* of the Word of God. We have enough preaching—we have enough people telling us what they think. What does *God* say? What difference does it make what you or I think? What God thinks—that is what is important.

Daniel concludes his sermon by stating that the handwriting was from God whom Belshazzar had spurned and ridiculed and blasphemed. Some people wonder if he had committed an unpardonable sin. I’ll let you answer that. I just know that he had an opportunity here to receive the truth, and he turned it down.²⁹

Daniel 5:25

And this is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.

[the writing] The writing could not be understood until interpreted by Daniel. To teach that the original writing was in Aramaic, Hebrew, Samaritan, or any known language of the Babylonian Empire is to propagate fallacy, for, if this had been the case, some of the lords from all over the empire could have interpreted it without the divine help through Daniel. There is no indication that he could read it by his own natural ability. As to the words being in Aramaic, they are translations of the original words in some unknown language.

[MEME, MEME] MENE, MENE, meaning numbered, numbered, i.e. repeated for the sake of emphasis. God has numbered your kingdom, and it is finished (Daniel 5:25-26).

[TEKEL] TEKEL, meaning weighed. You are weighed in the balances, and are found lacking (Daniel 5:25,27).

[UPHARSIN] UPHARSIN or PHARSIN is the plural of PERES meaning division. Your kingdom is split up and given to the Medes and Persians (Daniel 5:25,28).

²⁹McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (3:560). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Daniel 5:26

This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it.

Daniel 5:27

TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.

The writing on the wall was a message for all those who defy God. Although Belshazzar had power and wealth, his kingdom was totally corrupt, and he could not withstand the judgment of God. God’s time of judgment comes for all people. If you have forgotten God and slipped into a sinful way of life, turn away from your sin now before he removes any opportunities to repent. Ask God to forgive you, and begin to live by his standards of justice.³⁰

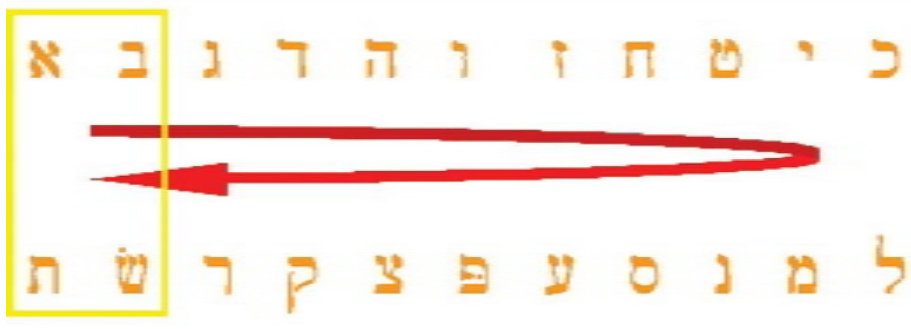
Daniel 5:28

PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.

The Handwriting on the Wall

Talmudic assertion: written vertically and backwards...Other ancient traditions assume Atbash encryption...

Atbash



(Assuming atbash encryption)

³⁰ Life Application Notes



Mene: Numbered, Reckoned. “God hath numbered thy kingdom and finished it.” Your number is up.

Tekel: Weighed. “Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.”

Peres: Broken, Divided. “Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and the Persians.”

(By implying a different vowel, “paras” rather than “peres.” It also becomes a play on words: *paras* was the word for Persia.)

The Medes and Persians joined forces to overthrow Babylon. This event was predicted in the second phase of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in Daniel 2—the silver chest and arms.

Deffinbaugh: Three little words compose the message, one of which was repeated. They seem to be Aramaic words. While these words may have been familiar to the king, the message in writing was so terse he could not understand it. Now, Daniel is about to interpret the meaning of the words on the wall.

Scholars have spent considerable effort to explore the origin and meaning of each of these three terms.³¹ We need not rely on such efforts to determine the meaning of the writing on the wall. The king did not need a dictionary; he needed the interpretation of the meaning of these three words as written, in the context of that moment of history. In effect, it would seem that the message on the wall was a kind of abbreviation, summed up in three words. Imagine a three point message!

Daniel explained that the twice-used term ‘MENE’ informed the king that God had numbered his kingdom and was putting an end to it (verse 26). In effect, God seems to be saying to Belshazzar, “Time’s up.” ‘TEKEL’ meant the king had been weighed on the scales of divine justice and found deficient. The king had given God short measure. ‘PERES’³² is the divine notification that the Babylonian kingdom was to be divided and handed over to the Medes and the Persians (verse 28).³³

³¹ It seems to be fairly conclusively proven, for example, that all three terms are units for the measurement of weight. Various theories also show how the letters and words were arranged. There even seem to be puns or word plays here. See Walvoord, pp. 127-129 and Baldwin, pp. 123-125.

³² The “U” of the term ‘UPHARSIN’ is equivalent to “and.” ‘PHARSIN’ is the plural of ‘PERES.’ See Walvoord, p. 128.

³³ Robert Deffinbaugh, Biblical Studies Press, www.bible.org, 1995

Daniel 5:29

Then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

[commanded Belshazzar] Belshazzar rewarded him according to his word, but Daniel did not exercise third rulership over Babylon due to the fact that the Medes and Persians took over the kingdom that very night (Daniel 5:30). Thus ended the kingdom of Babylon after holding Israel in captivity for 70 years (Jeremiah 25; Daniel 9:2).

[scarlet] Purple.

[put a chain of gold about his neck] Put the chain of political dignity upon his neck.

Clothed Daniel with scarlet— $\diamond \square \Sigma \textcircled{R} / \diamond$ *argevana*, more probably with purple. The gold chain about the neck was an emblem of magisterial authority. It is often thus mentioned in Scripture.

Verse 29 describes the king's response, which, like his life and administration, was found wanting. Belshazzar's response to Daniel imply two sad realities. First, the king's response indicates he believed Daniel had given him the true interpretation of the writing on the wall. He rewarded Daniel as he had promised to anyone who could interpret the writing on the wall. When he rewarded Daniel, he gave testimony to the truth of the interpretation Daniel had given. Surely he would never have rewarded Daniel for an interpretation he believed to be inaccurate.

Second, the king's response is sadly deficient. While Daniel is not said to have urged the king to repent, as he did with Nebuchadnezzar (4:27), prophecy affords sinners the opportunity to repent.³⁴ Daniel does not indicate how much time is left for the king. We know from the final verses of the passage that the night would not pass before the king was put to death. For him, there were only minutes—at the most hours—to repent, and he did not do so.

Is this one final act of pride described in verse 29? Did the king take such pride that his word would be carried out that he spent his last moments bestowing the promised reward upon Daniel, a reward Daniel had already turned down? Or did the king think that putting Daniel in a position of power might change things? I believe Daniel turned down the reward before he interpreted the writing on the wall because he wanted the king to know his was a ministry of grace. The king's insistence on rewarding Daniel, even in the last moments of his own life, was to be understood as a rejection of grace. The king's promise was fulfilled, but at the same time, his doom was sealed. How tragic to be preoccupied with purple clothing, a gold necklace, and the promotion of men, rather than with eternal destiny.³⁵

³⁴ See Jeremiah 18:5-8; Jonah 3.

³⁵ Robert Deffinbaugh, Biblical Studies Press, www.bible.org, 1995

Daniel 5:30

In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain.

[that night] The night of the drunken feast and the handwriting on the wall (Daniel 5:1,30).

[king of the Chaldeans slain] Xenophon says he was slain by two lords, Gadatas and Gobrias, who joined Cyrus to avenge themselves of certain wrongs which Belshazzar had done them.

In that night was Belshazzar—slain—Xenophon says, he was dispatched by two lords, Gadatas and Gobrias, who went over to Cyrus, to avenge themselves of certain wrongs which Belshazzar had done them. We have already seen that Cyrus entered the city by the bed of the Euphrates, which he had emptied, by cutting a channel for the waters, and directing them into the marshy country.³⁶

Darius diverted the river Euphrates when the soldiers of Babylon were drunk. The drunken soldiers had neglected to bolt the gates, so Darius and his men were able to get into the city, despite all its elaborate fortifications (Isaiah 44:28-45, Jeremiah 50:38). The fall of Babylon foreshadows the fall of the great commercial center also called Babylon in Revelation 18. It appears that Babylon will be rebuilt by greedy men who love materialism as much as Belshazzar did.³⁷

Daniel 5:31

And Darius the Median took the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old.

[Darius the Median] Darius the Mede (Daniel 5:31; Daniel 6:1-27; Daniel 9:1). Many have denied the existence of this king due to the fact that the word Darius was merely an appellative denoting the Maintainer, and was used as such by Xerxes and others. This Darius is not listed in secular history by the name of Darius the Mede. He is thought to be Astyages. He reigned over Babylon before Darius I, II, and III of profane history. He is not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture outside of Daniel. Josephus speaks of him as being the son of Astyages and kinsman of Cyrus, saying that he took Daniel into Media and exalted him as his chief ruler over the princes of the provinces, trusting him with everything of importance in his realm (Josephus, Book 10, ch. 11). Daniel speaks nothing of the war that raged between the Babylonians and the Medes, but the other prophets do (Isaiah 13, Isaiah 14, Isaiah 45, Isaiah 46, Isaiah 47; Jeremiah 1, Jeremiah 51). The Medes and Persians were confederates in this war; the former under Darius and the latter under Cyrus. Both princes were supposed to have been present at the taking of Babylon.

³⁶ Adam Clarke's Commentary

³⁷ Chuck Smith Sermon Notes, Book of Daniel, Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa, CA

Darius the Median took the kingdom—This is supposed to be the same as Cyaxares, son of Astyages and maternal uncle of Cyrus, to whom he gave the throne of Babylon, after himself had had the honor of taking the city.

Daniel speaks nothing of the war that raged between the Babylonians and the Medes; but Isaiah speaks particularly of it, chap. 13, 14, 45, 46, 47.; and so does Jeremiah, chap. 50, 51. I need not add, that it is largely spoken of by profane authors. The Medes and Persians were confederates in the war; the former under Darius, the latter under Cyrus. Both princes are supposed to have been present at the taking of this city. Mandane, daughter of Astyages, was mother of Cyrus, and sister to Cyaxares.³⁸

Darius and his soldiers entered Babylon by diverting the river that ran through the city, then walking in on the dry riverbed.

This Darius is not to be confused with Darius I, mentioned in Ezra, Haggai, and Zechariah, or Darius II (the Persian), mentioned in Nehemiah. Darius the Mede is named only in the book of Daniel. Other records name no king between Belshazzar and Cyrus. Thus, Darius may have been (1) appointed by Cyrus to rule over Babylon as a province of Persia, (2) another name for Cyrus himself or for his son, Cambyses, or (3) a descendant of Xerxes I.

While Daniel had not given a time frame for when his kingdom would end, the inference of Daniel's words was that time had run out for the king. Did the king even have time to sober up enough to understand what Daniel had told him? That very night the writing on the wall was fulfilled. Belshazzar was killed, and Darius the Mede came to power.

Secular history fills in much detail here showing how the Babylonian king felt secure within the walls of that great city and how Darius managed to lower the level of the River Euphrates which flowed through the city so that his army could enter the city unhindered. Daniel omits these details, perhaps because they diminish the impact of the swift and devastating fulfillment of prophecy.

Daniel intends for us to grasp this one thing: *the Word of God is sure*. God brought about the downfall of Babylon and Belshazzar, its king, just as He said. The history books provide details of this defeat, but Daniel underscores the one thing they will all omit: the death of Belshazzar and the defeat of Babylon was the judgment of God on a city and a people who profaned the name of the God of Israel. God will not be mocked.³⁹

³⁸ Adam Clarke's Commentary

³⁹ Robert Deffinbaugh, Biblical Studies Press, www.bible.org, 1995

Deffinbaugh Conclusion

We see from our passage that the events of that fateful final night in Belshazzar's banquet hall did not profit him at all. We may conclude then that Daniel 5 was written more for our edification than for Belshazzar. Let us conclude our study by highlighting some of the lessons we should learn from the writing on the wall.

(1) The deadly nature of the sin of pride. Pride is the evil response of sinful men to the grace of God. It is taking personal credit for what God has given or accomplished. Pride was the root sin necessitating the disciplining of Nebuchadnezzar, as we learn both from Daniel 4 and our text in chapter 5. Pride was also the sin of Belshazzar. It led to his blasphemous acts with the temple vessels and, ultimately, to his death.

The Bible views pride as a dreaded and deadly sin. In our culture today, pride is seen more as a virtue. In our culture, it is not something men have too much of, but something men believe they lack and need more of. Why does the Bible condemn men for thinking too highly of themselves and command them to do otherwise (see Philippians 2:1-11), while our culture tells us the great evil, the source of many social ills, is the lack of self-esteem? If self-esteem is not another name for pride, then what is it, and when is it ever described, defended, or advocated in the Scriptures?

Like his father, Belshazzar did not see God for who He is. He had no adequate grasp of the greatness of God, which always results in humility—a realistic view of ourselves. Only when we esteem God rightly do we see ourselves correctly. Pride swells men's ego to the point that God is small, and He can be controlled by men. True worship sees God as "high and lifted up," infinitely wise and all-powerful. True worship causes men to fall before God in humble praise and adoration. To fail to acknowledge the glory of God and pursue and promote one's own glory is to pursue death. We must not fail to learn this from the death of Belshazzar.

(2) The inadequacy of secular wisdom. Three times in the first five chapters of Daniel, the wisest men in the land were summoned by the king to tell him the truth which had been divinely revealed. Each time, the wise men were forced to acknowledge their inability to do so. Secular wisdom can never provide the answers for the all-important, spiritual and eternal issues of life:

(Isaiah 55:8-9) 8 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Neither are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. 9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts

(Romans 11:33-36) 33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! 34 FOR WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? 35 OR WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? 36 For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen (see also 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; 2:6-16).

A popular phrase frequently heard in Christian circles today says something like this: "All truth is God's truth." On the face of it, this is surely true. The problem is in placing secularly derived truth on the same level as divinely revealed truth. God's truth, as revealed in His Word, is the only truth we need to be saved and to live godly lives in this

world (see 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 4:12-13; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:22-25; 2:1-3; 2 Peter 1:2-4, 16-21; 3:14-18).

Why are Christians turning more and more to the secular wisdom of men (sometimes Christian men) for that which is essential for life and godliness? Are the Scriptures not sufficient? Is the cross of Christ not the solution for sin? What does the world offer that is better than the Bible has to offer? Christians are turning to secular wisdom for truth, guidance, and direction, when the Book of Daniel turns us to divine revelation. It is time to get back to the Book!

(3) Seeing the hand of God in history. The spiritual, divinely inspired account of the fall of Babylon differs greatly from that of secular accounts. I must admit it was tempting for me to “fill in” some details of the fall of Babylon from sources outside the Scriptures. But then it struck me: Daniel’s account includes all that God felt it necessary for us to know. It is not wrong to know more, but all we need to know, God has revealed in the Bible.

Daniel’s account differs greatly from the secular accounts of the historians. How and why Daniel differs is significant and instructive. Secular accounts focus on the political and administrative blunders of Belshazzar and Babylon. Daniel focuses on the moral failures of Belshazzar and the nobility of Babylon. Secular history would look at the death of Belshazzar and his kingdom from a political point of view. The Bible describes the same incidents from a spiritual viewpoint. The moral failure was that of pride. The sin was that of blasphemy and failing to give God the glory which is His. Secular accounts would focus on diverting of the river which passed under or through the walls of Babylon, while the Bible focuses on divine judgment. The city fell because this was God’s judgment on a wicked nation and a wicked king.

Daniel 5 describes the hand of God in the writing on the wall, but it also describes the hand of God in the history of Babylon and of Israel. To Belshazzar the “hand of God” was a bizarre and frightening thing. To the Christian, seeing “the hand of God” in history should be a constant mindset. Allow me illustrate this mindset.

In the past few weeks, we have seen the division of the USSR, the downfall of the Communist party, and the Communist domination of the Soviet Union. As we have watched the news, people have even had opportunity to ask questions of Soviet leaders Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin. In all of the explanations, the simplest, ultimate reason for the fall of Communism has been overlooked: Communism rule in Russia has toppled because God has divinely judged it. Communism was allowed to rule for a time. Communism denies the existence of God and resists the church of Jesus Christ and the proclamation of the gospel. Communism was given its day in the sun to achieve those purposes which God had for it. Now, judgment day has come for Communism. The cause of the events which have taken place in Russia are not found in the political realm but in the spiritual realm. We must see the hand of God in the history of the USSR.

(4) Learning from history. I am impressed that while Belshazzar’s punishment was revealed by the writing on the wall, this king’s sin was the result of his failure to heed the lessons which his father, Nebuchadnezzar, had learned. The basis for Belshazzar’s judgment was his failure to heed history and the lessons of his father. All the king needed to know in order to honor God and be spared from divine judgment, he did know. But he failed to act on what he knew from history. Even when the day of judgment was revealed through the writing on the wall, he still did not repent.

When you and I stand before God, all of the Bible will be the basis for divine judgment. We cannot say we did not know better nor can we plead ignorance. No one, in all of time, has been given so much revelation as we. I must ask: "What have you done with the revelation you have received through the Bible?" As God held Belshazzar responsible for what had happened to Nebuchadnezzar, so he will hold you and I responsible for what has happened to men through history, as revealed in His Holy Word. We must learn to heed the lessons of history.

(5) The judgment of God. Daniel 5 is the inspired account of the judgment of God, falling upon the kingdom of Babylon and upon its king, Belshazzar. How sad to read of a king who parties while his kingdom crumbles, and who fails to repent even when the day of judgment is divinely revealed to him. Refusing to heed the "hand-writing on the wall," he was judged for it. The final minutes of life were spent in matters pertaining to his earthly kingdom, rather than in seeking entrance into the eternal kingdom.

The judgment of Babylon and of Belshazzar were certain. They were also imminent. Yet the king never seemed to grasp this and act accordingly. His actions are typical of all who are blinded by sin. For this reason, our Lord warned of the dullness of men's hearts and minds, even as the day of judgment approaches:

(Matthew 24:32-44) 32 "Now learn the parable from the fig tree; when its branch has already become tender, and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; 33 even so you, too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door. 34 Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. 35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away. 36 But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. 38 For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that NOAH ENTERED THE ARK, 39 and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be. 40 Then there shall be two men in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left. Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming, 43 But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. 44 For this reason you be ready too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.

Only two letters are different in the names Belshazzar (the king) and Belteshazzar (Daniel). The life of the king was cut short, while the life of the prophet was extended, so that he outlived several Babylonian kings and served in the Medio-Persian court as well as the Babylonian court. But the difference between Belshazzar and Belteshazzar is not in the spelling of their names; the difference is in their relationship to God. Belshazzar resisted and rejected the grace of God and the revelation which he was given through history and the prophet Daniel. Belshazzar reaped the wrath of God. Belteshazzar, Daniel, trusted in God and served Him faithfully. Daniel believed, obeyed, and proclaimed God's Word, and lived on. Not only did Daniel live long in this world, but he

will live forever in the kingdom of God. May you not be like Belshazzar but like Belteshazzar.

(Isaiah 47:1-11) 1 *“Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon; Sit on the ground without a throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans. For you shall no longer be called tender and delicate, 2 Take the millstones and grind meal, Remove your veil, strip off the skirt, Uncover the legs, cross the rivers. 3 Your nakedness will be uncovered, Your shame also will be exposed; I will take vengeance and will not spare a man.”* 4 *Our Redeemer, the LORD of hosts is His name, The Holy One of Israel.* 5 *“Sit silently, and go into darkness, O daughter of the Chaldeans; For you will no more be called the queen of the Chaldeans; 6 I was angry with My people, I profaned My heritage, And gave them into your hand. You did not show mercy to them, On the aged you made your yoke very heavy. 7 Yet you said, ‘I shall be a queen forever.’ These things you did not consider, Nor remember the outcome of them. 8 Now, then, hear this, you sensual one, Who dwells securely, Who says in your heart, ‘I am, and there is no one besides me. I shall not sit as a widow, Nor shall I know loss of children.’ 9 But these two things shall come on you suddenly in one day; Loss of children and widowhood. They shall come on you in full measure In spite of your many sorceries, In spite of the great power of your spells. 10 And you felt secure in your wickedness and said, ‘No one sees me.’ Your wisdom and your knowledge, they have deluded you; For you have said in your heart, ‘I am, and there is no one besides me.’ 11 “But evil will come on you Which you will not know how to charm away; And disaster will fall on you For which you cannot atone, And destruction about which you do not know Will come on you suddenly”.*

(Isaiah 55:6-11) 6 *Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near. 7 Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the LORD, And He will have compassion on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon. 8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, Neither are your ways My ways,” declares the LORD. 9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts. 10 For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth, And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; 11 So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.*⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Robert Deffinbaugh, Biblical Studies Press, www.bible.org, 1995

Additional Notes, Missler:

Cyrus the Great & the Achaemenid Empire

Cyrus the Great was more than a great man who founded an empire (Aegean Sea to the Indus River). He is seen as the epitome of a great leader: brave and daring, yet tolerant and magnanimous. In 1971, Iran celebrated the 2500th anniversary of his monarchy.

Cyrus II (“The Great”)

Cyrus II (“the Great,” 559-530 B.C.) was the founder of the Achaemenid Persian Empire. Cyrus’ father, Cambyses I (600-559 B.C.), was king of Anshan, a region in eastern Elam (**Persia**). His mother was Mandane, a daughter of Astyages, king of **Media** (585-550 B.C.).

When Cambyses died in 559 B.C., Cyrus inherited the throne of Anshan and, after unifying the Persian people, attacked his father-in-law, the weak and corrupt Astyages. (The Median general Harpagus, whom Astyages had previously wronged, deserted the king and brought his army to the side of the young Cyrus.)

Astyages was soon captured and the Persians took the capital city of Ecbatana in 550 B.C. *without a battle*. (This was also to be the result at Babylon 11 years later.)

Cyrus succeeded in welding the Medes and Persians into a unified nation that continued for two centuries, until the time of Alexander the Great (331 B.C.).

The Conquest of Babylon

On October 12, 539 B.C., Cyrus’ general captured Babylon without a battle.

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

Herodotus

The Letter to Cyrus

When Cyrus made his grand entrance, Daniel presented him with an ancient scroll of Isaiah, which contained a personal letter *addressing him by name* [Josephus, *Antiquities*, XI, I, 2].

Isaiah had died 150 years before Cyrus was born!

(Isaiah 44:27,28) *That saith to the deep, Be dry, and I will dry up thy rivers: That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.*

(Isaiah 45:1-5) *Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; I will go before thee, and make the crooked places*

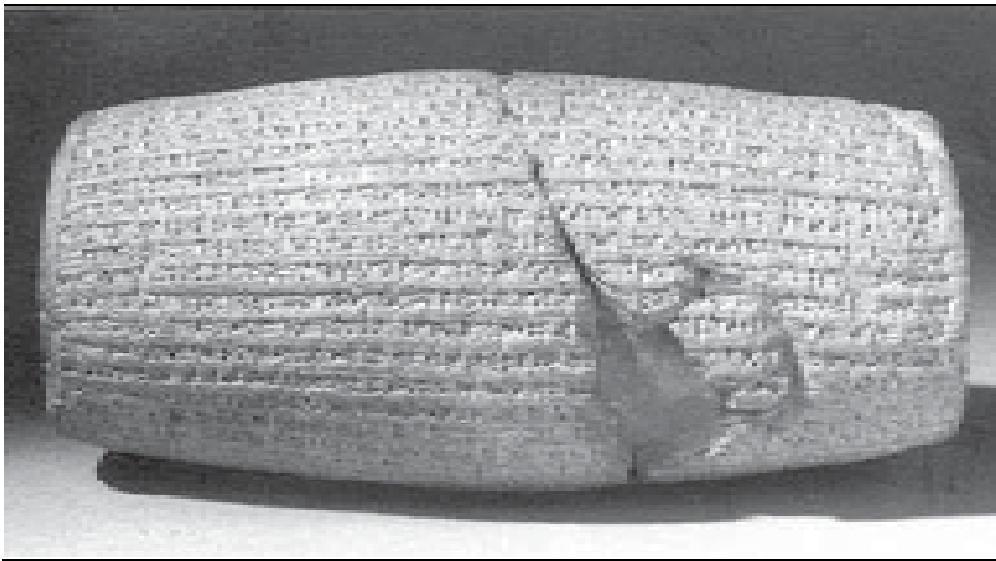
straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel. For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me. I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me:

Cyrus' Response

Cyrus was duly impressed. He freed the captives and returned the vessels that had been plundered from the Temple 70 years earlier. He even gave them incentives to return to their homeland and rebuild their temple (2 Chr 36:22; Ezra 1:1-4). [Only about 50,000 Jews responded to this royal proclamation and returned to Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel.]

The Stele of Cyrus

This cylinder, discovered by Hormuzd Rassam in the 19th century, can presently be seen in the British Museum in London.



“...without any battle, he entered the town, sparing any calamity; ... I returned to sacred cities on the other side of the Tigris, the sanctuaries of which have been ruins for a long time... and established for them permanent sanctuaries. I also gathered all their former inhabitants and returned to them their habitations.”

British Museum, London

(Ezra 1:2-3) *Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, “The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among*

you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem.”

The Decline

Cyrus claimed the title “King of Babylon.” He made his son Cambyses as his viceroy in Babylon in 538 B.C. Things remained peaceful until his death in 522 B.C.

In the reign of Darius II (521-486 B.C.) a further return of exiles to Jerusalem was allowed. His rule did not go unchallenged and several local Babylonians controlled the city for varying periods, usually taking the throne-name of “Nebuchadnezzar” to bolster their claims—Nidintu-Bel (Nebuchadnezzar III”) 522 B.C. and Araka (“Nebuchadnezzar IV”) 521 B.C.

In the fourth year of Xerxes (485-465 B.C.) the Babylonians made another attempt to gain their independence. Bel-shimanni and Shamash-eriba claimed the throne in 482 B.C. and this revolt was suppressed with much cruelty and damage to Babylon.

On his visit in 460 B.C., Herodotus reported that the city was virtually intact, however. Xerxes and his successors (Artaxerxes I - Darius III, 464-332 B.C.) had little to spare for Babylon amid their lengthy and expensive wars with Greece. Irrigation work was neglected and the diversion of trade to the main Persian road from Sardis to Susa aided the decline of the city’s influence.

The Rise of Greece

On October 1, 331 B.C. Alexander (III, “the Great”) was welcomed by the Babylonians when he entered the city after his victory over the Medes at Gaugamela. He was acclaimed king and on his return from the east nine years later he planned extensive renovations including the creation of a port for the city large enough for 1000 warships.

Though the site of Esagila was cleared, work ceased on Alexander’s ambitious plans at his death in Babylon on June 13, 323 B.C. The career of Alexander is detailed in Daniel 8. His successors, in Daniel 11. Alexander died at age of 32; the Greek Empire took 22 years to divide. The “silent years” (between the testaments) is profiled in advance in Dan 11:5-35.

The Greek Empire

Alexander is succeeded by his four generals:

- **Cassander** Macedonia & Greece
- **Lysimachus** Thrace, Bithynia, most of Asia Minor
- **Ptolemy** Egypt, Cyrene, Arabia - Sponsored the Septuagint Translation: (270 B.C.)
- **Seleucus** Syria and East to India

Antiochus Epiphanes (The “Little Horn” of Dan 8)

Atrophy & Decay

The foundation of a new rival capital city, Selucia, on the River Tigris expedited the decline of the ancient metropolis. The dispersal of Jews from Babylon is reported by Josephus (*Antiq.* XVIII, ix 6-9).

The city subsequently underwent a gradual decay, even though the ruins remained occupied. Documents on clay from a school for priests in the city continued at least until A.D.100.

Early in the first century A.D. a colony of merchants from Palmyra brought brief prosperity, but they left about A.D. 75 (Garner, p 7-8).

The city was visited by Trajan in A.D. 115. Babylon was first reported deserted by Septimus Severus 84 years later.

As recently as the 1800s the village of Hillah, containing over 10,000 inhabitants, stood on the site of ancient Babylon (Rich, p.157). In the late nineteenth century, the German archeologist Robert Koldewey conducted extensive studies at Babylon and the four Arab villages situated on the site. Babylon had been inhabited for some time even before his arrival.