

Belshazzar's Feast and the Fall of Babylon (October 11, 539 BC)

Daniel 5

Belshazzar's Feast

- 1 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.

The Writing on the Wall

- 5 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.

Daniel Summoned

- 10 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 Belteshazzar. Let Daniel now be summoned and he will declare the interpretation."
- 13 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."

A Refusal and a Rebuke

- 17 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.
- 22 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 your ways, you have not glorified.
- 24 Then the hand was sent from Him and this inscription was written out.

The Writing Explained

- 25 "Now this is the inscription that was written out: 'MENĒ, MENĒ, TEKĒL, UPHARSIN.'

26 This is the interpretation of the message: ‘MENE’—God has numbered your kingdom and put an end to it.

27 ‘TEKĒL’—you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient.

28 ‘PERĒS’—your kingdom has been divided and given over to the Medes and Persians.”

29 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.

The Fall of Babylon

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.

Darius’ New Government (November 7–24, 539 BC)

Daniel 6:1–2

1 It seemed good to Darius to appoint 120 satraps over the kingdom, that they would be in charge of the whole kingdom,

2 and over them three commissioners (of whom Daniel was one), that these satraps might be accountable to them, and that the king might not suffer loss.

Daniel Set Above All the Governors (November 25, 539 – February 21, 538 BC)

Daniel 6:3

3 Then this Daniel began distinguishing himself among the commissioners and satraps because he possessed an extraordinary spirit, and the king planned to appoint him over the entire kingdom.

Daniel and the Lion’s Den (February–March, 538 BC)

Daniel 6:4–28

The Plot

4 Then the commissioners and satraps began trying to find a ground of accusation against Daniel in regard to government affairs; but they could find no ground of accusation or *evidence of corruption*, inasmuch as he was faithful, and no negligence or corruption was *to be found* in him.

5 Then these men said, “We will not find any ground of accusation against this Daniel unless we find *it* against him with regard to the law of his God.”

6 Then these commissioners and satraps came by agreement to the king and spoke to him as follows: “King Darius, live forever!

7 All the commissioners of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the high officials and the governors have consulted together that the king should establish a statute and enforce an injunction that anyone who makes a petition to any god or man besides you, O king, for thirty days, shall be cast into the lions’ den.

8 Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document so that it may not be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which may not be revoked.”

9 Therefore King Darius signed the document, that is, the injunction.

The Accusation and Condemnation of Daniel

10 Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously.

11 Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and supplication before his God.

12 Then they approached and spoke before the king about the king’s injunction, “Did you not sign an injunction that any man who makes a petition to any god or man besides you, O king, for thirty days, is to be cast into the lions’ den?” The king replied, “The statement is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which may not be revoked.”

13 Then they answered and spoke before the king, “Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or to the injunction which you signed, but keeps making his petition three times a day.”

14 Then, as soon as the king heard this statement, he was deeply distressed and set *his* mind on delivering Daniel; and even until sunset he kept exerting himself to rescue him.

15 Then these men came by agreement to the king and said to the king, “Recognize, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no injunction or statute which the king establishes may be changed.”

16 Then the king gave orders, and Daniel was brought in and cast into the lions’ den. The king spoke and said to Daniel, “Your God whom you constantly serve will Himself deliver you.”

17 A stone was brought and laid over the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signet rings of his nobles, so that nothing would be changed in regard to Daniel.

18 Then the king went off to his palace and spent the night fasting, and no entertainment was brought before him; and his sleep fled from him.

The Deliverance of Daniel

19 Then the king arose at dawn, at the break of day, and went in haste to the lions' den.

20 When he had come near the den to Daniel, he cried out with a troubled voice. The king spoke and said to Daniel, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you constantly serve, been able to deliver you from the lions?"

21 Then Daniel spoke to the king, "O king, live forever!

22 My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths and they have not harmed me, inasmuch as I was found innocent before Him; and also toward you, O king, I have committed no crime."

23 Then the king was very pleased and gave orders for Daniel to be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den and no injury whatever was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.

The Accusers Killed and Daniel's God Honored

24 The king then gave orders, and they brought those men who had maliciously accused Daniel, and they cast them, their children and their wives into the lions' den; and they had not reached the bottom of the den before the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones.

25 Then Darius the king wrote to all the peoples, nations and *men of every* language who were living in all the land: "May your peace abound!

26 I make a decree that in all the dominion of my kingdom men are to fear and tremble before the God of Daniel;

For He is the living God and enduring forever,
And His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed,
And His dominion *will be* forever.

27 He delivers and rescues and performs signs and wonders
In heaven and on earth,
Who has *also* delivered Daniel from the power of the lions."

Daniel Prospers in the Medo-Persian Empire

28 So this Daniel enjoyed success in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

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Chronological Notes

- 1) Historical Setting of Daniel 5.¹
 - A) According to Daniel 5:30, Babylon fell to the Persian army shortly after the disastrous end of Belshazzar's banquet. The Persians marched into Babylon on October 12, 539 (16 Tishri 539). Therefore the banquet that is the historical setting of Daniel 5 must have been on the evening of October 11, 539.
 - B) At the end of chapter 4, Nebuchadnezzar had recovered from his insanity and regained his throne. He then died in 562 BC. If the final events of Daniel 4 occurred during the last year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, then Daniel 5 begins twenty-three years later, in 539 BC. However, if Nebuchadnezzar's insanity ended about 570 BC, then about thirty years has passed between the end of Daniel 4 and the events in Daniel 5.
 - C) Much had happened in the years between Nebuchadnezzar's death and Belshazzar's feast. Nebuchadnezzar was succeeded by his son Amel-marduk, who reigned two short years from 562–560. Amel-marduk was assassinated, and his brother-in-law, Neriglissar, seized the throne and ruled from 560 to 556. Neriglissar was succeeded by his young son Labashi-marduk, who reigned only a few months in 556. He was deposed in a rebellion that brought one of the members of the coup, Nabonidus, to the throne.
 - D) Nabonidus reigned from 556 BC until the fall of Babylon to the Persians in 539. He proved to be singularly unpopular in Babylon because of his devotion to the god Sin instead of the patron god of Babylon, Marduk (also called Bel). In response to this unpopularity, Nabonidus installed his son Belshazzar as coregent and voluntarily exiled himself to Tema in the Arabian Desert for some ten years. The commonly accepted date for the beginning of Belshazzar's coregency is 553, although there is good evidence that it did not begin until 550. Nabonidus was in Babylon again in 539. With the Persian

¹ Sourced from Andrew E. Steinmann, *Daniel*, Concordia Commentary (Concordia Publishing House, 2008): 259.

army approaching Babylon, Nabonidus left the city and met Cyrus in battle at Sippar two days before the fall of Babylon. The Babylonian troops were routed by the Persians, and Nabonidus fled. He later returned to Babylon after its fall to the Persians and surrendered himself. Cyrus allowed him to live the remainder of his life in Carmania according to Berosus. Therefore the sequence of Babylonian rulers after Nebuchadnezzar's death in 562 to the fall of Babylon in 539 is as follows:

- Amel-marduk (562–560)
- Neriglissar (560–556)
- Labashi-marduk (556)
- Nabonidus (556–539), with coregent Belshazzar (553–539 or 550–539)

2) Historical Setting of Daniel 6.²

- A) In Daniel 5:31, Darius the Mede (Cyrus the Persian) “received the kingdom,” and in Daniel 6:1, Darius decides to place satraps over the conquered kingdom of Babylon. It is obvious that Daniel 6 took place shortly after the fall of Babylon to the Persians.
- B) The city of Babylon was entered by the Persian commander Gubaru on 16 Tishri 539 BC (October 12, 539). The Persian king Cyrus arrived in Babylon on 3 Heshvan 539 (October 29, 539). He appointed Gubaru governor and other officials were appointed under Gubaru. However, Gubaru died on 11 Heshvan (November 6, 539). Babylonian records do not reveal who was ruler of Babylon under Cyrus between 11 Heshvan 539 and the beginning of Cyrus' first official year on 1 Nisan 538 (March 24, 538). However, almost thirty cuneiform tablets from Cyrus' first year speak of “Cyrus, king of lands, Cambyses, king of Babylon,” indicating that Cyrus' son Cambyses was placed on the throne of Babylon as coregent with his father. Moreover, Cambyses took part in the New Year's festival honoring the patron god of Babylon, Marduk (Bel)—a privilege reserved for Babylon's king. However, probably due to the difficulty Cambyses had working with Babylonian officials, he was removed from the throne nine months later and replaced by a governor named Gubaru (a different man than the now-deceased Persian commander by the same name). Beginning with the tenth month of his first year, Cyrus is called “king of Babylon, king of lands.” Gubaru remained governor beyond Cyrus' death until Cambyses' fifth year as king over the Persian Empire.
- C) We should note that Daniel was Cyrus' presumptive choice to be the person placed over the entire kingdom of Babylon (6:2). However, nowhere does Daniel 6 say that he was placed in that position. Instead, we are only told that Daniel “prospered” during the reign of Cyrus (6:28) and lived until at least Cyrus' third year (10:1). Given the trouble Cyrus had with jealousy among officials in Babylon (as evidenced by the account in Daniel 6), it appears that he decided instead to place his son Cambyses in charge. Therefore, Daniel was probably not promoted to the position of governor, though he appears to have retained important influence in the affairs of the kingdom.
- D) Thus the events of Daniel 6 take place between Cyrus' arrival in the city of Babylon in October 539 and the naming of Cambyses as king of Babylon in late March 538. We can construct a possible chronology for the events in Daniel 6 as follows:
- 3 Heshvan (October 29) 539 BC – Cyrus arrived in Babylon and appointed Gubaru governor.
 - 4–10 Heshvan (October 30–November 5) 539 – Gubaru began appointing satraps.
 - 11 Heshvan (November 6) 539 – Gubaru died.
 - 12–29 Heshvan (November 7–24) 539 – Cyrus completed appointing satraps and placed three overseers (including Daniel) over the satraps (instead of a new governor; Daniel 6:1–2).
 - Kislev 539–Shebta 538 (November 25, 539–February 21, 538) – Daniel distinguished himself; Cyrus planned to appoint him as governor of the kingdom of Babylon (Daniel 6:3).
 - Late Shebat–Adar 538 (Late February–March 23, 538) – The plot against Daniel was hatched. Daniel rescued from the lions' den.
 - 1 Nisan (March 24) 538 – At the beginning of Cyrus' first official year, Cambyses was made king of Babylon and took part in New Year's festival in Babylon.

² Sourced from Andrew E. Steinmann, *Daniel*, Concordia Commentary (Concordia Publishing House, 2008): 301–303.