

Daniel 4:34-37 NKJV And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever: For His dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom *is* from generation to generation. (35) All the inhabitants of the earth *are* reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven And *among* the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand Or say to Him, "What have You done?" (36) At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my honor and splendor returned to me. My counselors and nobles resorted to me, I was restored to my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added to me. (37) Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works *are* truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down.

You might wonder why Nebuchadnezzar was shown such mercy and grace considering what he did to God's people.

The short answer is "I don't know". The better answer is "am I any better or deserving?" No! So, the best answer is "Praise God from who all blessings flow...for His mercy endures forever". The Babylonian captivity had this interesting side-affect to bring the very one who captured the Jews to the God of the Jews.

(Daniel 5:1 NKJV) Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in the presence of the thousand.

Before we get into the text, we need to know that after 43 years, Nebuchadnezzar's reign came to an end with his death.

His son, Evil-Merodach ruled after him for 2 years.

His brother-in-law, Neriglassar, assassinated him and then he reigned for 4 years and then died.

Neriglassar's son, Laborosoarchod, ruled for 9 months. He was a child when he took the throne. He was beaten to death.

Nabonidus was appointed by those who killed the young king. Recent archeological evidence confirmed the Bible's account because Nabonidus was always considered the last king before the Persian's conquered the Babylonian Empire. His mother, who is mentioned in this chapter, may have been a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar who married his father. It's all very hazy...

But Belshazzar was his eldest son and was put in charge of the kingdom when the king was away for 10 years or so (presumably fighting the Persians). Belshazzar was co-regent with his father until 539BC when the empire could no longer strike back at the Persians.

All this info is to show that many years have passed between chapters 3 and 4 (probably about 25). It will also serve to confuse us when Belshazzar is called the 'son of Nebuchadnezzar' but we will deal with that shortly.

The chapter opens with a feast!

Big, huge feasts were the norm in the days of these empires. This king, it was noted, "drank in their presence", perhaps, to show that he was "one of the good ol' boys". More likely because of the advancing Persians, the king wanted to ensure that his support was

This is strange since there's a war going on. But perhaps the king wants to cement his support with a party!

(Daniel 5:2 NKJV) While he tasted the wine, Belshazzar gave the command to bring the gold and silver vessels which his father **Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple which *had been* in Jerusalem, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. (3) Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken from the temple of the house of God which *had been* in Jerusalem; and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. (4) **They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone.****

These vessels were created at the direction God for use in the tabernacle and then in the Temple. They were ceremonially clean having been anointed with temple/tabernacle oil and according to Josephus, blood as well. Therefore, they were consecrated to the LORD God Almighty to minister to Him.

This pagan king defiled them by having common, unclean people, men, women and even concubines drink from them as if they were just purchased from Party City!

And to add insult to injury, they even lifted those cups up to their own non-gods as if they were real!

(Daniel 5:5 NKJV) 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. (6)** Then the king's countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, **so that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other.**

I don't believe it is any coincidence that the "hand" appeared at this time and wrote on the walls...(btw: the "lampstand" was believed by many to be one from the Temple as well).

Our God will not be mocked! Even the pagans had some notion of sacrilege in their culture and this strange sight got their attention.

Some believe that there were only fingers present and not an entire hand. In either case, it had to be an eerie scene.

the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other – this was a way of saying that the king was terrified.

(Daniel 5:7 NKJV) The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. The king spoke, saying to the wise *men* of Babylon, "**Whoever reads this writing, and tells me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around his neck; and he shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.**" (8) Now all the king's wise *men* came, but they could **not read the writing**, or make known to the king its interpretation. (9) Then King Belshazzar was greatly troubled, his countenance was changed, and his lords were astonished.

Some believe that the writing was in Hebrew which is why they could not even read it. Not all agree but say that perhaps in their fear, their cognitive senses left them!

My image is of the king who is ghostly white and almost cowering in fear.

the third ruler in the kingdom: 3rd ruler means that he father is first, Belshazzar is second and this person would be third.

(Daniel 5:10 NKJV) **The queen**, because of the words of the king and his lords, came to the banquet hall. The queen spoke, saying, "O king, live forever! Do not let your thoughts trouble you, nor let your countenance change. (11) **There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God. And in the days of your father, light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, were found in him; and King Nebuchadnezzar your father—your father the king—made him chief of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers. (12) Inasmuch as an excellent spirit, knowledge, understanding, interpreting dreams, solving riddles, and explaining enigmas were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar, now let Daniel be called, and he will give the interpretation.**"

Many suppose this not to be Belshazzar's wife but the "Queen Mother" because she was very familiar with Nebuchadnezzar and the man Daniel. This woman may have been a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar.

"your father" – in ancient cultures, a father may have been an actual father, grandfather and in some cases even an uncle.

Don't let the phrase "Spirit of the Holy God" fool you. She was as pagan as they come. Her husband, Belshazzar's father, introduced the moon-god called Sin (hahaha) into the culture. But she was evidently impressed by this man, even calling him by his Hebrew name!

Daniel is in his 40's; Given his character, he would not be at this feast! And, evidently his name didn't come up until the queen mentioned him. Then again, since this is at the end of the king's reign, he simply didn't invite Daniel to come...we'll have to read more about there adventures together in Chapter 7 and 8.

(Daniel 5:13 NKJV) Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king spoke, and said to Daniel, "Are you that Daniel who is one of the captives from Judah, whom my father the king brought from Judah?"

(14) I have heard of you, that the **Spirit of God** is in you, and *that* light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you. (5:15) Now the wise *men*, the astrologers, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing and make known to me its interpretation, but they could not give the interpretation of the thing. (16) And I have heard of you, that you can give interpretations and explain enigmas. Now if you can read the writing and make known to me its interpretation, you shall be clothed with purple and *have* a chain of gold around your neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom."

(Daniel 5:17 NKJV) Then Daniel answered, and said before the king, "**Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another;** yet I will read the writing to the king and make known to him the interpretation.

This seems impertinent on Daniel's part but he had always been strong in the LORD. Again, critics believe that Daniel would have been killed right then and there for such a remark. But God has used men like him to bring difficult messages, e.g., Nathan and David and then protected them as well.

In my imagination, I see Daniel coming in and seeing the writing on the wall right away. He knows what it says and knows what it means...

(Daniel 5:18 NKJV) O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father a kingdom and majesty, glory and honor. (19) And because of the majesty that He gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whomever he wished, he executed; whomever he wished, he kept alive; whomever he wished, he set up; and whomever he wished, he put down. (20) **But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him.** (21) Then he was driven from the sons of men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling *was* with the wild donkeys. 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 rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses.**

This is a great synopsis of Nebuchadnezzar's life. Even with "**his spirit was hardened in pride**", God was able to humble him and turn his heart towards the True and Living God.

(Daniel 5:22 NKJV) "But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this.

For he had neglected the warning given him by the history of Nebuchadnezzar.

Now, if Belshazzar had known the details of his grand-father it's easy to see why he didn't want to consult with Daniel right away! Many simply do not want to know the 'real' truth but are satisfied with lies presented as truth.

(Daniel 5:23 NKJV) And you have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven. They have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your lords, your wives and your concubines, have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know; and the God who *holds* your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified. (24) Then the fingers of the hand were sent from Him, and this writing was written.

Things consecrated to God are His! He will not let those who defile by action or attitude to go unpunished.

"your gods are things created by your hands; they neither can see, hear or know...they are not real!"

But, there is a God in heaven who holds your very next breath in His Hands...therefore, glory belongs to Him and Him only!

Therefore, the fingers which wrote on the wall were sent by Him.

(Daniel 5:25 NKJV) "And this is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.

Strange indeed!

(Daniel 5:26 NKJV) This *is* the interpretation of *each* word. **MENE: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it;**

(Daniel 5:27 NKJV) **TEKEL:** You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting;

(Daniel 5:28 NKJV) **PERES:** Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians."

UPHARSIN – plural of PERES.

(Daniel 5:29 NKJV) Then Belshazzar gave the command, and they clothed Daniel with purple and *put* a chain of gold around his neck, and made a proclamation concerning

him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

The king certainly didn't put up much resistance to the message. God Almighty revealed the truth of the message deep into the king's heart. But he did have the sense to do what he said he would, and even though Daniel said that he wanted nothing, he humbly accepted his reward.

(Daniel 5:30 NKJV) That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain.

Much criticism has been made about all these things happening in one night but that's from the same critics that discount the book as being historical and/or written by Daniel at all in the timeframe claimed by most biblical scholars.

(Daniel 5:31 NKJV) And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, *being* about sixty-two years old.

The question arose in history about Belshazzar's cognitive abilities since the last verse in chapter 5 indicates that Darius the Mede conquered the city and Belshazzar was killed. The taking of Babylon was one battle of many that the Persians/Medes fought against his kingdom. This city was the 'Titanic' of its day: Archeologists conservatively estimate the dimensions of the city as follows:

- The outer walls were 17 miles long.
- The walls were 22 feet thick and 90 feet high
- The outer wall guard towers were another 100 feet high
- The gates were made of bronze
- There were inner walls and moats that made the city extremely secure.

The city was breached by the Persians with a nifty diversion of the Euphrates River into a reservoir. The river flowed under one wall and to the second wall. The Persians marched under the outer wall on "dry land" and evidently, they had sympathizers within the city who opened the gates of this second wall so that the soldiers were able to march into the city.

Several thoughts crossed my mind while reading this story.

1. This king was expected to learn from the lessons taught to Nebuchadnezzar, but he did not learn anything until it was too late.
 - a. God did not show him much mercy as He did with Nebuchadnezzar; perhaps because of the brazen way he defiled the Temple vessels by using them to get drunk!
2. For the Jews who might have read letters from Jeremiah, none of this would have come as a surprise:
 - a. **Jeremiah 51:56-58 NKJV** Because the plunderer comes against her, against Babylon, And her mighty men are taken. Every one of their bows is broken; For the LORD *is* the God of recompense, He will surely repay. (57) "And I

will make drunk Her princes and wise men, Her governors, her deputies, and her mighty men. And they shall sleep a perpetual sleep And not awake," says the King, Whose name *is* the LORD of hosts. (58) Thus says the LORD of hosts: "The broad walls of Babylon shall be utterly broken, And her high gates shall be burned with fire; The people will labor in vain, And the nations, because of the fire; And they shall be weary."

- b. [Isaiah 44:28 – 45:1-7](#) is a longer prophesy that even mentions Cyrus, king of Persia, by name from 150-200 years before.
3. Once again a mighty empire is conquered but not without help from a moral decay within it's walls and within the hearts of the people, especially the leaders.
 - a. The warning was strong but fatal.
 - i. I have weighed you on the balance and there was too much I found missing
 - ii. I, who raises up and puts down, have numbered your days as king and they are complete, even to this very day.
 - iii. I have given your kingdom over to another empire, that, while it is divided, is My sovereign decree that no man can come against.
 - b. The weighing of the king's life was nothing less than God's Perfect and Righteous Judgment; When Christ rules and judges, a similar reaction will take place. Belshazzar's judgment was such that he could not argue or debate. His silence spoke volumes as He encountered the true King of all Creation.
4. The 'writing on the walls' was like writing on the stone tablets; the writing on the stone tablets were written on our hearts. Paul clearly understood. Throughout the ages God could be clearly seen by us through all His creation. And if that were not enough, some were chosen to hear His voice. He also revealed Himself through His Word whether written on stone, plaster walls, skins, metal or paper. And finally, the ultimate revelation was the sending of His Son. Yes, Paul understood, and he wrote to us:
 - a. [Romans 1:20-23 NKJV](#) For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, **so that they are without excuse**, (21) because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. (22) Professing to be wise, they became fools, (23) and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.
 - b. Therefore, how much more are they without excuse who have heard, ignored or rejected Jesus?
- 5.