

DANIEL

6. THE WRITING ON THE WALL



Silent as a shadow, an uninvited guest enters the royal citadel for Babylon's last feast and writes Belshazzar's sentence on the palace wall!

HIGH POINTS OF CHAPTER 5

- The prince who knew the best, but chose the worst.
- A great city drinks itself to destruction.
- King Belshazzar's judgment day.
- The unerring balances of God

THE MYSTERY OF BELSHAZZAR

This chapter introduces us to another ruler – Belshazzar, the last King of Babylon. His name meant “Bel protect the king.” (Bel was another name for the god Marduk.)

Until recent times, complete mystery surrounded Belshazzar. Unlike the famous Nebuchadnezzar, his name had never been found outside Daniel's writings. As well, all the ancient historians listed Nabonidus a Babylon's last king. So critics concluded that the story of Belshazzar was simply a myth.

THE SOLUTION

In 1854, Sir Henry Rawlinson deciphered the name “Belshazzar” on a clay cylinder, unearthed from the ruins of ancient Ur in Iraq. The inscription was a prayer of Nabonidus to his god Bel for himself and his son “Belshazzar.”

Since then, more than five hundred other tablets containing Belshazzar's name have been found. From them his whole life history can be virtually reconstructed.

Why was Belshazzar, and not Nabonidus on the throne when Babylon fell? The answer is simple. When Belshazzar was about 30 years old, Nabonidus went into retirement at Tema in Arabia, leaving his son to rule the empire. Today, the Bible's claims about Belshazzar as the last king of Babylon can no longer be doubted.



Henry Rawlinson

Exhibit 1

WHEN THE SPIRIT SPEAKS

The Holy Spirit is mentioned 350 times in the Bible. Some passages reveal that, like God the Father and Christ the Son, the Holy Spirit is:

- eternal (Hebrews 9:14)
- knows all things (1 Corinthians 2:10,11)

Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit as a person:

- "another Helper" (John 14:16,17)
- "He will teach you all things" (John 14:26)
- "He will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13)
- "He will tell you things to come" (John 16:13)
- "He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness" (John 16:8)

Paul also speaks about the "personality" of the Holy Spirit:

- He loves (Romans 15:30)
- He can be grieved (Ephesians 4:30)
- He communes with people (2 Corinthians 13:14)

The Holy Spirit became Christ's representative after he had ascended to heaven. (John 16:7, page 1044).

All the close influences of God upon a person's conscience are the work of the Holy Spirit, first through His word, by which we learn the truth; then through our thought and prayer. He inspires desires to do right, and brings feelings of guilt when we break God's commandments. It is the Holy Spirit who moves us to repent; that is, to be sorry for our sins; to turn around, change our minds and go the right way. That's what the word repentance means. (Read John 16:8, page 1044; Romans 2:4, page 1086; Acts 26:20, page 1082)

When the Holy Spirit speaks, what shall we do about it? We can respond as Nebuchadnezzar did at last, or like Belshazzar, turn a deaf ear. Isaiah said we hear a voice saying "this is the way, walk in it" (Isaiah 30:21) - the voice of conscience. Hebrews 3:7,8 says, "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts ..." Try asking yourself, will I be a Belshazzar or will I be a Nebuchadnezzar?

REVIEW QUIZ (T/F)

1. Belshazzar held a drunken orgy in which he openly challenged God by drinking from the sacred vessels of God's sanctuary.

2. A supernatural hand wrote on Belshazzar's palace wall to announce the end of the Babylonian kingdom. _____

3. It took less than 24 hours for the prophecy of Belshazzar's death to be fulfilled. _____

4. The kingdom of Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians.

5. Daniel was not able to make clear to Belshazzar exactly why the kingdom was being taken from him. _____

BABYLON'S FADING GLORY

But Belshazzar was a failure both as a king and as a soldier. Fond of luxury, he succeeded only in bringing his empire to ruin.

This weakening of Babylon's leadership was noticed by the watchful Persians, Medes, and Elamites, over whom Babylon had ruled for 70 years. Under the command of their dynamic leader, Cyrus the Great, they began to push into Babylon's territory.



So deceived was Belshazzar by the old myth of "Babylon the Eternal" and so blind to the Persian military threat, that at the most dangerous time possible, he invited thousands of his lords and ladies to the inner citadel for a night of drunken revelry. That same night, the armies of Cyrus closed in.

Belshazzar took the gold and silver vessels captured from the Jewish temple to drink wine from

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

A. A NATION ON THE BRINK

QUESTION 1 (Daniel 5:1-3, page 861)

Feeling safe and secure behind the city walls, what did Belshazzar command to be brought to the banqueting hall?

"(Belshazzar) gave the command to bring the gold and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the _____, which had been in Jerusalem." (Verse 2)

QUESTION 2 (Daniel 5:4,5)

What frightening event interrupted the celebrations?

The _____ of a man's _____ appeared and wrote opposite the lamp stand on the _____ of the wall of the

king's palace." (Verse 5)

QUESTION 3 (Daniel 5:5-9, page 861)

What facts can you find in verses 4 to 9 which show that the message on the wall could not have been written by a human being?

B. A WISE WOMAN TO THE RESCUE

Trembling with terror, Belshazzar shouted for somebody to bring in the astrologers, but they were unable to understand the writing, just as Nebuchadnezzar's wise men had been unable to interpret his dreams fifty years before.



The wild party pulses on into the night totally unprepared for what was about to happen

QUESTION 4 (Daniel 5:10,11)

When the queen heard about the trouble she hurried into the banquet hall.

(a) What wise suggestion did she make to the king?

"There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the _____ of the Holy."
_____. (verse 11)

(b) What did the queen say this man had been able to do for Nebuchadnezzar? (Answer in your own words or from verse 12.)

(c) What was the man's name? (verse 12) _____

NOTE: The queen here would most likely have been the queen mother, possibly a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar. She refers to Nebuchadnezzar as "father", which in Bible times often meant "ancestor". This would have been the meaning here. It is for this same reason that Nebuchadnezzar is called Belshazzar's "father" in verse 2.

- 1) Do you see any parallels between our modern world and Babylon her last night?
- 2) Did Belshazzar know what he should be doing? How did he know?
- 3) Do the three failures of the astrologers recorded in Daniel chapters 2, 4, and 5 have any significance for us today with regard to astrology?

NOTES:

QUESTION 14 (Daniel 5:31)

Who received the kingdom after the death of Belshazzar?

ANSWER: _____

Note here that Daniel had now lived to witness the fulfillment of the first part of his image prophecy. The silver kingdom had taken the place of the gold. Medo-Persia had overcome Babylon. Think about how Daniel must have felt on seeing his prediction fulfilled.

Question 15 (Daniel 5:22, page 862)

Engrossed in the pleasures of life, Belshazzar steeled his heart against the voice of the spirit of God. The same danger confronts people and rulers today. Would you like to have a mind and heart that are always responsive to God's leading and teaching?



At the same time that the writing appeared on the wall, the Persian army entered Babylon and captured the city

ANSWER: _____

READ EXHIBIT 1: Page 11
WHEN THE SPIRIT SPEAKS

OPTIONAL QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT**C. DANIEL WARNS BELSHAZZAR****QUESTION 5** (Daniel 5:13-16, page 862)

When Daniel was brought before the king, what did Belshazzar promise to give him if he could interpret the writing on the wall?

"You shall be _____ with purple"

"have a _____ of _____ around your neck"

"and shall be the third _____ in the kingdom" (Verse 16)

QUESTION 6 (Daniel 5:17)

Was Daniel interested in making money or receiving honours out of his work as a prophet? What reply did he make to the king?

"Let your _____ be for yourself, and give your _____ to another; yet I will read the writing to the king, and make known to him the interpretation." (Verse 17)

QUESTION 7 (Daniel 5:18-21)

Daniel was not in a hurry to explain the writing on the wall. First, he wanted to remind Belshazzar about his failure to learn from God's dealings with Nebuchadnezzar. Read verses 18-21 and write down in a few words Daniel's message to the king and any lessons we should take from it for ourselves

**QUESTION 8** (Daniel 22-24)

What did Daniel say was the reason for the writing on the wall?

"But you his son, Belshazzar, have not _____ your heart, a I - though you knew all this." (Verse 22)

The wild party is interrupted by a startling message delivered in an even more startling way

"And you have lifted yourself up against the _____ of _____." (Verse 23)

QUESTION 9 (Daniel 5:23, page 862)

What three things had Belshazzar done that were most offensive to God?

ANSWER: _____



A hand writes the judgment message for Babylon upon the wall

QUESTION 10 (Daniel 5:23,24)

Who did Daniel say was responsible for the writing on the wall?

ANSWER: _____

E. DOOM PRONOUNCED UPON BABYLON

QUESTION 11 (Daniel 5:25-29)

From these verses, read the four mysterious words and write the interpretations, which Daniel gave.

MENE _____

TEKEL _____

PERES
or UPHARSIN _____

Notice Belshazzar's reaction? (Verse 29) Do you find it difficult to understand how, at this desperate moment, the doomed king could have remembered his promise to reward Daniel?

Was it because Belshazzar was drunk? Or was the king trying to win

Daniel's favour and have him intervene to avert the disaster? Do people today sometimes try to block out or ignore God's warnings about judgment to come? Jot down in brief your own thoughts on this question.

F. THE CURTAIN FALLS ON KING AND EMPIRE

QUESTION 12

What was meant by Belshazzar being "weighed in the balances and found wanting"? (Verse 27)

ANSWER: _____

QUESTION 13 (Daniel 5:30)

How long did it take for judgment to come upon Belshazzar? (Circle your answer)

- (a) less than 24 hours
- (b) a month
- (c) a year
- (d) ten years

How were the Persians able to enter the heavily fortified Babylon so easily? Herodotus, "the father of history", Greek writer and traveler of the fifth century BC, states that the armies of Cyrus the Great diverted the waters of the Euphrates, causing the river level to drop in its flow beneath the city wall. At the right moment, when the palace revelry was at its height, the Persians entered via the river bed and stormed the citadel. Belshazzar was slain. The end had suddenly come for the Babylonian Empire (538 BC). (from Herdotos 1.191. Trans. A. D. Godley, Vol IV, Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press, 1946, pages 239, 241) (Xenophon, also Greek, C430-354BC, gives a similar account.)