

Daniel 5 – The Writing On The Wall

Aramaic¹ – Modified Translation of NAS95

Dan. 5:1 Belshazzar the king held a great feast for a thousand of his nobles, and he was drinking wine in the presence of the thousand.

Nebuchadnezzar ²	605-563 B.C.
Evil-Merodach (Man of Marduk), Neb.'s son	563-561 B.C.
General Neriglissar (E-M's brother-in-law)	561-556 B.C.
Labashi-Marduk, Neriglissar's son	556 B.C.
Nabonidus, leader of revolt against L-M	556-539 B.C.
Belshazzar, Son of Nabonidus	549-539 B.C.

Dan. 5:2 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

Dan. 5:3 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.

Dan. 5:4 They drank the wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

Dan. 5:5 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.

Dan. 5:6 Then, the king's face grew pale, and his thoughts alarmed him. In addition, his hip joints went slack and his knees began knocking together.

Dan. 5:7 The king called out 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. He shall also have authority as third ruler in the kingdom."

Dan. 5:8 Then, all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the inscription or make known its interpretation to the king.

Dan. 5:9 As a result, King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, his face grew even paler, and

¹ **Daniel 1:1-2:4** is written in **Hebrew**, along with **8:1-12:13**. The rest of Daniel, **2:5-7:28**, is written in Aramaic.

² **Babylonian Persian (Mede) Greek Syrian Greek Egyptian Greek Roman Middle East Messianic** [Expositor's Bible Commentary – Nebuchadnezzar died in 563 B.C. and was succeeded by his son, Evil-Merodach ("Man of Marduk") (cf. 2 Kings 25). He was assassinated by his brother-in-law, General Neriglissar, two years later in 561 B.C. Neriglissar died five years later in 556 B.C. and was succeeded by his son, Labashi-Marduk, who was murdered nine months later in 556 B.C. The revolt's leader, Nabonidus, who was not related to the royal family but married Nebuchadnezzar's daughter, took over in 556 B.C. and ruled Babylon until its fall to the Persians in 539 B.C. However, during the last ten years of his life, he spent most of his time in Teima, an important Edomite city, and left the central control of the empire to his son, Belshazzar. The Persians, under Commander Ugbaru, diverted the waters of the Euphrates River in order to reduce its level flowing into Babylon and snuck into the city at night in September of 539 B.C., taking it by surprise. Belshazzar must have died that night (v. 30).]

³ Here "father" means a previous king to whom Belshazzar can attribute some blood relationship because he is the actual son of Nabonidus, who married Nebuchadnezzar's daughter. Thus, Nebuchadnezzar is his grandfather.

his nobles were perplexed.

Dan. 5:10 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.”⁴

Dan. 5:11 “There is a man in your kingdom in whom is a spirit of the holy gods. 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.”⁵

Dan. 5:12 “This was because an extraordinary spirit, knowledge, 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.”

Dan. 5:13 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?”

Dan. 5:14 “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.

Dan. 5:15 “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.

Dan. 5:16 “But I personally have heard about you, that you are able to give interpretations and solve difficult problems. 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.”

Dan. 5:17 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.

Dan. 5:18 “O king, the Most High God granted sovereignty, grandeur, glory, and majesty to Nebuchadnezzar your father.

Dan. 5:19 “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.

Dan. 5:20 “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.

Dan. 5:21 “He was also driven away from mankind, and his heart was made like that of beasts, so that 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

⁴ This is Nebuchadnezzar’s daughter, the wife of Nabonidus.

⁵ Because Nebuchadnezzar’s daughter is Belshazzar’s mother, she is referring to his grandfather as his father and important ancestor as former king of Babylon. Thus, she is being even more emphatic in her advice to Belshazzar to consult Daniel. She is saying that if this Jewish man was good enough for your royal ancestor, he will indeed be capable of interpreting the writing on the wall for you, Nebuchadnezzar’s grandson.

whomever He wishes.

Dan. 5:22 “Yet you, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this,

Dan. 5:23 but you have exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven, because they have brought the vessels of His house before you, so that you and your nobles, your wives, and your concubines have been drinking wine from them. In addition, you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see, hear, or understand. But the God in whose hand are your life-breath and all your ways, you have not glorified.

Dan. 5:24 “Therefore, the hand was sent from Him and this inscription was written out.

Dan. 5:25 “And this is the inscription that was written out: ‘MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.’

Dan. 5:26 “This is the interpretation of the message: ‘MENE’ — God has numbered your kingdom and put an end to it.⁶

Dan. 5:27 “‘TEKEL’ — you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient.⁷

Dan. 5:28 “‘PERES’ — your kingdom has been divided and given over to the Medes and Persians.”⁸

Dan. 5:29 Then Belshazzar gave orders, and they clothed Daniel with purple, 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.

Dan. 5:30 That same night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain.

Dan. 5:31 So Darius the Mede received the kingdom at about the age of sixty-two.

Darius the Mede⁹

539-530 B.C.

⁶ The first word מְנַנֵּה is a perfect passive, and its meaning is disputed. Daniel uses a similar word מְנַנֵּה to explain it, and this word means “he numbered,” meaning that Belshazzar has been “counted” so to speak, so that he ends up failing to acquire a proper count for God of his spiritual qualifications.

⁷ This second word מְקַלֵּל is a perfect passive and means “to be weighed.” It is also the same in Hebrew as שֶׁקֶל = shekel, a unit of measurement and a monetary term. Thus, Belshazzar has been weighed in the balance by God and found lacking in authentic belief.

⁸ A play on words — מְפָרֵס from the Hebrew פָּרַס = divide. However, its consonants are also the same as those for the empire of Persia (פָּרְסִיָּה). Thus, Belshazzar’s empire is about to be “divided,” i.e., given up and taken over by the Persians, which happened that very night (v. 30).

⁹ This is not the same as Darius the Great, i.e., Darius Hystaspis, who ruled Persia from 522-485 B.C. Apparently, there is no explicit evidence outside the Bible for this man, but he is most likely a “king” of Median descent, who was appointed ruler of the Babylonian region by Cyrus the Great, much like Herod the Great and his sons who were appointed by the Roman Senate and Emperors as rulers of the area of Israel and granted the title “king.” The word *dara* means king in Avestan Persian, allowing us to conclude that Darius was an honorific title much like even the Hebrew Messiah.