

# BELSHAZZAR'S CONTEMPT

## Chapter 5

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About 20 years have passed since Nebuchadnezzar's testimony (Chapter 4) and his grandson, Belshazzar, is now a co-regent with his father Nabonidus. With the Medo-Persian army just outside the gates of Babylon, Belshazzar holds a grand feast with thousands of lords, defiantly ignoring the threat of attack believing their city is impregnable. In contempt of God he brings in the temple goblets and uses them to praise the gods of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone. Belshazzar has crossed the line and is about to be condemned by God

### A. WHAT TO WATCH FOR

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Notice how Daniel draws a comparison between Nebuchadnezzar, who eventually recognized God's sovereignty, and Belshazzar's outright contempt for God. Daniel's attitude toward Belshazzar can be seen by the absence of a respectful greeting to this defiant king. Observe too how Daniel refuses to "paid" for using special abilities God gave to him.



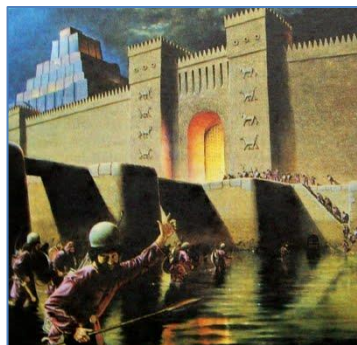
## B. BACKGROUND

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Daniel is about 80 years old when this event takes place when a combined army of Medes and Persians has surrounded the city.

The main character is Belshazzar, who was the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, serving as a co-regent with his father Nabonidus. Nabonidus had taken an army outside the walls to engage the Medes and Persians but was defeated, then fled, and is now in hiding.

While Belshazzar held his great feast, receiving a verdict from God that his time was up, the Medo-Persian army found a weak point in the defense of the Babylonian city. Although the walls of the city were too high and too thick to break down, the Euphrates River, which flowed through the great city of Babylon, presented a way to invade the city,



About two weeks before the drunken party Cyrus, Commander of the Medes and Persians, started preparing for an invasion. He divided his army and sent several thousand troops to the south side, and several thousand troops to the north side of the city. The remaining troops then diverted the Euphrates River causing its level to drop under the city walls enabling the Medo-Persians to invade the city and capture its leaders.

The city experienced little battle damage and the conquest was so swift and complete that it was several days before many citizens knew there had been a change in the government. Just as Daniel prophesied in Chapter 2, the gold kingdom (Babylon) was superseded by the silver kingdom (Medo-Persian)

## C. DANIEL CHAPTER 5 (NLT)

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### THE HAND WRITING ON THE WALL (5:1-5A)

"Many years later King Belshazzar gave a great feast for 1,000 of his nobles, and he drank wine with them." <sup>2</sup> While Belshazzar was drinking the wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver cups that his predecessor, Nebuchadnezzar, had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem. He wanted to drink from them with his nobles, his wives, and his concubines. <sup>3</sup> So they brought these gold cups taken from the Temple, the house of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. <sup>4</sup> While they drank from them they praised their idols

made of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone. <sup>5</sup> Suddenly, they saw the fingers of a human hand writing<sup>1</sup> on the plaster wall of the king's palace, near the lampstand.

### **BELSHAZZAR BECOMES TERRIFIED (5B-9)**

The king himself saw the hand as it wrote, <sup>6</sup> and his face turned pale with fright. His knees knocked together in fear and his legs gave way beneath him. <sup>7</sup> The king shouted for the enchanters, astrologers, and fortune-tellers to be brought before him. He said to these wise men of Babylon, "Whoever can read this writing and tell me what it means will be dressed in purple robes of royal honor and will have a gold chain placed around his neck. He will become the third highest ruler in the kingdom!" <sup>8</sup> But when all the king's wise men had come in, none of them could read the writing or tell him what it meant. <sup>9</sup> So the king grew even more alarmed, and his face turned pale. His nobles, too, were shaken.

### **THE CALL FOR DANIEL (5:10-12)**

<sup>10</sup> But when the queen mother heard what was happening, she hurried to the banquet hall. She said to Belshazzar, "Long live the king! Don't be so pale and frightened. <sup>11</sup> There is a man in your kingdom who has within him the spirit of the holy gods. During Nebuchadnezzar's reign, this man was found to have insight, understanding, and wisdom like that of the gods. Your predecessor, the king-- your predecessor King Nebuchadnezzar-- made him chief over all the magicians, enchanters, astrologers, and fortune-tellers of Babylon. <sup>12</sup> This man Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar, has exceptional ability and is filled with divine knowledge and understanding. He can interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means."

### **DANIEL EXPLAINS THE WRITING (5:13-21)**

<sup>13</sup> So Daniel was brought in before the king. The king asked him, "Are you Daniel, one of the exiles brought from Judah by my predecessor, King Nebuchadnezzar? <sup>14</sup> I have heard that you have the spirit of the gods within you and that you are filled with insight, understanding, and wisdom. <sup>15</sup> My wise men and enchanters have tried to read the words on the wall and tell me their meaning, but they cannot do it. <sup>16</sup> I am told that you can give interpretations and solve difficult problems. If you can read these words and tell me their meaning, you will be clothed in purple robes of royal honor, and you will have a gold chain placed around your neck. You will become the third highest ruler in the kingdom." <sup>17</sup> Daniel answered the king, "Keep your gifts or give them to someone else, but I will tell you what the writing means. <sup>18</sup> Your Majesty, the Most High God gave sovereignty, majesty, glory, and honor to your predecessor,

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<sup>1</sup> While Bible commentators do not agree on the specific language of these hand written words, it was most likely understood by those who knew Hebrew and Aramaic. It was the meaning of the words that was not understood. (Baldwin 137)

Nebuchadnezzar. <sup>19</sup> He made him so great that people of all races and nations and languages trembled before him in fear. He killed those he wanted to kill and spared those he wanted to spare. He honored those he wanted to honor and disgraced those he wanted to disgrace. <sup>20</sup> But when his heart and mind were puffed up with arrogance, he was brought down from his royal throne and stripped of his glory. <sup>21</sup> He was driven from human society. He was given the mind of a wild animal, and he lived among the wild donkeys. He ate grass like a cow, and he was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he learned that the Most High God rules over the kingdoms of the world and appoints anyone he desires to rule over them.

#### **THE INDICTMENT AGAINST BELSHAZZAR (5:22-23)**

<sup>22</sup> "You are his successor, O Belshazzar, and you knew all this, yet you have not humbled yourself. <sup>23</sup> For you have proudly defied the Lord of heaven and have had these cups from his Temple brought before you. You and your nobles and your wives and concubines have been drinking wine from them while praising gods of silver, gold, bronze, iron, wood, and stone-- gods that neither see nor hear nor know anything at all. But you have not honored the God who gives you the breath of life and controls your destiny!

#### **THE VERDICT AGAINST BELSHAZZAR (5:24-29)**

<sup>24</sup> So God has sent this hand to write this message. <sup>25</sup> "This is the message that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, and PARSIN. <sup>26</sup> This is what these words mean: *Mene* means 'numbered'-- God has numbered the days of your reign and has brought it to an end. <sup>27</sup> *Tekel* means 'weighed'-- you have been weighed on the balances and have not measured up. <sup>28</sup> *Parsin* means 'divided'-- your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and Persians." <sup>29</sup> Then at Belshazzar's command, Daniel was dressed in purple robes, a gold chain was hung around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom.

#### **THE PUNISHMENT OF BELSHAZZAR (5:30-31)**

<sup>30</sup> That very night Belshazzar, the Babylonian king, was killed. <sup>31</sup> And Darius the Mede took over the kingdom at the age of sixty-two. "

## **D. CHAPTER SUMMARY**

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The Babylonian king (co-regent), Belshazzar, is seen to be arrogant, prideful, and rebellious. He throws a drunken party, using the vessels that were taken from the temple in Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar years earlier. Those at Belshazzar's party were worshipping their false gods of gold, bronze, wood etc., believing the city of Babylon was invincible, when a hand appears on the wall. At this, Belshazzar became so terrified that his face turned pale with fright. His knees knocked together in fear

and his legs gave way beneath him. No one could interpret it but Daniel who then reveals that it was the end of the line for Belshazzar and his kingdom which was about to be conquered and divided. That very night Belshazzar was killed when Darius, the Mede easily invaded and conquered the city of Babylon.

## **E. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

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1. Why do you suppose Belshazzar called for the gold and silver cups taken from the temple in Jerusalem, when he most likely had many other ornate Babylonian drinking cups?
2. How might this act have influenced the 1,000 nobles who joined Belshazzar in this party with regard to their pagan deities?
3. Why do you suppose they were praising their pagan idols made of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone while drinking from the Jerusalem temple cups?
4. Why would Belshazzar become so frightened at the hand writing on the wall when everyone was praising idols made of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone?
5. To whom did Belshazzar initially turn to for understanding the hand writing on the wall and why were they unable to explain it? How might this also have influenced the thinking of the 1,000 nobles at this party?
6. Was God being too cruel to Belshazzar for simply using the Jerusalem temple cups? List the indictments in Daniel 5:22-23.

7. How does Daniel 5:31 relate to Daniel 2:39? How does this relate to Christians today?

## **F. CHAPTER WRAP UP**

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1. Trust in false wisdom is especially dangerous for those in \_\_\_\_\_  
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2. Israel's omnipotent God cannot be compared to the \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ (5:22-23).
3. Boastful arrogance by mere mortals is \_\_\_\_\_  
(5:22-23; Prov. 16:12).