

DANIEL

Week 13, Chapters 4 and 5

We are going to get historical and detailed, and you're going to hear a lot of new names for the first time today; so have your pens and pencils handy. As we ended our study of Daniel chapter 4 last time, the promised divine punishment had come upon Nebuchadnezzar for his refusal to acknowledge YHWH as the Most High God (the **EI** in Hebrew, the **Ilay** in Aramaic), who rules over all human kingdoms and has the power to give and take away dominion over them. Please understand: that concept was entirely foreign to the entire world at that time. A single god, who ruled over all kingdoms on earth, was completely counter to the universal belief that each nation had its own unique god or gods that controlled that nation's fate. A god's sphere of influence was generally only within the borders of the nation that he or she belonged to. So it was asking a lot of Nebuchadnezzar to accept that one god ruled over all nations and kingdoms on earth, and that that god was the God of the Jews.

The punishment that the Lord promised to Nebuchadnezzar was a type of insanity that gave the king the mind of an animal. It resulted in the loss of his throne and control over his kingdom for a time, because in such a demented condition he could not possibly rule or even be seen in public due to his alarming appearance and bizarre behavior.

Let's re-read a portion of Daniel chapter 4.

RE-READ DANIEL 4:30 – end

What we see happen is actually a well-established pattern; it is that while God might delay a judgment from the time that He gives the warning of impending catastrophe until it actually occurs, when it finally does happen it usually comes with the breathtaking suddenness of a collapsing dam. So in verse 30 when we hear that the threatened judgment happened to the king, the idiom "within the hour" is not meant to say "within 60 minutes", but rather that something happened immediately. We learned in verse 25 that it was a year from the time that Daniel gave the interpretation of the tree-dream to Nebuchadnezzar, a warning that included the ominous ultimatum to acknowledge Yehoveh as the God Most High or else, until it came about. Thus we see that, for example, even though there were centuries of warning and prophecy concerning the piercing (the death) of the Messiah, his burial, and then his resurrection, it all came to fulfillment in not more than 72 hours. And we have every reason to assume that all the expectations that Believers have held for so long about the End Times with the return of Christ, the war of Armageddon, the 21 prophesied judgments poured out by

God's angels upon the earth and its inhabitants, and the setting up of Messiah's earthly and visible throne in Jerusalem will occur so rapidly that people will have little time to comprehend what is actually happening to the world.

It is my contention that since the 7 Biblical Feasts are prophetic of the 7-fold mission of Christ, and that the prophetic messages of the first 4 Feasts have already been fulfilled, that the entire sequence of final events (as expressed by the last 3 Feasts that occur in the fall season of the year) will occur, from beginning to end, in but 22 or 23 days. And if Messiah's worshippers are not prepared to know what to look for, we will be in shock and not able to recognize it for what it is and to offer assurance to others.

It is interesting that the narrator of this chapter, Nebuchadnezzar, switched from the 1st person (I, me) to the 3rd person (he, they) beginning in verse 25, and it continues in that "voice" until verse 31. This is another of those issues that I told you I'd tell you about when we encountered them; issues that bible critics say proves that Daniel is a fraud, and not a very good one at that. Critics say that in a narrative to switch from 1st person to 3rd person and then back again is not good literary form, and shows that probably several hands were involved in crafting this deceptive fiction known as the Book of Daniel.

But notice the occasion upon which the switch occurs: it is at the time that the king's mind becomes an animal mind that the king (as narrator) speaks of himself in the 3rd person, and then he switches back to the 1st person after the 7 units of time have passed and he regains his human mind. From Nebuchadnezzar's perspective that poor mentally ill creature that eats grass like an ox isn't really him, the King of the World, anymore. It is an out of body experience. It is also not unlike how a rehabilitating drug addict (when the drugs aren't controlling them any longer) will speak of him or her self when they were still under the power of the chemicals and doing things that seem so foreign to how they see themselves now,. It is as though they are two different people; one they recognize and identify with and one they don't.

In verse 31 the ordained period of time has ended and Nebuchadnezzar's human nature and senses are restored to him. And the first thing he does is to look heavenward. I think we ought to take from this that despite the 7 "times" (whether 7 years, months, or seasons) that he had become mentally deranged, the memory of what happened to him and why it happened was at the forefront of his mind. Like finally waking from a bad dream that he couldn't seem to escape, the reason for being trapped in this condition was implanted in his consciousness and he was aware of it all along.

His instinctive reaction was to praise this God that had taken his mind away and now given it back, because he also knew that part of the package was that he would be restored to his kingdom. He'd get his old life back.

Some commentators say that Nebuchadnezzar's speech of verse 32 means that he converted and became a believer in the God of Israel. Others, like C.F. Kiel and Calvin say he did not; I agree with them. That said there is insufficient information given to be certain either way. Even so, Nebuchadnezzar has made a noticeable progression in his understanding of who the Most

High is. He acknowledges the Lord's utter sovereignty and omnipotence over the entire earth. Interestingly, the king still doesn't seem to know this God's formal name. But he does add a new title to the mix in verse 33 as the king refers to Yehoveh as the King of Heaven.

We should not take this pious sounding statement as anymore than Nebuchadnezzar's horrific experience convincing him to take a wider view of God's sphere of influence as compared to the other gods. Saying "King of Heaven" is about as useful or articulate as referring to Yehoveh as "the man upstairs" (who is neither a man nor is He upstairs). And yet, however Nebuchadnezzar now mentally pictures the Lord, it seems to be sufficient to accomplish whatever it is that the Lord intended in him.

I want to repeat something I said earlier in our study of Daniel: Nebuchadnezzar was not a particularly wicked man in God's eyes, and in fact was a useful servant. Some Rabbis compare him to the Pharaoh of the exodus but I think that is not only too harsh, but far off the mark. The Pharaoh was used for destruction of his own nation and as a ransom for God's people. He was a stubborn evil man whom God used like a hammer on an anvil. Thus far we have found nothing about Nebuchadnezzar that has him taking a particular dislike of Jews. In fact, he has employed 4 Jews that we have been introduced to (Daniel, Shadrakh, Meshakh, and Aved-N'go) in the highest offices in his capital and his empire. That he ordered death in the furnace for three of them was not a racial issue; it was the same order for anyone who wouldn't bow down to the golden statue. We don't hear of any kind of Babylonian mistreatment or barbarism aimed at the Jews (as we do in the story of Esther, for example). In fact, as we get to the time of the Persian conquest of Babylon, and then the Persian king's urging of the Jews of Babylon to return home to Judah, only a relative few will go. The rest, by their own choice, stayed. This is hardly the action of a people who feel persecuted and oppressed and anxious to get away. And in a few hundred more years, Babylon will become one of the 3 greatest centers of Judaism (along with Jerusalem and Alexandria, Egypt) in the world.

Let's move on to chapter 5.

READ DANIEL CHAPTER 5 all

We're not going to get very far into this chapter today and you'll quickly discover why that is. You may not have been aware of it, but the opening words of the 1st verse of this chapter have created enormous controversies and discord among Christian and Jewish commentators for centuries. And those discordant words are: "**Belshatzar** the king". Now how much trouble could those 3 simple words possibly cause? Plenty.

We're going to camp here for awhile because there's a lot to explain that will help us understand not only the remainder of the Book of Daniel, but also why many modern bible commentators have shown little respect for this important book of Scripture.

To begin with, some bible versions have completely confused **Belshatzar** the king, with **Beltshatzar**, who is Daniel. The two names are identical except for the "T"(**tet**) that is inserted after the letter "L" (**lamed**) in Daniel's Babylonian name. So I'll begin by saying that these are

definitely two different people.

Further until fairly recently, the belief was that there was no king of Babylon, not even a person in Babylonian royal history, named **Belshatzar**; he was just a fictionalized name playing a character in a fictionalized book. Imagine the surprise when a cache of clay tablets was found in an archeological dig that not only used the name **Belshatzar**, but essentially verified the biblical account of him. So now that we've established scientifically and biblically that he was real and that he was royal, that ought to end the skepticism as concerns his mention in Daniel, right? Not so fast.

The next issue concerning what is said about **Belshatzar** begins in Daniel 5:10 and goes through verse 12. Let's re-read it.

RE-READ DANIEL 5:10 – 12

Here's the issue that caused (and still causes) many historians and bible commentators to discount these passages. A Babylonian queen appears in the narrative (that the CJB says is the Queen Mother, but that is a guess) and she advises **Belshatzar** to call for Daniel to come and decipher some mysterious writings. And she explains to **Belshatzar** (some say this is her son) that he should do this because his father, Nebuchadnezzar, employed Daniel and even made him chief of the Chaldean magic arts guild because he was so amazingly accurate in his predictions and his interpretations of dreams and visions. So what's the problem here? Well, it's because this **Belshatzar** could not have been Nebuchadnezzar's biological son as we're told in other Scriptures that Nebuchadnezzar's son **Evil-Merodach** succeeded him (we find this in 2Kings 25 and in Jeremiah 52). Further, the Uruk King list that was discovered agrees that it was **Evil-Merodach** who immediately succeeded his biological father Nebuchadnezzar.

Then, at the end of chapter 5 King **Belshatzar** dies and then immediately in chapter 6 the Medes and Persians take over the Babylonian Empire. So we have several conundrums that includes the reality that the Prophet Jeremiah said that Nebuchadnezzar's dynasty would be a 3-generation dynasty: himself, his son, and his grandson.

Jeremiah 27:6-7 CJB

⁶ *For now, I have given over all these lands to my servant N'vukhadnetzar the king of Bavel; I have also given him the wild animals to serve him.*

⁷ *All the nations will serve him, his son and his grandson, until his own country gets its turn- at which time many nations and great kings will make him their slave.*

And **Belshatzar** doesn't seem to be any part of that 3-generation dynasty, even though this queen says Nebuchadnezzar was his father. Then there is the issue that the Uruk King List and other tablets found call **Belshatzar** the SON of the king, but never call him the King. Yet

he is referred to in Daniel as King **Belshatzar** and **Belshatzar** the king. From this the bible critics feel vindicated that what they had concluded all along was correct: that whoever this Jewish fake was who penned this book was a pretty poor historian. But now in the year 2013, it seems that this mystery of who **Belshatzar** was, and what his relationship to Nebuchadnezzar was, and when he ruled, and what his relationship to the queen in our story was, can be pretty well nailed down.

Let's begin with Nebuchadnezzar who became the King of Babylon in the year 605 B.C. and brought it to its height of glory as the greatest empire the world had ever known. He ruled for 43 years and then died in October of 562 B.C. His biological son **Evil-Merodach** took over from him and ruled less than 2 years. He was murdered in August of 560 B.C. So, we have the first 2 generations of Nebuchadnezzar's dynasty established: Nebuchadnezzar himself, succeeded by his son **Evil-Merodach**. Here's where things start to get tougher.

The next king of Babylon was **Nergal-sharra-usur**, also known as **Neriglissar**. By the way, when we see the Akkadian word **sharra** used in a name it is meant to denote that person as a king. This fellow was married to a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar (a sister of **Evil-Merodach**). So the next king after **Evil-Merodach** was his brother-in-law. And while one could quibble a bit about it because of the lack of a blood relationship, the reality is that **Nergal-sharra-usur** was indeed part of the royal family (he was Nebuchadnezzar's son-in-law) and so can rightfully be considered the 3rd king of the Nebuchadnezzar dynasty. Ah; but can he be considered as a son or grandson of Nebuchadnezzar? Because that was part of Jeremiah's prophecy. By the way there is no evidence that **Evil-Merodach** was murdered by **Nergal-sharra-usur**, but it seems that because of the great benefit he received by it, that he was hardly an innocent bystander.

Nergal-sharra-usur managed to survive about 4 years and died in April of 556 B.C. The young son of **Nergal-sharra-usur** succeeded him in May of 556 B.C. **Labashi-Marduk** seems to have survived for about 3 to 9 months before he was assassinated. From this point forward there seems to be no way that any following king can be seen as being legitimately part of the royal family of Nebuchadnezzar. This was because the next King of Babylon was a fellow named **Nabu-naid** in Akkadian; but better known as **Nabonidus** in English translations.

Nabonidus was chosen from among the ranks of military leaders to be the new King of Babylon. Babylonian records make it clear that he was the son of an Aramean (a Syrian) named **Nabu-balassu-iqbi** who had in some unknown way served in the royal court of the Nebuchadnezzar dynasty. So, as you can see, the genealogical or even familial chain to Nebuchadnezzar is here broken. Now it gets even more complicated (bear with me).

Nabonidus had a son named **Bel-sharra-usur**, better known to us as **Belshatzar**. So we've finally found him. The **Belshatzar** of Daniel chapter 5 (and in later chapters) seems to be the last in the line of Babylonian kings, but he had no direct genealogical or royal family ties to Nebuchadnezzar's family. So back to Daniel chapter 5 verses 10 through 12. How is it then that this queen speaks to **Belshatzar** in verse 11 and says:

Daniel 5:11 CJB

11 There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the spirit of the holy gods. In the days of your father, he was found to have light, discernment and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods. King N'vukhadnetzar your father- the king, your father- made him chief of the magicians, exorcists, astrologers and diviners;

So, here we have this unnamed queen saying quite clearly that **Belshatzar's** father is none other than King Nebuchadnezzar (which, as you can see, is historically impossible). Are the bible critics right? Have we got a major problem here that punches another hole in the Book of Daniel? Let's see.

One of the great bible commentators and linguists of the 19th and 20th centuries was an academic named R. D. Wilson. This man could read and speak 60 languages, including the most ancient biblical languages. In his book titled, "Studies on the Book of Daniel", he spends quite a bit of time explaining that there were at-least 8 ways that the term **abba** (father) is used in the bible and what each of these ways meant within the ancient Middle Eastern cultures. First, father meant the direct biological father of his children (the common way we would think of it). Second, father meant the biological grandfather of his children's' children. But it also meant the adoptive male parent of a person not of his own biological family or even his own tribe. It can mean a step-father (the husband of a woman who had been previously married and had children by another man). But it is also regularly used to simply mean an ancestor (the father of the tribe or clan of so and so). And it can mean father in the sense of a founder or a Patriarch (like Abraham, the founder of the Hebrew race, who is regularly called Father Abraham by Hebrews even to this day). In some cases it is used to refer affectionately to a king.

The point is this: the term father in the bible can be used in a host of contexts and only sometimes does it mean direct biological father of his children. In fact the problem that most gentile Christian laypersons, Pastors, and some commentators find with biblical genealogies is that they aren't aware of the many ways that "father" is used in the bible, and how generations are often skipped in the biblical genealogies by making the grandfather the "father" of the next generation. So we have two choices in front of us concerning the queen's statements about **Belshatzar**: either the writer of Daniel was wrong and really thought that **Belshatzar** was Nebuchadnezzar's biological son or he was merely using a common and standard convention of that era and attaching **Belshatzar** to Nebuchadnezzar as being "his father" in the sense of Nebuchadnezzar being the revered Patriarch of the Babylonian Empire and especially of it's kings. Further, this chapter is in Aramaic and continues to offer matters from a Babylonian perspective. So the answer to the question seems pretty clear when we have all the information.

What this also tells us that there was a jump in time from the last verses of chapter 4 (when Nebuchadnezzar has regained his human mind) to the first verse of chapter 5 and **Belshatzar** is King of Babylon. Or better, a number of Babylonian kings had succeeded Nebuchadnezzar between the last verse of chapter 4 and the first verse of chapter 5, even though not very many

years had passed. It was only perhaps 12 years from Nebuchadnezzar's death until **Belshatzar** was ruling over Babylon. So the 3 generation dynasty that God promised to Nebuchadnezzar before Babylon would tumble into disarray and then fall to the Medes and Persians was over BEFORE the opening verse of Daniel chapter 5. Thus with chapter 5 we are in the final stage of the Babylonian Empire's existence, and Yehoveh is in process of turning Babylon over to another nation in order to be punished. To put things in yet another perspective: of the 70 years that the Jews were exiled to Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar ruled for the first 43 of them. The several other Babylonian kings and the first Persian and Median kings all-together ruled the remaining 27 years of the 70 year exile.

But let's deal with one final critical issue about Belshatzar before we move on. Was he really a king or just the son of a king (that king being Nabonidus)? Here's what occurred. **Nabonidus** was a military man so he spent the first 12 or 13 years of his reign doing what he did best: leading military excursions, mostly on the Arabian Peninsula. First he campaigned extensively in the Transjordan, securing that area, and then spent a 10 year stint establishing outposts and fortresses in the heart of Arabia. Why he did that is not clear, and we'll not bother to speculate because ancient records don't really address the matter. But consider this: he was the King of Babylon, and he was gone to far away places, leading an army, for years at a time. Who was going to run things at home? Do you give the job duties of "king" to a management team of loyalists? His answer was to appoint his son, **Belshatzar**, as his surrogate. After all, **Nabonidus** needed someone he could trust, who wouldn't try to make the empire his own during **Nabonidus'** extended absences. Rule by committee wasn't going to work for the many years he'd be away and the temptations for someone to rise up and try to take over the throne would be enormous. He fully intended to retain his title of king, and someday to settle back down and sit on Babylon's throne as a more typical king.

Thus we see the Babylonian records refer to **Belshatzar** NOT as the King of Babylon, but rather as the son of the king. So why, in Daniel, is he called King **Belshatzar** and **Belshatzar** the king? Why is Belshatzar said to be the one in power when the Persians and Medes conquered Babylon, when Babylonian and Sumerian records make it clear that Nabonidus had returned from his years in Arabia, and once again settled in as King of Babylon. We can only speculate, but in the end it is really just a matter ancient Middle Eastern custom and of common sense. While it may not have been officially declared a co-regency (a king and his heir apparent ruling together in co-operation as with David and Solomon), it was a de facto co-regency between **Nabonidus** and his son **Belshatzar**. And in a co-regency both men are given the title of king, even if the junior one's title was mostly an honorary title, until the senior king died and the junior king became the sole king.

It would be natural that Belshatzar would sit on the throne, live in the palace, and be addressed as king during the many years his father was away. During the first 13 years of his reign, Nabonidus was apparently rarely home. So, from the perspective of the royal court, and especially from a courtier like Daniel, the only person he knew as ruler of Babylon during those years was **Belshatzar** (not his father). Certainly Daniel knew the arrangement.

Records show that the various high government officials that **Belshatzar** appointed during those first 13 years that he co-reigned with his father (while his father was gone), were kept on

when his father returned for the final 4 years of his reign before the Medes and Persians captured Babylon. Those same records show that **Nabonidus** was captured by the Persians, and not killed. There is no specific mention in Babylonian records of what happened to his son **Belshatzar**. So there is no reason to think that the Book of Daniel isn't correct when it states that **Belshatzar** was killed when Babylon was conquered, but there is no mention of his father, the senior king, **Nabonidus**. For in fact **Nabonidus** had learned of the coming invasion, escaped to Borsippa (about 13 miles south of Babylon), and apparently left his son **Belshatzar** to see to the defenses of Babylon. Daniel tells us that **Belshatzar** was killed as a result of the invasion, but no circumstances are given.

So the Book of Daniel tracks perfectly well with Babylonian historical records regarding the kings of Babylon. To quibble over whether Daniel (or in the bible critics' viewpoint, the anonymous writer of Daniel) should have used the term "king" referring to **Belshatzar** is like arguing whether a former president of the United States ought retain the title after he was no longer in office. It is simply a long-standing tradition in America to do that, and there is no right nor wrong to it. But you can bet that some historian a thousand years from now will look back at American History and wonder how so many men could hold the title of President at the same time, and then will likely consider it an error or a fake because it doesn't seem logical to him or her.

So back to Daniel 5 verse 1. Now that we can see that what is happening is taking place in the last few years of Babylon's existence as an empire, and that King **Nabonidus** was apparently away at the time, or he was satisfied to let his son **Belshatzar** continue to run the day to day operations of the empire in his stead, we have some context for what is about to happen.

Belshatzar throws a party. It is said that 1,000 people were in attendance. No doubt this is a round number. There would have been important people in his government, some heads of state, and some wealthy aristocrats. There is no reason to see this as an exaggerated number. We have several records of kings having parties of this size, and some considerably larger. When Alexander the Great was married, the official records say that 10,000 were invited.

The last half of verse 1 says that "he (the king) drank wine before the thousand". Our CJB says the king drank wine in the presence of the thousand, which is close by not quite the same. The idea is that a king sat at his own royal table, and it sat on an elevated platform so that his regal stature could be honored, and so that he could be seen by the crowd. But then verse 2 says that the king did something that he'd live to regret. He did something that would turn out to be as foolish as it was arrogant. He called for the gold and silver goblets and other vessels that had served in the Temple in Jerusalem, and they would be defiled and used for the common purpose of drinking wine in order to get drunk at the king's party.

That is where we'll begin next time.