

DANIEL

Week 14, Chapter 5

We spent almost our entire time together last week dealing with only a couple of issues. First, the transition from Daniel chapter 4 and the long 43-year reign of King Nebuchadnezzar, to chapter 5 and the final days of the Babylonian Empire under another Babylonian King. But, the second matter that we camped upon was expressed in the opening 3 words of Daniel chapter 5, which are: “**Belshatzar** the King”. Those words have been seen for scores of years (if not more) as a problem. And this is because until fairly recently, there was no known record of any King of Babylon named **Belshatzar** other than in the bible. And for bible academics of the school of bible criticism, the bible (unlike almost any other ancient document) is automatically considered unreliable until some other non-Hebrew source confirms the information. However much to the dismay of bible skeptics, the discovery of the Uruk King list along with the Nabonidus cylinder and what is called the Persian Verse Account of Nabonidus, has laid aside any doubts that **Belshatzar** did exist and he was at the least part of the last royal family of Babylon, and was the son of King Nabonidus of Babylon.

Yet that didn't end the list of controversies about the mention of **Belshatzar** because in truth, in the Babylonian records, he is always referred to as the “son of the king” (King Nabonidus) and never as simply “the king”. However since several Daniel passages refer to **Belshatzar** specifically as “the king”, then bible critics say this is a historical error (not merely a copying error) and further proof that Daniel is a work of legend and fiction. What we found with a bit of digging and connecting the dots was that King Nabonidus, who was a former military commander, felt more comfortable leading military excursions than he did ruling like a politician from his throne in Babel, so he ventured to far away places, leading his army, for most of the years he is credited with being Babylon's king.

Thus Nabonidus left his biological son **Belshatzar** in charge of the Empire while he was away. And, naturally, **Belshatzar** was the man whom Daniel (and all others in the royal court) dealt with on a daily basis and who, rightfully, was the face of the monarchy for years at a time. Other than for the army, **Belshatzar** ruled over every aspect of life in the Babylonian Empire such as any Monarch would. Therefore what else would a person meeting him face to face call him, as they approached him on the throne in the palace in Babel, but “king”? (even if he was the junior king to his father, the senior king)? Among anthropologists, historians and archeologists this type of arrangement is called a co-regency. That is a king and his heir rule simultaneously for anywhere from a few days to a few years. It was a rather common situation. Thus the supposed controversy over Daniel calling **Belshatzar** “king” is at best a tempest in a teapot; or at worst a rather disingenuous attempt to make the book of Daniel guilty of falsehood until proven innocent.

Then there is the final sticky matter of Nebuchadnezzar being called **Belshatzar's** father in a number of passages in Daniel 5. There is no reasonable way that Nebuchadnezzar was Belshatzar's biological father, unless all the discovered documents and king's lists are wrong, and all in the same way. From a chronology standpoint, **Belshatzar** could have been a biological son of **Nebuchadnezzar** since Belshatzar ruled only 12 years or so after Nebuchadnezzar's death. However Babylonian records make it clear that **Belshatzar's** biological father was Nabonidus, who was in no way related to Nebuchadnezzar or his descendants; therefore neither could **Belshatzar** have been related to Nebuchadnezzar. However one merely has to read the bible carefully to realize that the term "father" (**abba**) is used in a number of different ways and contexts (R.D. Wilson identifies at least 8 of them) not totally unlike it is in our time. Father doesn't only mean "biological father", it can also mean grandfather, non-blood related stepfather and a host of other things. And one of the common uses of the term "father" in the bible is to indicate a founder of some sort or a family Patriarch (such as Father Abraham, the found of the Hebrew race), and it was often a term used for the first of a dynasty or it merely indicated a venerated ancestor.

Therefore, from a bible criticism scholar's viewpoint, had this mention of Nebuchadnezzar as a "father" to **Belshatzar** come from anywhere else other than the bible, they would have tasked themselves with trying to determine which application of the 8 customary ways that the term "father" as regularly used in ancient times was meant in this passage. But since it is the bible, then the ONLY way they are satisfied to take it is as "biological son", and since (admittedly) **Belshatzar** can't be a biological son to Nebuchadnezzar then they consider the statement as misinformation. Sad, is it not, that the discipline of bible criticism represents the leading bible commentators of our time and for the past century; and represents the leadership at most bible colleges, dominates Christian seminaries, and so legions of young pastors fresh out of seminary have been subjected to this kind of liberal mindset that has as it's main purpose to discredit the Holy Scriptures that they no doubt at first thought they were going to be taught how to uphold?

This week we're going to tackle a few more controversial issues about the Book of Daniel. But first I want to pause in order to encourage you today (something I probably ought to do more often): do not succumb or back down to what has become the leading theology in modern Judeo-Christendom that attempts to evolve our faith into more of a human philosophy than the spiritually centered belief system that it was at its birth. Most secular and even so-called Christian colleges today have placed the subject disciplines of Christianity (as well as Judaism) into the Philosophy department, and done away with the Religion department as a move of political correctness. The goal of bible criticism and liberalism is to have you believe in the Jesus-philosophy, but to **not** believe in Yeshua as divine, as Savior, or in His Holy Word.

You don't have to be afraid of facing these folks thinking that because of their education background they will make you look foolish. And this is because, first, what they teach is often intellectually dishonest on its face and their base premises of the non-existence of the spirit realm, predictive prophecy, and miracles are circular in argument. Second, and perhaps more pertinent to every Believer, is because you don't have to simply freeze-up, and then chalk-up your belief in the truth of the bible to only "faith". Certainly faith is central to every Believer's belief system and to understanding Scripture, just as it is true that bible critics are not always

wrong. They often raise legitimate questions from time to time that aren't so easy to reconcile, and we should be ready to admit that. It's not necessary that every question the bible presents has to have a firm and provable answer. But if you will continue to study the Scriptures with dedication, take the time to learn God's Word from the beginning and approach it from its original Hebrew context, dig a little more into Hebrew and Middle Eastern history, and ask the Holy Spirit to guide and teach you and unlock God's mysteries, you will have a deep enough understanding to reply with an intelligent rebuttal that will often send liberal bible critics away muttering to themselves or even silenced.

I've talked with several of you who tell me how you have been at dinner or lunch and talking casually with a friend or family member who starts to question the bible or your faith, and that you were shocked at the knowledge that came out of your mouth in reply. You suddenly realized that you knew things about God, His Word, and His patterns and principles that you didn't realize you knew! You see, the bible was never meant to be the sole province of academics, seminarians, and theologians. The bible was written for every one of God's elect to understand, digest, and follow as one's life-guide. And many of you, thank the Lord, have discovered this reality. So as I've endeavored to show you at every step of the way in our methodical study of Daniel, that each accusation of falsehood and error against this book can usually be addressed and rebuffed without us looking like a deer caught in the headlights, or resorting to: "I'll just believe what I want to believe, and you believe what you want to believe". So hang in there as we continue; these details that we are delving into matter and you can comprehend them and remember them.

Since we read the entire chapter 5 last week, we'll re-read it in portions this week.

RE-READ DANIEL 5:1 – 4

Belshatzar is throwing a party for around 1000 of his closest friends. It was Oriental custom that the king sits in the front of the room, on a raised platform, so that his guests could take their cues by watching him. And this king wanted to drink copious amounts of wine and get drunk. Now some scholars claim that the reason for this party was religious, and that's why the king used the Jerusalem Temple goblets. In other words, the use of those Temple vessels was (even if mistakenly) actually meant to show honor to the God of the Jews. But that ignores the plain statements of the texts that the vessels were used to praise other gods and goddesses.

Other bible academics say that since we know that immediately following this party **Belshatzar** was killed (so says verse 30), that this must have been one last great fling as the king sensed the inevitability and immediacy of Babylon's coming fall to the Persians and Medes. This is maybe even more fanciful than the 1st suggestion. The reality is that we're not told a reason for the party; so a better thought might be that this king, as with most kings, liked parties in his honor. And with the mention of his wives and concubines being in attendance, drinking right along with him, the sordid and common intent of the party seems logical.

However the Rabbis have another answer and it's a pretty good one. Recorded in the Talmud Tractate Megilla 11b, it is said that the occasion for the party was as a kind of response to the

prophecy of Jeremiah that the Jews would be exiled under the power of Babylon for precisely 70 years, and it would end when Babylon was conquered by another people. So according to Babylonian reckoning the 70 years had passed, the Jews were still captive in Babylon, and Babylon was still standing as a Babylonian Empire. Thus a national celebration was called for to mock the God of Jews who, in the end, couldn't deliver on His prophetic promise that had been given through Jeremiah. So **Belshatzar** took the gold and silver Temple ritual vessels (that the earlier Babylonian kings had been careful not to defile up to this point), and used them to drink toasts to his gods who (according to the ancient way of thinking) had defeated the God of Jews and prevented this people from being released from the power of Babylon. Were these Rabbis correct? Nothing about their explanation is improbable and actually fits quite well. But, we can't know with absolute certainty.

Another reasonable explanation as to why, breaking with a tradition of almost 70 years of showing respect to these sacred Temple objects, this king ordered the Temple goblets to be brought to him is that he was drunk, and had lost any sense of appropriateness or caution. It is obvious from the context that these vessels had been stored away for safe-keeping since Nebuchadnezzar's day. They were considered spoils of war, property of the king, and were proof for folks of that era that the Babylonian gods were superior to the God of the Jews, at least when it came to war. But we don't see Nebuchadnezzar directly mocking God by using them. Even though he did grow prideful and arrogant, thinking his own greatness had built this Empire, we still see him acknowledging the power of this God, especially after suffering through a period of madness that that Lord warned He would inflict upon him.....and did. But with the passing of time, and the death of Nebuchadnezzar (and not to mention the influence of a few liters of wine), this young king (this final King of Babylon) was feeling no fear. And worse, showing no respect.

Verse 4 once again mentions the drinking of wine so as to emphasize that this was the main activity of this party. As C.F. Kiel says, "The wickedness lay in this, that they drank out of the holy vessels of the Temple of the God of Israel to glorify their heathen gods in songs of praise". **Belshatzar**, in his inebriated state, didn't realize that he had just picked a very public, unwinnable fight with the Creator of the Universe.

RE-READ DANIEL 5:5 - 9

Suddenly the king and his guests quit their revelry as they witnessed something that shook them to sobriety. Out of nowhere, fingers and part of hand began writing on the palace wall, which was being lit-up by a candelabra. Verse 5 emphasizes that the king saw the writing occurring. However the remainder of the story makes it clear that it wasn't only the king who saw it; it was visible to everyone present and to the Chaldean seers who were summoned to interpret its meaning.

It is interesting that this verse specifically mentions that the mysterious writing was on the **plaster** of the wall. Archeologists who have explored the ruins of Babel report that the interior walls of the royal palace were indeed coated in painted white plaster. So one can imagine that any dark object moving across a brilliant plaster-white background would show up quite well. The king turned as pale as the wall, and grew weak upon witnessing such an astounding thing.

When verse 6 says that the king's loins were loosed, it is an idiom. I've spoken to you before about how in ancient times various organs of the body were assumed to contain certain functions, many of which served as repositories of specific emotions. The heart, however, was not one of them. The heart was not a place of emotion, but rather of thinking and reasoning. The kidneys and liver, however, were two such organs that did emit emotions. The loins was conceived as yet another, and it was believed to be where fear and anxiety came from.

Verse 7 embellishes the narrative by saying that the king cried out for his royal guild of the black arts to come and explain this knee-knocking event. In fact the Aramaic better translates to "called loudly", meaning of course that he screamed for them he was so terror filled. One can easily picture how, nearly paralyzed with fear, he was ready to offer anything for a remedy. So he offers to give the one who can decipher the writing a purple cloak and a gold chain. Purple is the color that royalty wears, and the gold chain is meant as an insignia of authority. The words that say that the interpreter would one of 3 men ruling the kingdom; or receive 1/3rd of the kingdom, are difficult. But most likely it is that this person would become 3rd in command over Babylon. First in command was Nabonidus, second was Belshatzar, and whoever was next after Belshatzar was about to be replaced. Even with such an unprecedented reward there for the taking, none of the Chaldean seers had the answer.

RE-READ DANIEL 5:10 - 12

Beginning with verse 10, we just plunge right back into controversy. We actually talked about these 3 verses at length last week, and reviewed them to begin today's lesson, with regards to the identification of the queen and whether or not Nebuchadnezzar was actually **Belshatzar's** father in the common biological sense. The conclusion was that the term "father" merely meant that Nebuchadnezzar was the father in the sense of founder or Patriarch, of the current Babylonian Empire and therefore father of the current series of Babylonian monarchs.

As to the queen, she is a bit of a mystery. It seems that she was quite familiar with Nebuchadnezzar and knew much of the inner workings of the palace. She knew Nebuchadnezzar's reasons for calling upon Daniel, the Jewish exile, to interpret the king's dreams and visions and why he had placed this Hebrew foreigner in charge of his all-important royal guild of Chaldean seers (a thing which embarrassed and infuriated them). She knew not only his Jewish name (Daniel) but also his Babylonian name (**Belt-shatzar**). While there is no way to know for certain, and there are no records to verify it, it seems likely that this queen was Nebuchadnezzar's main wife. Recall that the time period we're dealing with is only 13 or 14 years after Nebuchadnezzar's death. So since wives were usually quite young when compared with their husbands, that his wife would still be alive, revered, seen as an important advisor to the current king, and allowed free access to the palace and the throne room, it is quite likely that this is the identity of the queen (although we don't know her royal name). In fact, that is more or less the consensus of bible scholars of all disciplines.

Where the disagreement comes among them is to whether or not she was also **Belshatzar's** biological mother (something the Scriptures do not tell us); but that is not out of the realm of possibility. Might it be that this queen is actually King Nabonidus's (**Belshatzar's** father's) wife and that's why she is front and center in the story, perhaps as kind of an

additional set of eyes and ears in the palace during Nabonidus's extended absences? If so, then she probably was **Belshatzar's** biological mother. But if that is the case, it is nearly unthinkable that she would also have been Nebuchadnezzar's wife at one time (again, something that the Scriptures don't tell us one way or the other). So we're still stuck with speculation as to just who this queen is.

In any case she makes a strong recommendation to the king that since Daniel was so highly thought of by the Patriarch Nebuchadnezzar that **Belshatzar** ought to summon him immediately to try and untangle the mystery of the writings on the plaster wall. In fact, the tone of the narrative makes her suggestion seem far more like an urgent instruction. This raises the question of whether or not Daniel was still in charge of the Chaldean seers' guild; he probably was not. Otherwise the king would have been well aware of him and no urging of the queen along with Daniel's credentials would have been necessary. Just as in modern politics, when regimes change so are there changes in those who are given high positions in the government administration.

RE-READ DANIEL 5:13 – 23

Daniel's most outstanding characteristic (at least as far as the Babylonian kings were concerned) was in his ability to accurately interpret dreams and visions. This gives me an opportunity for a brief but important detour. Another general controversy over the Book of Daniel is its placement in the Hebrew Bible. Daniel is NOT listed among the Books of the Prophets (the **Nevi'im**) nor is he considered to be a Prophet (along the lines of Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Ezekiel). Rather he is listed among the Writings (the **K'tuvim**) along with books like Ruth, Esther, and Psalms. So, say bible critics, this is proof of itself that not only is Daniel a very late book (they say it was written about 165 B.C., a claim that we have examined and thoroughly punctured), but also that the Rabbinical council didn't regard Daniel's sayings as legitimately prophetic. Rather Daniel was seen as only a legendary, though valuable, story. Therefore although the Rabbinic council didn't feel confident in including him among the great prophets, the book itself was so highly revered and read among the Jews and in Synagogues that they couldn't just leave it out, and so they placed it in a less authoritative position in the bible.

None of that line of thinking holds water; it only fulfills an agenda. First, the **K'tuvim** is not where the questionable books, or writings of "lesser inspiration", were placed in the bible. The various categories were simply a way to create structure and created for the sake of order and organization that is not much different in concept than the eventual way that later scholars divided each bible book into chapters and verses. By what authority does a bible scholar decide when a chapter starts and ends, and when a verse starts and ends? Their own.

Second, the category of Prophets (**Nevi'im**) is divided into two sub-categories called the Early Prophets (**Nevi'im Rishonim**) and the Later Prophets (**Nevi'im Acharonim**). The Early Prophets include books like Joshua, Judges and Kings. Thus we see that the definition of prophets and prophecy changed over time in the Tanach (OT), and it took yet another turn in the New Testament. This is not the time or the place to get into what is a lengthy discussion on the differences; suffice it to say that despite how it seems to us in modern times, the term

“prophecy” did not always (or only) mean making a prediction of the future. Rather it could mean simply recalling God’s Word to mind, or like in the New Testament, it could mean something similar to the Hebrew concept of **Midrash**. That is, existing Scripture is quoted and then discussed and debated among learned men to extract meaning. In the case of the New Testament (where about one-half of the words of the NT are but OT Scripture quotations), it is that Paul, Peter, John and others generally dealt with OT prophecies concerning the Messiah, and with the Torah laws of the Law of Moses, and then engaged in **midrash** (discussed them) in light of the new reality that the Messiah has finally come, who He turned out to be (Yeshua of Nazareth), and what this now means for the faithful (on the one hand), and the unfaithful (on the other hand) and even how the faithful and unfaithful are defined. And perhaps most importantly, who can belong to the Kingdom of Christ?

Thus Daniel doesn’t fall within the definition of an early or later prophet, even though he does so much predictive prophesying. The most visible and unique characteristic that separates Daniel from others is that he did his predictive prophesying in service to a series of pagan kings and never to an Israelite king. I mentioned that Psalms was also part of the same category that Daniel was placed in (the **K’tuvim**, the Writings), and of course Psalms is noted for having a number of predictive prophecies intertwined within them, including Messianic prophecies. Yet Psalms, like Daniel, is not included among the books of the Prophets. Bottom line: biblical categories are merely human attempts to create some kind of order and are inherently imprecise. Thus where a book (such as Daniel) is placed in the bible is anything but God orchestrated. In fact the typical Hebrew bible is ordered differently than the typical Christian bible, and in some cases the two don’t have the same number of books. So to try to discredit the Book of Daniel because around 2000 years ago a rabbinic council decided to place it in the category of Writings instead of Prophets is a contrived, if not shameful, argument designed only to destroy and not to build up the body of Messiah.

Back to our story. Daniel arrived, stood before **Belshatzar**, and told him that he’d interpret the writings that supernaturally appeared, but that he had no interest in monetary rewards. That kind of response no doubt went a long way to prove to the king that Daniel had no personal advancement in mind; what he’d tell the king was truthful and there was no agenda. I don’t believe that his refusal was a disrespectful or curt retort to the king’s offer of riches and position; it only appears that way when translated into English and set in a 21st century cultural setting. Rather it was just saying, “No thanks” because Daniel’s motives were such that self-interest wasn’t part of the equation (in contrast to the never-ending self-interest of the members of the Chaldean black arts guild).

But before Daniel tells the king the meaning of the writings on the wall, he reminded him not only of the greatness of his Patriarch Nebuchadnezzar, but what happened to Nebuchadnezzar when pride and arrogance over took him, and God placed him on par with animals as a consequence. He reminds him that it was the God Most High (notice again, no name, just a title) who gave Nebuchadnezzar the Babylonian Kingdom, and all of his greatness and honor. And it was because of what the God Most High (the **illay**, the **EI**) did for Nebuchadnezzar that the entire world bowed before this great king. But it was also because Nebuchadnezzar failed to give the God Most High His due that He had everything taken from him.

No doubt the reason for Daniel saying what he did was to impress upon **Belshatzar** that he didn't come near to measuring up to **Nebuchadnezzar**. Let's remember that technically this kingdom didn't even belong to **Belshatzar** but rather to his father, Nabonidus. So as staggering and without boundary was the reach and power of Nebuchadnezzar, so as limited was **Belshatzar's** reach and power. And yet, says Daniel in verse 22, knowing all this he still foolishly has decided to take on God. Despite the king being so very aware of what happened even to the incomparable Nebuchadnezzar, **Belshatzar** has trespassed even more deeply upon the God Most High. Thus we find no warning to him to repent; no possibility of reprieve (not even for a time); no offer to the king to turn and receive grace. **Belshatzar** had crossed over some great cosmic line in the sand, established and known only to the Lord of Heaven and Earth. He had been judged, his fate was sealed and it could not be altered. We have seen this pattern before, and we see it expressed yet again in a future time, some 600 years after Daniel.

Hebrews 10:23-29 CJB

²³ *Let us continue holding fast to the hope we acknowledge, without wavering; for the One who made the promise is trustworthy.*

²⁴ *And let us keep paying attention to one another, in order to spur each other on to love and good deeds,*

²⁵ *not neglecting our own congregational meetings, as some have made a practice of doing, but, rather, encouraging each other. And let us do this all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

²⁶ *For if we deliberately continue to sin after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,*

²⁷ *but only the terrifying prospect of Judgment, of raging fire that will consume the enemies.*

²⁸ *Someone who disregards the Torah of Moshe is put to death without mercy on the word of two or three witnesses.*

²⁹ *Think how much worse will be the punishment deserved by someone who has trampled underfoot the Son of God; who has treated as something common the blood of the covenant which made him holy; and who has insulted the Spirit, giver of God's grace!*