

Survey of the Bible Daniel 5:1-31

The last time we were together, we concluded chapter 4 as Nebuchadnezzar was given his sanity back from God as he spent 7 periods of time living as an animal in the wilderness after being cast from his throne.

Upon God returning him to power Nebuchadnezzar gives glory to the God of heaven.

Daniel 4:37 ³⁷ "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride."

Was this Nebuchadnezzar's conversion to the one true God?

We aren't told and since he had declared similar praises to God in his past while still holding on to his own gods we can't be sure, and since nothing is ever said again in either the old or new testaments about the end of his life we can only hope for his salvation.

And so, from here we move to another king who reigns over Babylon by the name of Belshazzar.

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

Without introduction or any segue between the two kings, as it relates to a chronological historical relationship, Belshazzar just appears.

What is interesting is that in the historical Babylonian accounts there is no one by the name of Belshazzar immediately following Nebuchadnezzar. And yet we are told clearly in chapter 5 that Nebuchadnezzar was his father.

Daniel 5:2 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,

Daniel 5:11 ¹¹ "There is a man in your kingdom in whom is a spirit of the holy gods; and 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.

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

If the historical records of Babylon do not suggest that Nebuchadnezzar was the immediate father of Belshazzar, how do we explain this?

The first thing to recognize is that it was not uncommon in ancient history, especially in near east history, for names to be changed or altered depending on who was recording the history. There are Pharaoh's who were completely written out of history precisely because of their bad relationship with the incoming power.

But it is not necessarily the case that there is absolutely no reference to Belshazzar in Babylonian history, the obvious one being Daniel himself, who lived during the time of this ruler and had direct contact with him and now writes about him.

Sinclair B. Ferguson in his commentary on Daniel makes this observation.

"Bel-sar-usar (Belshazzar) was the eldest son of Nabonidus, the last king of Babylon. Nabonidus (556-539) sought to exalt the moon god, Sin, as the chief deity among the Babylonian pantheon, replacing Marduk. Perhaps in part due to the local reaction of his attempts to redefine the hierarchy of the gods, Nabonidus set up his royal residence in Teiman, southeast of Edom, and for a decade left his son, Belshazzar, serving as regent.... Belshazzar therefore seems to have been virtually co-opted as monarch for practical reasons."

So, there is historical precedence for the existence of Belshazzar as a Babylonian ruler. However, if the father of Belshazzar is Nabonidus how do we explain our text which connects Belshazzar to Nebuchadnezzar as his father?

Again, ancient peoples, especially in the near east would often be connected to someone as their progenitor despite the fact that they were not the actual biological father in the immediate line.

This is why for example every Jew during Christ's time could identify their father as Abraham.

John 8:53 ⁵³ "Surely You are not greater than *our father Abraham*, who died? The prophets died too; whom do You make Yourself out *to be*?"

John 8:56 ⁵⁶ "*Your father Abraham* rejoiced to see My day, and he saw *it* and was glad."

In fact, you and I in Christ can also lay claim to Abraham as our actual father.

Romans 4:16 ¹⁶ For this reason *it is* by faith, in order that *it may be* in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those *who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all*,

The entire book of Daniel is not written to explain the historical accounts of Babylon, like say the books of Kings or Chronicles, but rather to display God's judgment on those who rebel, both Jew and Gentile, as well as mercy and grace that will also be displayed on both Jew and Gentile as we will see.

The distance between the reigns of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar may be long but there was no greater king in Babylon than Nebuchadnezzar and every subsequent king would glory in that light by being identified with him as a son even as the Jews gloried in the light and fame of Abraham.

Daniel is concerned with the exile coming to an end and is in expectation of God delivering His people with a mighty hand. And just as the Lord establishes kings as well as deposes them Daniel is recording the acts of God in redemptive history in a way that establishes that the kingdoms of this world will not stand against the Kingdom of God.

And so, we come to our text and it is clear that what the apostle Paul records for us in Galatians would prove to be true in the case of Belshazzar.

Galatians 6:7-8 ⁷ Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. ⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

Essentially what Belshazzar had done was to elevate himself among his guests as one who was above all things in his kingdom and could act with impunity regarding the King of kings as he

mocked and blasphemed the God of heaven by displaying the holy articles of worship that were designed for the House of God and His temple.

Daniel 5:2 he gave orders to bring the gold and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple which *was* in Jerusalem,

Daniel 5:3-4 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. ⁴ They drank the wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.

A number of years may have separated Nebuchadnezzar from Belshazzar, but one thing is clear, Belshazzar learned nothing from the history of Nebuchadnezzar. But he is about to relearn that lesson in a hurry.

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

It is at this point that Belshazzar, like Nebuchadnezzar, seeks the counsel of someone who can give him an answer to this strange thing that is happening to him. But all of his wise men are confounded by the letters on the wall.

Again, having a handle on history can help your present situation and fortunately for Belshazzar there was someone who knew her history.

Daniel 5:9-12 ⁹ Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, his face grew *even* paler, and his nobles were perplexed. 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. ¹¹ "There is a man in your kingdom in whom is a spirit of the holy gods; and 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. ¹² "*This was* because an extraordinary spirit, knowledge and insight,

interpretation of dreams, explanation of enigmas and solving of difficult problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belshazzar. Let Daniel now be summoned and he will declare the interpretation."

Belshazzar calls for Daniel and promises him to be third ruler in the kingdom but Daniel refuses.

Why do you suppose Daniel refuses this offer?

Part of it may be connected to the fact that Daniel knew that the Babylonian Kingdom was going to be judged by God and destroyed as we'll see later in this book where Daniel is given a vision of future kingdoms that replace the reign of Babylon over the world.

Add to that that Belshazzar has no regard for the one true God and consciously chooses to mock and denigrate God through his actions of blaspheming the holy things connected to God, Daniel feels compelled to let Belshazzar keep anything associated with his gods and his ungodly rule.

And of course, knowing that God was going to take Belshazzar's life, he would certainly not be in a position of making good on his promises.

But before Daniel gives Belshazzar the interpretation to the writing on the wall he is going to give him one more history lesson, that is history from God's perspective and His making, as His will was accomplished according to His good pleasure.

Daniel 5:18-22 ¹⁸ "O king, the Most High God granted sovereignty, grandeur, glory and majesty to Nebuchadnezzar your father. 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. 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. ²¹ "He was also driven away from mankind, and his heart was made like *that of* beasts, and 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 whomever He wishes. ²² "Yet

you, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this,

Even though he knew all this?

I don't think Belshazzar ever forgot his history but rather conveniently placed it to the side because it got in the way of his sin and rebellion.

Paul makes this clear about all men and their sin.

Romans 1:18-19 ¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men *who suppress the truth in unrighteousness*, ¹⁹ because that which is known about God is evident within them; for *God made it evident to them*.

Belshazzar has no excuse and cannot claim that he did not know the truth. He simply suppressed it in his own unrighteousness.

Daniel is simply acknowledging the truth by which God will now enact His judgment on Belshazzar.

Daniel 5:23 ²³ but you have exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines have been drinking wine from them; and 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 your ways, you have not glorified.

The gods of silver and gold and bronze, iron, wood and stone do not see or understand. But Daniel is reminding Belshazzar that despite how his gods cannot respond to any questions regarding his future His Creator can and will.

This is the God who breathed the breath of life into Adam after He formed Adam from the dust of the earth. It is this God who spoke the universe into existence in the span of 6 days and to whom all men who are charged to worship and glorify.

It is this God in front of whom Belshazzar now stands as Daniel represents His God and Creator and metes out the justice that God will deliver.

Belshazzar was only interested in knowing what the hand wrote on the wall not realizing that the message was far more ominous for

him than he imagined. After a night of drinking and partying he is about to be sobered up rather quickly.

Daniel 5:24-26 ²⁴ "Then the hand was sent from Him and this inscription was written out. ²⁵ "Now this is the inscription that was written out: 'MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.' ²⁶ "This is the interpretation of the message:

Daniel will address each word and its meaning.

Daniel 5:26 'MENE '-- God has numbered your kingdom and put an end to it.

There is a point where the patience of God comes to an end and God will be the One to determine that end and nothing will stay His hand. This part of the message is clear; the party is over.

Daniel 5:27 ²⁷ "'TEKEL '-- you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient.

By the way, every one of the words of this message are Aramaic words that describe a measurement of weight, which is likely why Belshazzar's wise men were not able to interpret the message though they could certainly interpret the words.

This is why Daniel can give a lengthy interpretation to just one word because God gave him the meaning of what kind of measurement was being weighed out for Belshazzar, and in the case of *Tekel* that particular weight falls short on God's scale.

Daniel 5:28 ²⁸ "'PERES '-- your kingdom has been divided and given over to the Medes and Persians."

The word *Upharsin* or *Peres*, which is a derivative of the *Uphasin*, is translated as half of the *mene* measurement, thus the meaning given to Daniel as the kingdom being divided and given over to the Medes and Persians.

The entire message is related to weights and measurements and every measurement is measured against the holiness of God and His word.

Leviticus 19:36-37 ³⁶ 'You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin; I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt. ³⁷ 'You shall thus observe all My statutes and all My ordinances and do them; I am the LORD.'"

Proverbs 20:23 ²³ Differing weights are an abomination to the LORD, And a false scale is not good.

Belshazzar lived a life of false scales and differing weights as he placed himself above the true scales of God's revelation as revealed to Nebuchadnezzar, and of that truth he suppressed in all unrighteousness.

Proverbs 24:12 ¹² If you say, "See, we did not know this," ***Does He not consider it who weighs the hearts?*** And does He not know *it* who keeps your soul? And ***will He not render to man according to his work?***

God will render powerless the one who exalts himself in power and now Belshazzar will have to personally face his Creator and God in judgment.

Apparently in a last ditch effort Belshazzar tries to do a good work for the man of God but the weight of his sin will not turn the scales back to his favor.

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

Of course this good work of Belshazzar results in falling short.

Daniel 5:30-31 ³⁰ That same night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain. ³¹ So Darius the Mede received the kingdom at about the age of sixty-two.

Belshazzar is out and Darius is in. We'll pick up here next time.