

Daniel 5: King Belshazzar and a new King in charge

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A New King in charge: King Belshazzar

In our study of Daniel, we have talked at length about King Nebuchadnezzar: from his rule over magnificent and wealthy Babylon to his humiliation when he lived in the manner of beasts. King Nebuchadnezzar's wits had been restored to him, but meanwhile, kings rise up and fall . . . and at this point in the historical record, there was a new king in charge.

[Daniel 5:1](#)

[Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in the presence of the thousand.](#)

Succession

King Nebuchadnezzar to King Belshazzar

Remember when we talked about [the kingdoms that would come after Babylon? The Medo-Persian Empire, the Greek \(Hellenistic\) Empire, and the Roman Empire, followed by divided nations.](#)

A historian named Berosus had chronicled what was happening in Babylon. He actually served as a Babylonian priest of Bel Marduk, but he was Hellenistic and actually wrote in Koiné Greek, a departure from Chaldean (an Aramaic dialect). We see a transitioning from the Babylon of King Nebuchadnezzar into a weakening empire that would be overtaken first by the Medo-Persians and then by the Greeks.

Berosus gives a timeline for some of these kings which helps us understand where King Belshazzar fits in.

King Nebuchadnezzar had a son. His name was Evil-Merodach. His Babylonian name would be transliterated more like *Awil-Marduk*, but I think as generations have passed, scribes left it as "Evil" because he was evil, licentious (*lawless, crude, unrestrained*), and served Marduk so the name fits and has stuck.

If you remember from [Daniel 1](#), King Jehoiachin of Judah was the son of King Jehoiakim of Judah.

[2 Chronicles 36:9](#) "[Jehoiachin was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem three months and ten days. And he did evil in the sight of the LORD.](#)" (He did evil,

just like his father Jehoiakim)

Well, if we turn to [2 Kings 25:27-30](#), Evil-Merodach befriends the wicked Judean king:

[²⁷ Now it came to pass in the thirty-seventh year of the captivity of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, that Evil-Merodach king of Babylon, in the year that he began to reign, released Jehoiachin king of Judah from prison.](#)

[²⁸ He spoke kindly to him, and gave him a more prominent seat than those of the kings who were with him in Babylon. ²⁹ So Jehoiachin changed from his prison garments, and he ate bread regularly before the king all the days of his life. ³⁰ And as for his provisions, there was a regular ration given him by the king, a portion for each day, all the days of his life.](#)

This is also reported in [Jeremiah 52:31-34](#):

[“Now it came to pass in the thirty-seventh year of the captivity of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-fifth day of the month, that Evil-Merodach king of Babylon, in the first year of his reign, lifted up the head of Jehoiachin king of Judah and brought him out of prison.”
Jeremiah 52:31](#)

ExtraBiblical sources such as Berosus and even Ptolemy record that Evil-Merodach ruled for only 2 years and then was assassinated by his brother-in-law. His brother-in-law was named Nergal-Sharezar.

Well, the Bible does at least mention Nergal-Sharezar in [Jeremiah 39:3](#) –

[“Then all the princes of the king of Babylon came in and sat in the Middle Gate: Nergal-Sharezer, Samgar-Nebo, Sarsechim, Rabsaris, Nergal-Sarezer, Rabmag, with the rest of](#)

[the princes of the king of Babylon.” Jeremiah 39:3](#). He is also mentioned in [Jeremiah 39:13](#).

It is said he ruled for 4 years and then he died of natural causes. The ancient historians say that he had a son, Laborosoarchod, who ruled as a child, but he had a mental disorder. He only ruled for 9 months when a gang of conspirators beat him to death.

The gang appointed one of their guys, Nabonidus, to be the new king.

Nabonidus had a son named Belshazzar, who became king. These were the final Babylonian kings.

Don't confuse Daniel's Babylonian name, "Belteshazzar" with this King Belshazzar. Very similar and even in meaning, their gods will "protect," but Daniel is not the king, so don't get confused by all these names.

Daniel 5:2-4

Belshazzar's desecration of the temple utensils

[² "While he tasted the wine, Belshazzar gave the command to bring the gold and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple which had been in Jerusalem, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. ³ Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken from the temple of the house of God which had been in Jerusalem; and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. ⁴ They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone." \(Daniel 5:2-4\)](#)

It has been years since the holy items had been taken from the

Jerusalem temple.

But Belshazzar wanted to make a point of how mighty his empire was and commanded that the gold and silver cups and utensils be brought to be used at his pagan feast and all those people drank from them with no shame.

Verse 4 should catch our attention. They drank their wine and “praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone.”

Remember King Nebuchadnezzar’s statue dream? It was constructed of each of those items. Their worship was severely misguided and would result in the fulfillment of that dream.

Daniel 5:5-12

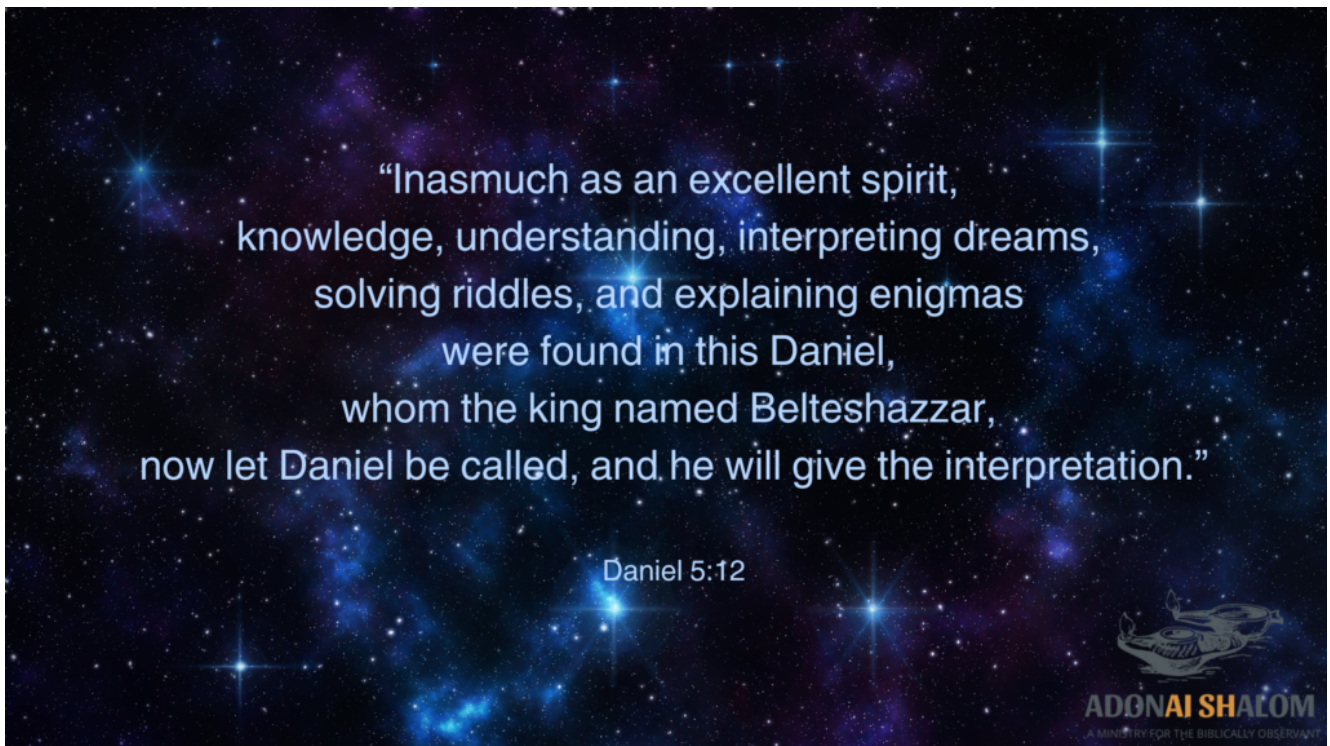
⁵ In the same hour the fingers of a man’s hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king’s palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. ⁶ Then the king’s countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other.

⁷ The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. The king spoke, saying to the wise men of Babylon, “Whoever reads this writing, and tells me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around his neck; and he shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.” ⁸ Now all the king’s wise men came, but they could not read the writing, or make known to the king its interpretation. ⁹ Then King Belshazzar was greatly troubled, his countenance was changed, and his lords were astonished.

¹⁰ The queen, because of the words of the king and his lords, came to the banquet hall. The queen spoke, saying, “O king,

live forever! Do not let your thoughts trouble you, nor let your countenance change. ¹¹ There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God. And in the days of your father, light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, were found in him; and King Nebuchadnezzar your father—your father the king—made him chief of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers.

¹² Inasmuch as an excellent spirit, knowledge, understanding, interpreting dreams, solving riddles, and explaining enigmas were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar, now let Daniel be called, and he will give the interpretation.” Daniel 5:1-12



The handwriting on the wall

If you've ever heard that phrase, "the handwriting's on the wall," everything's going down from here . . . it comes from this.

King Belshazzar watched as he experienced a vision. He saw a man's hand writing on the wall. Like King Nebuchadnezzar's

before him, King Belshazzar's countenance changed . . . and his knees buckled!

Like [King Nebuchadnezzar \(these kings never learn!\)](#) he called for his astrologer and sorcery team. But, as usual, they were useless for the task ([verse 8](#)).

The Queen's wisdom

According to commentaries, the queen mentioned in [Daniel 5:10](#) is not King Belshazzar's wife, but rather the queen mother. The Queen was either versed in their national history, had a good memory, or feared God. She knew about Daniel and counseled Belshazzar to call for Daniel. She was certain Daniel could give Belshazzar the interpretation of the writing on the wall.

Daniel 5:13-16

[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 captives from Judah, whom my father the king brought from Judah? ¹⁴ I have heard of you, that the Spirit of God is in you, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you.](#)

[¹⁵ Now the wise men, the astrologers, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing and make known to me its interpretation, but they could not give the interpretation of the thing. ¹⁶ And I have heard of you, that you can give interpretations and explain enigmas. Now if you can read the writing and make known to me its interpretation, you shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around your neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom."](#)

Daniel had been governor, but with all the different kings rising to power, he had essentially been demoted and forgotten about. Now King Belshazzar offers to make him third in command.

But Daniel wants no part of that:

[Daniel 5:17-24](#)

[17](#) Then Daniel answered, and said before the king, "Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another; yet I will read the writing to the king, and make known to him the interpretation. ¹⁸ O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father a kingdom and majesty, glory and honor. ¹⁹ And because of the majesty that He gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whomever he wished, he executed; whomever he wished, he kept alive; whomever he wished, he set up; and whomever he wished, he put down.

[20](#) But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him. ²¹ Then he was driven from the sons of men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till he knew that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses.

[22](#) "But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this. ²³ And you have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven. They have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your lords, your wives and your concubines, have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and

stone, which do not see or hear or know; and the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified. ²⁴ Then the fingers of the hand were sent from Him, and this writing was written."

Daniel is very confident in who he is as a prophet. He knew he would be able to interpret the writing.

When you serve God and you know who you are in Christ, you can have that same conviction. Learn to operate in the gifts of the Spirit and allow God to use you to bless others. Daniel had a prophetic gifting and He cultivated that as He sought God.

Daniel reminds King Belshazzar about all that happened to his predecessor King Nebuchadnezzar.

Verse 22 is very convicting because Daniel tells Belshazzar, "you knew all [of] this."

This isn't news to you, king.

Daniel describes 5 sins of Belshazzar:

1. Belshazzar hasn't humbled his heart
2. Belshazzar has lifted himself up against the Lord of heaven. Daniel uses the term, "Lord." In those earlier chapters, the term "God" was often used. But it has been established which God we are talking about, and not only is the God of Israel Supreme, but He is LORD of heaven. Lord over all of Belshazzar's gods.
3. Belshazzar used the LORD's holy vessels to drink wine at his pagan feast.
4. Belshazzar has given praise to idols who cannot see, hear, or know.
5. Belshazzar refuses to glorify the God who has given him life, and who owns everything

Daniel 5:25-31

²⁵ “And this is the inscription that was written:

MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.

²⁶ This is the interpretation of each word. MENE: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it; ²⁷ TEKEL: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; ²⁸ PERES: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.” ²⁹ Then Belshazzar gave the command, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a chain of gold around his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

³⁰ That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. ³¹ And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.

Daniel gives the interpretation, Belshazzar receives it by promoting Daniel again, but that very night, Belshazzar was killed.

And Darius, the Mede received the kingdom.

Babylon has fallen.

A new King in charge

The Babylonian king didn't measure up.

The world's systems will bring to power all sorts of kings and leaders. But God wants to be the King in charge.

If you've placed your trust in Jesus, He is the new King in charge of your life.

Let Him rule and reign in Your life!

The Medo-Persian Empire and the situation in the Middle East today

This weekend, Iran launched an aggressive attack against Israel.

In the Bible, Iran is also known as Persia, as well as Elam.

[Jeremiah 49:35-39](#)

[“Thus says the Lord of hosts:](#)

[‘Behold, I will break the bow of Elam,
The foremost of their might.
Against Elam I will bring the four winds
From the four quarters of heaven,
And scatter them toward all those winds;
There shall be no nations where the outcasts of Elam will not
go.](#)

[For I will cause Elam to be dismayed before their enemies
And before those who seek their life.
I will bring disaster upon them,
My fierce anger,’ says the Lord;
‘And I will send the sword after them
Until I have consumed them.
I will set My throne in Elam,
And will destroy from there the king and the princes,’ says
the Lord.](#)

[‘But it shall come to pass in the latter days:
I will bring back the captives of Elam,’ says the Lord.”](#)

“For I will cause Elam to be dismayed before their enemies And before those who seek their life.
I will bring disaster upon them, my fierce anger,’ says the LORD;
‘And I will send the sword after them until I have consumed them.
I will set My throne in Elam, and will destroy from there the king and the princes,’ says the LORD.”

Jeremiah 49:37-38



The Elamites and the Medes became part of the Persian Empire, and we just saw in [Daniel 5](#) that the Medo-Persian Empire conquered Babylon in 539BC.

The fall of Babylon was prophesied in [Isaiah 21:1-2](#):

“The burden against the Wilderness of the Sea.

As whirlwinds in the South pass through,
So it comes from the desert, from a terrible land.
A distressing vision is declared to me;
The treacherous dealer deals treacherously,
And the plunderer plunders.
Go up, O Elam!
Besiege, O Media!
All its sighing I have made to cease.”

The area in southern Babylon near the Persian Gulf was known as the “Land of the sea.” I imagine it would have been seen as a tourist destination, a beautiful place.

Well, God mocks their view of beauty. He calls it the Wilderness – in other words, the Wasteland desert of the sea. Babylon would be made desolate.

Daniel actually lived in Elam according to [Daniel 8:2](#).

We know that ultimately Elam (Persia) will ally with [Magog](#), which is believed to be [Russia](#). ([Ez.38:5](#))

[“You will say, ‘I will go up against a land of unwalled villages; I will go to a peaceful people, who dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates’– to take plunder and to take booty, to stretch out your hand against the waste places that are again inhabited, and against a people gathered from the nations, who have acquired livestock and goods, who dwell in the midst of the land.” Ezekiel 38:11-12](#)

There are differing views as to when the Gog/Magog war will begin, so you would have to really study this out to come up with what you think best aligns with the Scriptures.

Some believe the Gog/Magog War will occur pre-Tribulation while others believe it would occur during the first half of the tribulation. In any case, we know that Iran will fall on the mountains of Israel ([Ez.39:4-5](#)). While Iran and Russia plot and plan for a total victory, [Ezekiel 39:7](#) assures us that God will make His Holy Name known.

Hope for Iranians?

It is so very difficult to live in a nation that does its best to work against God.

Even the United States is becoming more and more secularized and anti-God.

The people of Iran have faced so much oppression, yet God has been working and there have been many conversions to Christianity despite the very real risks.

God can still bless you, even if you find yourself alone.

Parthians, Medes, and Elamites

[“And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia . . . ”](#)
[Acts 2:8-9](#)

Who was present on the day of Pentecost in [Acts 2](#)?

Medes and Elamites!

Persians! Iranians!

Jesus told His disciples to wait on Him, to wait on the Promise of the Father. And they did: from every nation, tribe, and tongue.

Similarly today, we await the Blessed Hope! He will return for all of us who believe and have placed our trust in Messiah Jesus!

[“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ . . . ”](#)
[Titus 2:11-13](#)

Place your trust in Him today! The fulfillment of so many Biblical prophecies in Isaiah, Daniel and Ezekiel prove that He will soon return! Are you ready for His return? Are you ready to meet Him in the air? If you would like to know more about Messiah Yeshua (Jesus Christ), please send us a message. We would love to hear from you!