

- *There were only about 20 years or so between Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar but they are full of all sorts of political intrigue, even murder and conspiracy at the highest levels of the Babylonian empire. Nebuchadnezzar died about a year after the end of chapter 4.*

*The **secular history record** shows the following activity on the **throne of Babylon** in this time:*

- Nebuchadnezzar was succeeded by his son Evil-merodach who reigned for only two years. (Biblical reference in 2 Kin. 25:27–30; Jer. 52:31–34) when he was murdered by his brother-in-law...
- Neriglissar (called Nergal-sharezer in Jer. 39:3, 13). After a brief reign of about 3 years Neriglissar died, leaving the kingdom in the hands of his son,
- Labashi-marduk lasted only two months before being killed by an assassin and succeeded by Nabonidus.
- Nabonidus, who was probably the son-in-law of Nebuchadnezzar, reigned for about 16 years. Although he left the kingdom in the hands of his son Belshazzar (some say he abdicated the throne) for much of the time, Nabonidus was able to restore some of the glory to Babylon.
- Belshazzar ruled as king the last years of Babylon. While Belshazzar was feasting, the city was surrounded by the Persian army. Belshazzar considered the city safe from attack because of its massive walls, and was confident to hold a banquet during military threat.
- *Don't confuse Belshazzar with Belteshazzar – the Babylonian name for Daniel.*
- *As this chapter opens, there is a **military threat from the Persians** (Medes and Persians) who surrounded Babylon. Belshazzar was “thumbing his nose” at them. Because of the walls surrounding Babylon and the huge stockpiles of food, he felt there was no threat. He forgot one thing – God is in control!*
- *We need to keep in mind that Babylon is far **more than just a place and kingdom in history**. It has great symbolic meaning and a very dramatic destiny. Remember it's place in prophecy and spiritual meaning. **LOOK FOR TYPES AND SIMILITUDES – GOD USES BABYLON AS A PICTURE OF OPPOSITION TO HIMSELF**. Babylon typifies man in rebellion and opposition to God, in every way. The way we think, the way we do business, the way we behave, and most importantly, **WHO**, what and how we worship. Babylon fell in 539 BC, but has not yet been destroyed. It will be. It is a good exercise to read the six chapters that prophesy this in Isaiah 13 and 14, Jeremiah 50 and 51, and Revelation 17 and 18.*



<sup>1</sup>*Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in the presence of the thousand.*

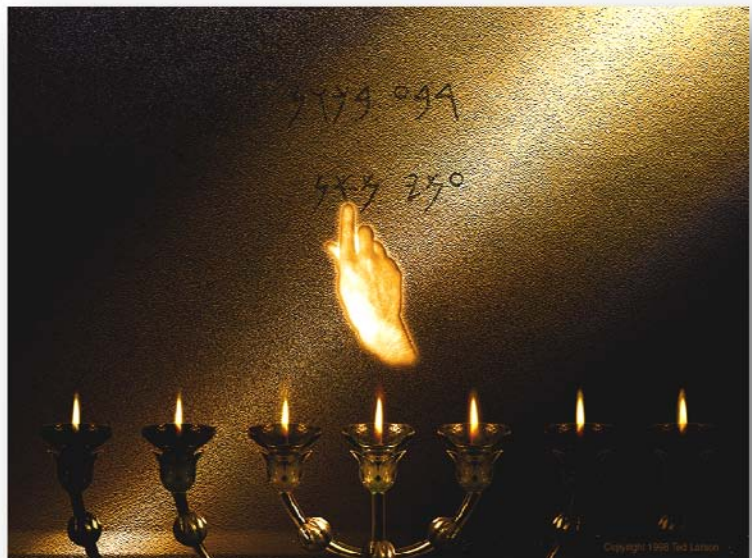
- **“Belshazzar the king...”** The scriptures here tell us that someone named Belshazzar was king at this time. But this has caused many to say that this is merely a “fairy tale,” not real, because there apparently was no mention of this guy in Babylonian history. The skeptics all thought this was made up by Daniel. (don’t confuse *Belshazzar* with *Belteshazzar* – Daniel’s Babylonian name). However, numerous archaeological discoveries in recent years have clearly established his existence. And further, show him to be the son of Nabonidus (*most likely the son-in-law of Nebuchadnezzar*), who left the throne many times, and left his son (Belshazzar) on the throne in his place. This would make Belshazzar Nebuchadnezzar’s grandson. The skeptics don’t make this criticism anymore. It is always so rewarding when the Bible is vindicated, and proven correct from the start. These events also prove that this was written by an eyewitness at the time. This writer knew the truth of the throne of Babylon millennia before history did!
- **Nabonidus was what would have been called “first in the kingdom.”** His son Belshazzar would have been “second.” This is important, because later Belshazzar was willing to make Daniel the “third,” a very high up position, next to the king himself.
- Nabonidus, the last ruler of the Babylonian empire, spent much of his time away from the kingdom on foreign expeditions, (*secular records indicate he was not well liked at home, so spent most of his time away*) and Belshazzar his son remained at Babylon as his co-regent. This shows the accuracy of what Jeremiah had said much earlier: **“With my great power and outstretched arm I made the earth and its people and the animals that are on it, and I give it to anyone I please. Now I will hand all your countries over to my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; I will make even the wild animals subject to him. All nations will serve him and his son and his grandson until the time for his land comes; then many nations and great kings will subjugate him.”** (Jeremiah 27:5-7) The Babylonian kingdom would last through the reign of a son and a grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, and then the Babylonian kingdom (the head of gold) would end. This was fulfilled quite literally, on the evening of the event in this chapter 5.
- Now Belshazzar, the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, is sitting on the throne of Babylon as **co-regent** and **throwing a huge blow out of a party**. Apparently this is a “high level” party for the elite (“his lords”), completely with lots of flowing wine. This party degenerated into a drunken orgy.
- The **Persian army had surrounded Babylon by this time**, but everyone in Babylon thought the city was impregnable (*Herodotus, the Greek historian, says they regarded the Persian siege “with indifference,” since they had stocked the city well with provisions*). After all, this city’s walls were 311 feet high, 87 feet wide, 56 miles long with 250 fully manned and stocked towers. Why worry??
- According to Herodotus, when the city was taken (by diverting the Euphrates River which ran through it) *“there was a festival going on, and they continued to dance and enjoy themselves, until they learned the news the hard way.”*
- **COMMENTARY: When God is through with a nation there is no defense. We can’t defend ourselves with missiles or anything else if God is through with us. So the most important thing is that this nation repent and turn back to God.** (Hal Lindsey)

<sup>2</sup>*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. <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone.*

- *“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,...”* Belshazzar obviously did not have the respect for Daniel’s God that Nebuchadnezzar did. It was common for conquering armies to take the national treasures as symbols of their conquest. But Nebuchadnezzar, as far as we know, merely stored them. Here an arrogant and stupid grandson calls for them to be brought to the party, where they were used as drinking vessels during a pagan celebration. Belshazzar apparently knew that his grandfather had come to a knowledge and respect of Almighty God (we’ll see this later), but here he deliberately defied and profaned God.
- *“...his father Nebuchadnezzar...”* In our understanding, Nebuchadnezzar was actually Belshazzar’s grandfather. In the ancient world it was common for “father” to mean any of a person’s previous ancestors.
- *“They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone.* They drank and praised the Babylonian gods. It would have taken more than one night to praise them all. Not only are they profaning El Elyon, the One True God, they have stepped over the line and are toasting pagan gods using holy vessels. Now He is going to invite Himself to this party.

*<sup>5</sup>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. ‘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.*

- *“In the same hour the fingers of a man’s hand appeared and wrote...”* In the same hour probably means at the same time he called for the holy temple vessels and the drinking and toasting to pagan gods began. The scriptures say “the fingers” so apparently all that could be seen doing this writing is a disembodied hand. It would have to have been large enough to catch everyone’s attention.
- *“...opposite the lampstand...”* It may be that this lampstand was **THE lampstand**, the actual Menorah from the Temple. This would seem appropriate. The lampstand is symbolic for the Messiah, for Yeshua, so some people think that the same hand that wrote in the sand while talking to the self-righteous Pharisees about the woman caught in adultery is the same hand that wrote on this wall. He is indeed omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. The only time God appears “in the flesh” (*perhaps even if just a hand!*) it is Jesus.
- *“...plaster of the wall of the king’s palace...”* Archaeologists have discovered a large room that measured 165 X 55 feet. This size of room could have easily held more than the thousand “lords” in this event. It is likely this is the banquet hall of this chapter. It was restored fully by Saddam Hussein, and used often for Iraq state affairs at the end of his dictatorship.



- **“Then the king’s countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him...”** Well, there’s nothing like a disembodied hand writing on the wall to spoil a party! Everything changed quickly and the party was over. Perhaps all the carousing stopped and an eerie silence punctuated by screams replaced the previous laughter. It says that the king’s face changed. Probably everyone’s did. And saying that his thoughts troubled him would be putting this very lightly. The word “terrified” is probably a bit more accurate, and not just Belshazzar. Every eye was on this wall, and every heart beat wildly.
- **“...so that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other.”** There is a difference in the interpretation of these words. In the KJV it reads: **“...the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another.”** Some suggest that this means he fell down, because he was so scared. Others say the word for “joints” can be interpreted as “girdles” or muscles, and that Belshazzar had a bit of an accident at that moment. There is an amusing story that can illustrate this interpretation. It is about Lord Nelson and the Spanish Armada. This is a story heard in connection with this chapter and helps us understand just what might have happened to Belshazzar when he saw the writing on the wall...



*Lord Nelson was in his cabin, and the cabin boy came in and said “Lord Nelson, there is a Spanish galleon on the starboard bow!” Fine, sound general quarters and get me my red waistcoat.” So he puts on his red waistcoat, engages the Spanish galleon and sinks it. Some time later Lord Nelson is in his cabin again, and once again the cabin boy comes running in and says “Lord Nelson! There are TWO Spanish galleons on the port quarter!” “Fine. Sound general quarters and get me my red waistcoat.” He puts on his red waistcoat and sinks both Spanish galleons. The next day the cabin boy comes in and says, “Lord Nelson, request permission to ask a question.” Lord Nelson says, “Granted son, that’s the way you learn. What is it?” The cabin boy says, “Sir, I notice every time you go into battle you always ask for your red waistcoat. Why is that sir?” Lord Nelson replies. “That’s a good question. You see, if we are engaged in battle, and I sustain a hit, I don’t want the crew to see blood and be demoralized so I always wear a red waistcoat to mask any such occurrence.” The cabin boy nods his head and says “Thanks, sir.” About a week later, the cabin boy comes running and says “Lord Nelson, Lord Nelson, the entire Spanish Armada is on the horizon!!” Lord Nelson responds “Fine. Sound general quarters and get me my brown britches!”*

- A few moments ago Belshazzar was probably drunk and **now he’s suddenly sober**. What he has seen on the wall has scared him nearly to death; he is overwhelmed with fear.
- Throughout the Book of Daniel, and all of scripture, we should be **conditioned to look for the types and “similitudes” in individual stories and events**. Often God uses these to bring a wider and larger message. We have seen how the fiery furnace of chapter 3 could be a type for the Tribulation at the end of time. Now, here in the banquet hall of chapter 5, some believe this drunken, debauched and immoral party is symbolic for the degenerate condition of mankind before the end times, and the return of Jesus.

***<sup>7</sup>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.”***

- When Belshazzar recovered enough to shout to someone, **he called in the wise men**. These guys make quite a number of appearances in this book, and never do they solve the problem. There is nothing “wise” about these wise men, or their advice. Perhaps this is a lesson in itself for us. It is not the “wisdom” of the world that will bring us whatever it is we need – that is shallow and meaningless. It is only wisdom from God that will solve every problem.
- Belshazzar is so shaken by this handwriting on the wall that he **promises quite a reward**. He will make whoever can tell him the meaning of the writing the third top position in the kingdom. The gold chain and the purple robe are symbols of this authority and high position. We promise rewards to get what we want. These are the world’s “treasures,” but they will not bring any kind of happiness or real reward.

*<sup>8</sup>Now all the king’s wise men came, but they could not read the writing, or make known to the king its interpretation. <sup>9</sup>Then King Belshazzar was greatly troubled, his countenance was changed, and his lords were astonished.*

- As usual, the wise men failed. **Now the king is even more troubled**, and once again his face changed. Keep in mind that everyone is probably watching him to see what he will do. Their reactions probably mirrored his. He didn’t know what to do at this point, and neither did anyone else. Terror is filling this room rapidly.

*<sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>“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. <sup>12</sup>“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.”*

- *“The queen, because of the words of the king and his lords, came to the banquet hall.”* The queen here is most likely the **widowed wife of Nebuchadnezzar**, Belshazzar’s grandmother (*or, she may have been the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar, and mother of Belshazzar, no one knows for sure*). She probably heard screams of terror and a great amount of noise coming from the banquet hall and responded. She has come to help her grandson out of his predicament.
- *“Do not let your thoughts trouble you,…”* The queen has come in response to the noise coming from the banquet hall, and not the noise of laughter and partying, but the noise of terror. She was not on the original invitation list. She probably quickly apprised the situation and tells Belshazzar that there is a man in his kingdom by the name of Daniel, a Spirit-filled man, who can decipher the writing. She must have had quite a knowledge of Daniel, probably first-hand, since she provides an amazing resume for him: *“...in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God. ... light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, ... an excellent spirit, knowledge, understanding, interpreting dreams, solving riddles, and explaining enigmas...”*
- **She urged Belshazzar to call in Daniel**, referring to him as the master of all the wise men in Nebuchadnezzar’s time. She had confidence in Daniel’s ability to give the answer to the strange mystery on the wall. She seems very sure of Daniel here, so she must have observed him in action before.

- *“And in the days of your father,...”* The timing of this ill-fated party is the very night that the kingdom of Babylon would fall to the Medes and Persians. Daniel was not at this party, and obviously was not even part of the current king’s official “staff.” Belshazzar had to be told about him. Daniel may have been retired at this point, or merely living a civilian life somewhere else. He is most likely in his 80’s at this point, a very old man for those times. The queen indicates his reputation was gained “in the days of your father,...” meaning during Nebuchadnezzar’s reign. With all the political intrigue and corruption that went on in Babylon following Nebuchadnezzar’s death, Daniel may have ceased being a valued asset to the kingdom, and was not even in any kind of official position at this time.

*<sup>13</sup>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? <sup>14</sup>“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.*

- *“Then Daniel was brought in before the king...”* Although he may not have had an official position in this current administration, it would seem obvious that Daniel is not too far away. Perhaps because of his great respect and position under Nebuchadnezzar he was afforded a retirement either in the palace or near it. At any rate, he is called and comes to the dining hall. It may very well be that Daniel was aware of what was happening, and knew in advance what role he would serve that night.
- *“Are you that Daniel...”* Belshazzar butters up Daniel a bit to begin with. He may have truly heard about him in the past, and just now remembered him, or the queen may have filled him in while they waited for Daniel to appear. He wants to make sure they have the right guy.
- *“...that the Spirit of God is in you...”* This is **the qualifier** that is given every time Daniel’s abilities and reputation are mentioned. It is only by the Spirit of God that Daniel is able to do what he does. This was true for Daniel, for his three friends, and for each of us. It is a reminder that personal pride has no place in our lives. It is only through God’s Spirit in us that we are able to do whatever it is He calls us to do. The “light...understanding, and excellent wisdom” are all from God. Daniel was not born with these things. They don’t belong to Him. They belong to God, given graciously to Daniel, and graciously to us.

*<sup>15</sup>“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. <sup>16</sup>“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.”*

- Every leader throughout time has kept his or her own set of advisers. In the ancient times those **advisers consisted of the “wise men” who relied on the occult or their own “wisdom”** for this counsel. Without the “Spirit of God” however, they will fail every time. Belshazzar relied on these guys, just like his father, and his grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar. At no time do they succeed in the task given to them. It is only by the “Spirit of God” that sound counsel can be given. This was true then, and it is true today in the leadership around the world.

- Belshazzar is obviously **afraid and desperate to know the meaning of this strange handwriting** on the wall. No one seems to understand it. It appeared mysteriously, obviously of divine origin. What he offers Daniel now is a sign of that desperation. His reward is to be “the third ruler in the kingdom.” This would make him Number 3 in all of the Babylonian Empire. Belshazzar’s father was Number 1, but he had left his son on the throne and abdicated. Belshazzar was Number 2. Daniel would have been made Number 3.
- As indicated before, this is also **an indication of the amazing accuracy of this book**. For centuries Daniel was ridiculed and attacked as a fairy tale because the so-called “scholars” insisted there never was anyone named Belshazzar on the throne of Babylon. This has since been proven false. Archeological finds have proven his existence. The person writing this book **would have had to be an eye witness** to these times and would have known the real circumstances, that Nabonidus was the real king (Number 1), first in the kingdom, and that his son Belshazzar was Number 2 (co-regent). This is vindication for the book of Daniel. It could not have been written centuries later as many suggest. The person writing this book (Daniel) knew the truth.

***<sup>17</sup>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.***

- Daniel is **offered the same reward which had been offered to the wise men**. But Daniel spurned these gifts. After all, why did Daniel need this reward? He would not have had it but for a few hours, but that’s not the reason he declined them. He was absolutely contemptuous of Belshazzar. He seems incredibly disrespectful. There is no address of “O King, live forever.” If the king had not been so filled with fear, he probably would not have ignored Daniel’s rebuff. Daniel refuses the reward, but will interpret the writing nonetheless.
- Daniel showed respect for Nebuchadnezzar, and even probably befriended him. But here **he seems to hold Belshazzar in disdain**. This grandson of the “head of gold” had not learned the lessons his grandfather had to learn.

***<sup>18</sup>“O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father a kingdom and majesty, glory and honor. <sup>19</sup>“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. <sup>20</sup>“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. <sup>21</sup>“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.***

- **Daniel now gives Belshazzar the lecture of his life**. He uses very pointed and powerful words to show Belshazzar why this strange writing has occurred, even before he tells him what it means. He points out that his grandfather’s kingdom was given to him by God, and became very big and powerful. And because of this power, Nebuchadnezzar’s heart became “hardened in pride” and God had to intervene.
- Nebuchadnezzar had been an absolute ruler on this earth – not through his own ability, but because of the will and plan of God. Many believe there has probably not been another ruler like him and there will not be another until Antichrist rules. Daniel recites for Belshazzar how God dealt with his grandfather. God had put him on the throne and had given him a true world kingdom.

- Daniel **refreshes Belshazzar’s memory** about what happened to Nebuchadnezzar and puts this whole story into “nutshell” form here. We are told one more piece of information about Nebuchadnezzar’s extraordinary experience – he lived among the wild donkeys.
- *“...till he knew that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses...”* This is the bottom line of Nebuchadnezzar’s lesson, and until he learned it, his condition would not change. It is the same lesson Belshazzar will learn this night, but he is not given the opportunity to change. His kingdom ends that night, and so does his life. This is the same lesson everyone throughout history, whether in leadership or not, must also learn.

*<sup>22</sup>“But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this. <sup>23</sup>“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.*

- Daniel’s lecture to Belshazzar continues. It contains a **list of reminders and accusations**. Again, Daniel does not take the tone he did with Nebuchadnezzar, whose heart was apparently more open to receive God’s wisdom. Belshazzar was proud and arrogant, but did not heed his grandfather’s lessons. He didn’t apply anything that Nebuchadnezzar had learned to his own life. He knew all that happened to his grandfather, but still did not humble his own heart. Daniel reminds him of this.
- Daniel points out the **problems with Belshazzar’s heart**:
  1. He reminded him of the source of Nebuchadnezzar’s greatness and power. It was God, not Nebuchadnezzar.
  2. Nebuchadnezzar’s power was known and feared throughout the earth. He was the greatest of all world leaders, but again, only by El Elyon, the Most High God. Belshazzar’s kingdom at this point was on the verge of collapse. He could not compare in any way to his grandfather.
  3. Nebuchadnezzar’s sin was his pride and arrogance, just like Belshazzar’s is.
  4. Daniel revealed what happened to Nebuchadnezzar because of this sin. He lost everything, until he could understand the sovereignty of the Most High God over all the kingdoms of the earth.
  5. Belshazzar knew all of this, but chose to ignore it.
  6. Belshazzar chose to instead “lift himself up above the God of heaven.” He blasphemed this God by using the vessels of temple worship for a drinking party, and toasting pagan gods.
  7. He did not glorify God, the one who “owns your breath.” Instead he mocked God.
- **IMPORTANT TRUTH:** We must understand that **God destroys only those who have known the truth and have refused it.** Daniel tells Belshazzar that he ignored God’s lessons and message, and soon he will pronounce his doom. Daniel reveals the principle by which God operates, one which Paul also confirmed: “The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.” (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12). These verses apply to the Great Tribulation period, where those we are “deluded” are those who have rejected the truth, God, and His light. Belshazzar was one so deluded. They have existed throughout history, exist today, and will exist in the coming trials of this world. Their delusions are delusions of self grandeur, where self needs nothing and no one but self. This is a basic principle we must understand.

- *“...the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways...”* This is a statement that should startle us into some serious thought and reflection. God is in control, not us. He gets the glory, not us. He is Almighty, not us. Belshazzar, though he had opportunity, did not learn this, but instead rejected that God. Now he will pay the price for that rejection.

<sup>24</sup>*“Then the fingers of the hand were sent from Him, and this writing was written.*

<sup>25</sup>*“And this is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.*

<sup>26</sup>*“This is the interpretation of each word. MENE: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it;*

<sup>27</sup>*“TEKEL: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; <sup>28</sup>“PERES: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.”*

- Daniel interprets the writing, but only after indicating that **the Most High God, the one that Belshazzar ignored and did not glorify, is the one sending the message.** Essentially the message is that Belshazzar has sinned, not repented, and is now being judged and sentenced.
- We don’t know exactly what language, if any, was written on the wall, even though the words are similar to Aramaic. If it was Aramaic, we don’t know why the wise men did not understand it. Many things could have explained the wise men’s lack of understanding. There is much speculation about it, but the only thing that can be said is that God wrote it, and the Holy Spirit revealed it to Daniel. The wise men could not make heads or tails of it all, since unlike Daniel, they apparently did not have the “Spirit of God” within them to understand these things.



- *“MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN...”* The **U** of **Upharsin** is the word for “and” in Aramaic. In the interpretation Daniel considered each term separately, and so omitted reading the “and” that preceded **Peres**. **Pharsin** is also the plural form of the word **Peres**.
- *“MENE”* This word should have been easy for any wise man to read, it meant **“numbered.”** The meaning of this word in association with the others was the puzzling part. Daniel informed Belshazzar that the days of his kingdom had been numbered by God, and they had just expired. This is probably where we get our saying “his number was up.”
- *“TEKEL”* meant **“weighed.”** Belshazzar was “weighed” by God and found lacking. According to God’s scales, Belshazzar did not measure up. (NOTE: neither do we! But thankfully, when we surrender to the plan of the Most High God for our lives, we are covered by the blood of Jesus, and our shortcomings are hidden in that!)
- *“PERES”* As Daniel interpreted, signified **broken and divided**, and meant that Babylon was to fall and be divided **to the Medes and Persians**, a combined power of two nations, of which the Persians were the dominant force. This kingdom later became known as the Persian Empire. At any rate, the Babylonian Empire has now come to an end. Belshazzar was **“numbered, weighed, and broken.”**

<sup>29</sup>*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.*

- It is very interesting that even after giving Belshazzar an earful and an effective sentence of doom, Belshazzar keeps his word and gives Daniel the gifts that he rebuffed. In the culture of the ancients, especially Babylon and the Medes and Persians, what came from the king’s mouth was law.

- Perhaps Belshazzar had no choice. He could have executed Daniel for his words, but he didn't. **God honors those who honor Him!** This is an overriding lesson through this book.
- It would have been interesting to know what was passing through Daniel's mind when Belshazzar honored him this way. **In just hours, Belshazzar would be dead**, and the Babylonian kingdom would end. Daniel knew all of this. All of Belshazzar's honors and rewards would amount to nothing.

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

- So, just as God had said through Jeremiah, and now through Daniel, **the Babylonian Empire came to an end, at the very time He predicted.** History tells us that *"not a spear was thrown when Babylon was defeated."* The huge "impregnable" city of Babylon was completely taken without a battle.
- The **Babylonians knew the Persian army was out there surrounding the city.** They attempted to halt the invasion of Cyrus and his armies, but were defeated in various cities near Babylon. So they retreated to Babylon, whose walls they assumed would protect them during what they thought would be a prolonged siege. According to one ancient source, they had stockpiled enough provisions to last 20 years. This strategy was a common means of defense in those times. It helps to explain how Belshazzar could be so bold as to throw a drinking party for a thousand nobles while enemy troops surrounded his city. They felt completely safe behind their wall, which was thought to be impregnable. It was a false sense of security.
- Cyrus and his armies knew they didn't have enough troops to completely surround the city, and even he knew, like the Babylonians, that they could not breach or siege the city walls. They put their heads together and **came up with an ingenious plan.** They decided they could divert the mighty Euphrates River, which ran directly through Babylon and created a moat around the city. They began this massive project by digging huge trenches to re-route the river. When they had completed this project, they apparently waited until one of Babylon's famous festivals, which always was accompanied by drinking parties. Cyrus knew it would be at this point that the city inside would have the least amount of defenses. When the opportunity came, the night portrayed in Daniel chapter 5, Cyrus' armies stopped the flow of water and came into the city by marching up the dry riverbed, much to the complete surprise of its defenders. There was very minor resistance, and the city was taken easily. Belshazzar, the current king on the throne of Babylon was killed that night. His father Nabonidus was in exile, so the Babylonian Empire ended that night.
- **There is some controversy here about exactly who "Darius the Mede" was.** Secular records (at least those discovered so far!) do not reference him. Daniel is specifically naming someone, but we aren't sure who this was. The handwriting on the wall indicates the kingdom would fall to the Persians, not the Medes. However, Cyrus did have at least two generals, whom we know of, who were Medes. Also, some think it was Cyrus' uncle. Cyrus' mother was a Mede and his father was a Persian. It was their marriage that brought this great coalition of Medes and Persians together. There are a number of persons who could be the one Daniel is referencing – we just are not sure which one is this Darius the Mede.
- This ultimately is not important in this story, but is often pointed at as a way of discrediting Daniel. However, as always, time always proves scripture correct. Secular history never had a record of Belshazzar, and then subsequent archeological evidence named him as the son of the king of Babylon at that time (the king who had pretty much abandoned the throne and left his son there as 2<sup>nd</sup> in command), **we know that eventually we will see that Daniel was correct.** We should ignore any clouds of doubt cast over this particular individual. (This Darius is not to be confused with the later Persian king Darius the Great (521–485 B.C.)

- We should remember that **secular evidence for the existence of Pontius Pilate was only discovered in 1961**. The bottom line – God and His Word are ALWAYS true, right, correct and trustworthy!

**THERE IS MUCH MORE TO THIS STORY.** We could end the study of this chapter here, but there is one more extremely important bit of information we need to know at this point. Although it is not covered much in the book of Daniel, it is referenced in other places of scripture. God raised up Nebuchadnezzar and the entire Babylonian empire. His purpose in this was to have a place for His people the Jews while they were in exile in Babylon. This Babylonian Empire lasted just 70 years, precisely the time God gave Israel away from her land. That is astonishing in itself. But it goes much farther. At the end of this chapter in Daniel, Cyrus is the king of the Medes and Persians and now in control of a new kingdom. We see the end of the Babylonian Empire, and a new king on the throne. We also need to understand that **Israel's captivity is now at an end. What will God do now?** It is mind-blowing how He works!

Cyrus is mentioned several times in the scriptures, in the books of the Chronicles, Ezra, and Daniel and in one more place (we'll get to in a moment). It is worth reading these references to understand how God worked in these times. God used Cyrus, just as He used Nebuchadnezzar. He raised both these men up to serve His purpose. These were pagan kings, yet both gave glory and honor to the God of Israel. Both acknowledged Him as THE God. One took His people captive, the other set them free and sent them home with the finances to rebuild their city and their temple. When you have knowledge of secular history, this was most unusual. God is at work here, and it is so easy to see His hand in both of these men and these events.

#### 2 Chronicles 36:21-23

*“...to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths. As long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years. Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is among you of all His people? May the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up!”* (called the “proclamation of Cyrus”)

#### Ezra Chapter 1

*“Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is among you of all His people? May his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel (He is God), which is in Jerusalem. And whoever is left in any place where he dwells, let the men of his place help him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, besides the freewill offerings for the house of God which is in Jerusalem. Then the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, with all whose spirits God had moved, arose to go up and build the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem. And all those who were around them encouraged them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with precious things, besides all that was willingly offered. King Cyrus also brought out the articles of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem and put in the temple of his gods; and Cyrus king of Persia brought them out by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah. This is the number of them: thirty gold platters, one thousand silver platters, twenty-nine knives, thirty gold basins, four hundred and ten silver basins of a similar kind, and one thousand other articles. All the articles of gold and silver were five thousand four hundred. All these Sheshbazzar took with the captives who were brought from Babylon to Jerusalem.”*

### Ezra 3:6-8

*“From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD, although the foundation of the temple of the LORD had not been laid. They also gave money to the masons and the carpenters, and food, drink, and oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre to bring cedar logs from Lebanon to the sea, to Joppa, according to the permission which they had from Cyrus king of Persia.”*

### Ezra 4:1-6

*“Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the descendants of the captivity were building the temple of the LORD God of Israel, they came to Zerubbabel and the heads of the fathers’ houses, and said to them, “Let us build with you, for we seek your God as you do; and we have sacrificed to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here.” But Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of the fathers’ houses of Israel said to them, “You may do nothing with us to build a house for our God; but we alone will build to the LORD God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us.” Then the people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building, and hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.”*

### Ezra 5:11-17

*And thus they returned us an answer, saying: “We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the temple that was built many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and completed. But because our fathers provoked the God of heaven to wrath, He gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this temple and carried the people away to Babylon. However, in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, King Cyrus issued a decree to build this house of God. Also, the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple that was in Jerusalem and carried into the temple of Babylon—those King Cyrus took from the temple of Babylon, and they were given to one named Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor. And he said to him, ‘Take these articles; go, carry them to the temple site that is in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be rebuilt on its former site.’ Then the same Sheshbazzar came and laid the foundation of the house of God which is in Jerusalem; but from that time even until now it has been under construction, and it is not finished.” Now therefore, if it seems good to the king, let a search be made in the king’s treasure house, which is there in Babylon, whether it is so that a decree was issued by King Cyrus to build this house of God at Jerusalem, and let the king send us his pleasure concerning this matter.*

### Ezra 6:1-5

*“Then King Darius issued a decree, and a search was made in the archives, where the treasures were stored in Babylon. And at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of Media, a scroll was found, and in it a record was written thus: In the first year of King Cyrus, King Cyrus issued a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem: “Let the house be rebuilt, the place where they offered sacrifices; and let the foundations of it be firmly laid, its height sixty cubits and its width sixty cubits, with three rows of heavy stones and one row of new timber. Let the expenses be paid from the king’s treasury. Also let the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple which is in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, be restored and taken back to the temple which is in Jerusalem, each to its place; and deposit them in the house of God”—*

### Ezra 6:14

*“So the elders of the Jews built, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they built and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the command of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.”*

Several other references to Cyrus are found in Daniel, including chapters 1, 6, and 10. We will also hear and learn more about Darius in coming chapters, especially chapter 6. How these men served God’s purpose is quite amazing, and well worth our time to study. But perhaps **the most incredible of all references to Cyrus is found in the book of Isaiah.**

We know Cyrus is the one who issued the decree ending the Babylonian captivity of the Jews, and sending them back to their land, along with the financial aid to rebuild. How did he know to do this? Well, God wrote him a personal letter 150 years before he was even born! Daniel showed it to him. Cyrus knew God was speaking directly to him. This is quite remarkable.

This letter is found in Isaiah chapter 45, but begins with an introduction in the previous chapter 44, starting in verse 24. This should show the sovereignty of our El Elyon to even the greatest skeptic. Keep in mind this was written well before Cyrus was even born!

*“Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, And He who formed you from the womb: “I am the LORD, who makes all things, Who stretches out the heavens all alone, Who spreads abroad the earth by Myself; Who frustrates the signs of the babblers, And drives diviners mad; Who turns wise men backward, And makes their knowledge foolishness; Who confirms the word of His servant, And performs the counsel of His messengers; Who says to Jerusalem, ‘You shall be inhabited,’ To the cities of Judah, ‘You shall be built,’ And I will raise up her waste places; Who says to the deep, ‘Be dry! And I will dry up your rivers’; Who says of Cyrus, ‘He is My shepherd, And he shall perform all My pleasure, Saying to Jerusalem, “You shall be built,” And to the temple, “Your foundation shall be laid.”” (Isaiah 44:24-28)*

**And this remarkable letter continues in chapter 45:**

*“Thus says the LORD to His anointed, To Cyrus, whose right hand I have held— To subdue nations before him And loose the armor of kings, To open before him the double doors, So that the gates will not be shut: ‘ I will go before you And make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of bronze And cut the bars of iron. I will give you the treasures of darkness And hidden riches of secret places, That you may know that I, the LORD, Who call you by your name, Am the God of Israel. For Jacob My servant’s sake, And Israel My elect, I have even called you by your name; I have named you, though you have not known Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other; There is no God besides Me. I will gird you, though you have not known Me, That they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting That there is none besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other; I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the LORD, do all these things.’ “ Rain down, you heavens, from above, And let the skies pour down righteousness; Let the earth open, let them bring forth salvation, And let righteousness spring up together. I, the LORD, have created it. “ Woe to him who strives with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth! Shall the clay say to him who forms it, ‘What are you making?’ Or shall your handiwork say, ‘He has no hands’? Woe to him who says to his father, ‘What are you begetting?’ Or to the woman, ‘What have you brought forth?’” Thus says the LORD, The Holy One of Israel, and his Maker: “ Ask Me of things to come concerning My sons; And concerning the work of My hands, you command Me. I have made the earth, And created man on it. I—My hands—stretched out the heavens, And all their host I have commanded. **I have raised him up in righteousness, And I will direct all his ways; He shall build My city And let My exiles go free, Not for price nor reward,**” Says the LORD of hosts. (Isaiah 45:1-13)*

It is interesting to note that **Cyrus is called “his anointed” and “my shepherd”** – similar to the way that God called Nebuchadnezzar “my servant.” These men were used by God to fulfill his perfect plan for Israel. “Messiah” comes from the word for “anointed.” Cyrus, however, is not THE Messiah, but an anointed one, separated and chosen by God to carry out His intended plan at this time. Cyrus was so impressed with this letter written to him 150 years before his birth, that he readily agreed to send the Jewish captives home to Israel, and even helped them financially in incentives, and in rebuilding the Temple. Without Cyrus and God’s intended shepherd at this time, this would never have happened. This is just one more piece of evidence that we should be completely confident that God has a plan, and that He is indeed Sovereign!



**CYRUS IN HISTORY** – More validation of the God’s Word!

### **The Cyrus Cylinder**

This is an ancient clay cylinder, on which is written a declaration in the name of King Cyrus the Great. It dates to the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, and was discovered in the ruins of old Babylon. It was created after the Persian conquest of Babylon in 539 BC, making it part of the Persian Empire. The cylinder praises Cyrus, revealing his kingly lineage. It also lauds his building projects, and the fact that he was considered a benefactor to the people of Babylon.

There is some evidence that it might make mention of the repatriation of the Jews from Babylon (their return to Israel). This cylinder has a unique and interesting history, one worth investigating on your own.

### **The Tomb of Cyrus**

Cyrus' tomb was discovered in 1951 at the ruins of Pasargadae (south-central Iran). This tomb is in pretty good condition, considering it is over 2500 years old. It is not huge, by ancient terms, at 36 feet high. It apparently once contained the "golden sarcophagus" of Cyrus, but now it is empty. There is a very interesting inscription on the tomb that was recorded by Plutarch in AD 90: "O man, whoever you are and wherever you come from, for I know that you will come--I am Cyrus, son of Cambyses, who founded the Empire of the Persians and was king of the East. Do not grudge me this spot of earth which covers my body." – Cyrus" Seems like a humble sort of guy! By what we know of him in history, and we do know quite a bit not only from scripture but also a multiple of secular sources, he was a decent, fair and good ruler. We imagine his early encounter with the God of Israel probably had a lot to do with this.



**NOW BACK TO DANIEL....At this point in our story, Darius the Mede is the ruling King of Persia, under Cyrus.** It would be three years until Cyrus issued the decree to allow the Jews to return to Israel. Our story with Darius in control will continue next time in Daniel chapter 6.

