

Lesson #44 • Hebrews 11:33b-34

Victory Over Circumstances

**“Shutting the Mouths of Lions &
Quenching the fury of the flames”**

Daniel • Part 4 of 6

• H A N D O U T •

► As we open chapter 5, we find a significant leap of time has taken place. Nebuchadnezzar is no longer the King of Babylon. The monarch who is now sitting on Babylon's throne in chapter 4 is Belshazzar. Unfortunately, scripture doesn't give us any details about this change of monarchs. The few hints in 2 Kings 25 and Jeremiah 52, indicates that Belshazzar didn't come to the throne directly after Nebuchadnezzar. But if we are to get more of the details, we will need to go to secular sources.

In addition to the well-known first-century A.D. historian, Flavius Josephus, who specialized in the history of the Jews, there was a man named Berossus, a historian who lived in 300 BC who wrote extensively about the Babylonian Empire. Today there are only fragments left of his writings which are housed in the British Museum, but if we take information from those fragments, along with some quotations from Josephus, and add that to the limited notations in 2 Kings and Jeremiah, we end up with enough facts to fill in the highlights of Babylon's journey from Nebuchadnezzar to Belshazzar.

Here is what we know for sure:

- **Nebuchadnezzar** was born in 634 BC and died peacefully in Babylon in 562, at the age of 72 years. Nebuchadnezzar had ascended the throne after the death of his father, Nebopolassar, in 604 BC and Nebuchadnezzar's reign for 43 years.

- His son, **Evil-Merodach** [pronounced “*Eh-vil*”] ascended Babylon's throne after Nebuchadnezzar. Evil-Merodach, is described in 2 Kings 25:27-30 and Jeremiah 52:31-34 as the King who befriended Judah's King Jehoiachin, bringing him out of Babylon's prison and honored him by having him eat at the King's table. Evil-Merodach reigned only two years. He was assassinated by his brother-in-law, Neriglassar, stating that Evil-Merodach was too impulsive and his reign too depraved.

- **Neriglassar**, the brother-in-law who killed Evil-Merodach, is mentioned in Jeremiah 39:3, 13, but his name is spelled “Nergalsharezer.” [All the scholar seem to agree they are one and the same person.] He ruled only four years, dying of natural causes.

- Next to the throne in 556 BC was Neriglassar's son, **Labashi-Marduk**. The facts about him are quite sketchy. Berossus says he was a child with diminished mental capacity but other documents suggest he was an adult. His reign was short. Berossus says nine months, while the other documents report two to three months. We do know that he was assassinated as part of a coup to take over the throne.

- **Nabonidus** was part of the conspiracy and his fellow conspirators appointed him as their next King. **Nabonidus** ruled until Cyrus the Great of Persia conquered Babylon, which makes **Nabonidus the last Babylonian King.**

Q: Wait ... What happened to Belshazzar? There is no mention of him in the above narrative.

► **Here is how Belshazzar got into the act:**

Remember, Daddy Nebonidus wasn't born into royalty, nor was he prepared for the rigors or obligations of the throne. He was the king as a result of a conspiracy to overthrow Babylon's throne. Nebonidus was in his third year as King when he decided to leave Babylon and live in Arabia. He turned the business of the Kingdom of Babylon over to his eldest son, Belshazzar, who was subsequently appointed – not crowned – as his father's co-regent. He served in this capacity for six years.

When Chapter 5 of Daniel opened, Nebonidus had mustered an army out of Arabia and had met the Medo-Persian army in battle. Unfortunately, he was captured. All royal responsibility was suddenly fallen totally on Belshazzar's shoulders. To make matters worse, the Medo-Persian army had gathered in Babylon and had surrounded the famous city, looking for a way to penetrate their remarkably strong defense.

God shows up at Belshazzar's Party ...

Daniel 5:1-4 · Many years later King Belshazzar gave a great feast for 1,000 of his nobles, and he drank wine with them. While Belshazzar was drinking the wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver cups that his predecessor, Nebuchadnezzar, had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem. He wanted to drink from them with his nobles, his wives, and his concubines.

So they brought these gold cups taken from the Temple, the house of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. While they drank from them they praised their idols made of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

Q: What is surprising about the fact that Belshazzar is giving a feast?

Q: Why would Belshazzar be so confident Babylon's defenses will hold?

Outer Walls:

Walls:

Guard towers:

City gates:

Q: Why was it such an offense for Belshazzar and his party-goers to drink from the gold and silver cups that had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem?

Daniel 5:5-6 · Suddenly, in the same hour, they saw the fingers of a human hand writing on the plaster wall of the king's palace, near the lamp-stand. The king himself saw the hand as it wrote, and his face turned pale with fright. His knees knocked together in fear and his legs gave way beneath him.

Q: Why does the text make such a strong statement regarding the time the writing was seen?

Daniel 5:7-9 • The king shouted for the enchanters, astrologers, and fortune-tellers to be brought before him. He said to these wise men of Babylon, "Whoever can read this writing and tell me what it means will be dressed in purple robes of royal honor and will have a gold chain placed around his neck. He will become the third highest ruler in the kingdom!"

But when all the king's wise men had come in, none of them could read the writing or tell him what it meant. So the king grew even more alarmed, and his face turned pale. His nobles, too, were shaken.

Q: What was Belshazzar offering when he pledged to give the one who could read the writing on the wall the honor of being the "third highest ruler in the Kingdom?"

Daniel 5:10-12 • But when the queen mother heard what was happening, she hurried to the banquet hall. She said to Belshazzar, "Long live the king! Don't be so pale and frightened. There is a man in your kingdom who has within him the spirit of the holy gods. During Nebuchadnezzar's reign, this man was found to have insight, understanding, and wisdom like that of the gods. Your predecessor, the king – your predecessor King Nebuchadnezzar – made him chief over all the magicians, enchanters, astrologers, and fortune-tellers of Babylon. This man Daniel, whom the king named Beltshazzar, has exceptional ability and is filled with divine knowledge and understanding. He can interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means."

Q: What does the Queen Mother's advice to Belshazzar tell us about Daniel at this point in time?

► So Daniel is brought to the party and stands before Belshazzar. He explains that he understands who Daniel is and what he has done in the past, and that he is filled with insight, understanding and wisdom. Then he presents what he calls a "difficult problem" to him. None of his wise men can read the words on the wall. He explains that he has been told that Daniel can give the interpretation. He offers the same enticement of wealth and power he gave to his wise men and asks him to interpret the message.

Daniel says he will interpret the writing, but the King can either keep his gifts or give them to someone else. Then he proceeds to explain to Belshazzar how the Most High God dealt with his predecessor, Nebuchadnezzar. He explained that it was God who made Nebuchadnezzar great and it was God who humbled Nebuchadnezzar, stripping him of his glory and making he made like a beast until he learned that the Most High God is the one who rules over the kingdoms of the world.

Daniel 5:22-24 · "You are his successor, O Belshazzar, and you knew all this, yet you have not humbled yourself. For you have proudly defied the Lord of heaven and have had these cups from his Temple brought before you. You and your nobles and your wives and concubines have been drinking wine from them while praising gods of silver, gold, bronze, iron, wood, and stone – gods that neither see nor hear nor know anything at all. But you have not honored the God who gives you the breath of life and controls your destiny! Then from His presence the hand was sent, and this writing was inscribed."

Q: What was the “hand” that wrote?

The message: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN

Daniel 5:26-29 · This is what these words mean:

- *Mene means ‘numbered’ – God has numbered the days of your reign and has brought it to an end.*
- *Tekel means ‘weighed’ – you have been weighed on the balances and have not measured up.*
- *Parsin means ‘divided’ – your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and Persians."*

► Belshazzar kept his word and though Daniel didn't want it, the King had Daniel dressed in robes of purple, gave him a gold chain to hang around his neck and proclaimed him to be the third highest ruler in the kingdom.

Q: The interpretation given by Daniel was extremely harsh, yet Belshazzar rewarded him for giving the interpretation. Why would Belshazzar do that? Doesn't that seem out of character?

But time is up and there will be no reprieve ...

Daniel 5:30-31 · That very night Belshazzar, the Babylonian king, was killed. And Darius the Mede took over the kingdom at the age of sixty-two.

Q: What do these final two verses represent in terms of the prophecy Nebuchadnezzar was given by Daniel concerning his first dream: the colossal statue?

► The scripture doesn't give us any details of this takeover. However, thanks to the Nabonidus-Cyrus Chronicle [which currently resides in the British Museum] and a document written by Herodotus some 80 years after the incidence, we can piece together some of the details.

It all went down in 539 BC, on the 11th of Marcheswan. [That is October-November on our calendar.] Even though the Medo-Persian army had already surrounded the City of Babylon in a siege mode, Belshazzar ignored the threat, confident the City could not be breached.

In fact, according to Herodotus, Belshazzar hadn't even bothered to lock the street-gates which ran next to the river.

Nabonidus-Cyrus Chronicle -->



So, while he and his one thousand friends were in a drunken stupor, partying and trying to figure out what the handwriting on the wall said, the Medo-Persian army, under the leadership of Cyrus, were busy building a series of dams along tributaries of the Euphrates, slowly turning the river into a great basin at Sepharvaim that Nebuchadnezzar had constructed for drainage and to maintain a water supply.

Once the water around the City itself had receded to the height of a man's thigh, the troops entered the water and were able to breach the walls and enter the City through the unlocked street-gates. This was done so quietly that even those who were not at the party were unaware of the takeover.

Even though all the sources indicate that the City was taken without a battle, we know that Belshazzar was killed. We are not told under what circumstances he met his death. Possibly he was executed.

Though Darius was a Mede, this takeover was a Medo-Persian effort. It is believed that Darius and Cyrus actually ruled concurrently, with Darius in a subordinate position to Cyrus. Both would play an important part in the unfolding drama.

► But for now, according to scripture, it is Darius' show.

◆◆◆
Next Time ◆ Lesson #45
“Daniel – Part 5 of 6”