

EXILIC & POST-EXILIC PROPHETS OF THE BIBLE

Senior Adults & Friends Bible Study — Summit View Church of Christ
Winter 2022-2023

PART 6, SECTION 1 THE WRITING ON THE WALL

DANIEL 5

Date: The date of these events is known from ancient Babylonian history: it was October 12, 539 BC, the day that the city of Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians (5:30-31).

historical context...

At this time, the Babylonians were at war with the Medes and Persians, and were losing. The Babylonian Chronicles (a large group of ancient tablets recording the history of the Babylonian Empire) report that a few days before the events of Daniel 5, Cyrus, the ruler of the Medes and Persians, defeated Belshazzar's father, King Nabonidus, and his army near Sippar, about 50 miles from the city of Babylon. Nabonidus fled but was later captured and sent into exile. (*adapted from Mark Mangano, Esther and Daniel, The College Press NIV Commentary, page 217*)

Daniel 5:1-9

5:1 — Given the historical context above, what seems odd about the timing of this banquet?

5:2-3 — The Babylonians had taken articles from God's temple in Jerusalem on 3 prior occasions:

- 605 BC (when Daniel was exiled), Daniel 1:2 — *What was taken?*
- 597 BC (when Ezekiel was exiled), 2 Kings 24:13 — *What was taken?*
- 586 BC (when Jerusalem was destroyed), 2 Kings 25:13-17 — *What was taken?*

5:3-4 — What might God have found offensive about the conduct of the king and his guests as they used the goblets from God's temple?

5:5 — What terrifying sight did the king see, and what did it do?

5:7 — What 3 rewards did the king promise to the person who could translate the writing?

Daniel 5:10-24

5:10-12 — Who urged King Belshazzar to consult Daniel? _____

- Daniel was a young man when he was exiled to Babylon and entered King Nebuchadnezzar's service in 605 BC. Assuming he was, say, 18-ish years old at that time, approximately how old would he be now, in 539 BC? _____ years old

5:13 — King Belshazzar doesn't refer to Daniel as "chief of the magicians, etc." like the queen does (verse 11). Instead, he asks him if he is one of the _____ brought from _____.

- Why might that identification be significant at this moment?

5:17 — What did Daniel suggest that the king do with his gifts and rewards?

5:18-21 — What story about Nebuchadnezzar did Daniel remind Belshazzar of?

- This story is found in chapter _____ of Daniel.

5:22-24 — Daniel declared that God had sent the hand because of Belshazzar's sinful conduct, including:

Daniel 5:25-31

5:25-28 — According to Daniel, what did the inscription foretell?

TRANSLATION & SIGNIFICANCE OF THE INSCRIPTION

- The words are written in Aramaic and actually appear as nouns: "mina, mina, shekel, half [-shekel]," referring to units of money.
- When read as verbs, the words mean, "numbered, numbered, weighed, divided."
- "Peres" (verse 28, the singular form of "parsin") is a pun on "Persia," hinting that God's judgment against Belshazzar and Babylon will come about through the forces of Persia.
- A mina was worth 60 shekels. Thus the writing on the wall offers an equation:

$$\begin{array}{rcccccc} \text{Mene/Mina} & + & \text{Tekel} & + & \text{Parsin} & = \\ 60 \text{ shekels} & + & 1 \text{ shekel} & + & 2 \text{ half-shekels} & = & 62 \text{ shekels} \end{array}$$

...According to 5:31, Darius the Mede was 62 years old when he took control of Babylon. Coincidence?

5:30 — When was the prophecy of the inscription fulfilled?

5:31 — Who took over the kingdom of Babylon?

Historical Documentation of the Fall of Babylon

adapted from "Herodotus and the Fall of Babylon," NIV Archaeological Study Bible, page 1283, and page 1393, note on Daniel 5:1-2; and John E. Goldingay, Daniel (Word Biblical Commentary), pages 106-107.

- The Greek historian Herodotus (400s BC) records that the city of Babylon fell in a single night during a rowdy festival. He suggests that the conquering Persian forces diverted the Euphrates River, which flowed through the middle of Babylon, and entered through the riverbed as it ran beneath the city walls.
- In the Nabonidus Chronicle, a Persian document written after Babylon's fall in 539 BC, the Persian king, Cyrus, claims that he conquered Babylon without a struggle. His assessment of Belshazzar was exceedingly low, fitting the description of Belshazzar in Daniel 5.
- The Nabonidus Chronicle also states that Cyrus gave authority over Babylon to a man named Ugbaru or Gubaru; this could be another name for the man called "Darius the Mede" in Daniel 5:31. Alternatively, Darius may have taken authority over Babylon shortly after Gubaru, who is said to have died within a month of the conquest of the city.

for discussion

- 1) Are there ever times when the things of God are dishonored in other nations today? in our nation? How does God respond to such acts of dishonor?
- 2) On what grounds does God tend to bring judgment upon rulers and governments?
- 3) What do you think this story meant to Jews in Daniel's time? What meaning does it hold for us today?