
a ***Grace Notes*** course

Daniel

an expositional study
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Lesson 105

Daniel Chapter 5

Daniel 105 – Chapter 5

Contents

Daniel 5	3
Daniel 5:1	3
Daniel 5:2-8.....	3
Daniel 5:9-12.....	5
Daniel 5:13-17	5
Daniel 5:18-19	6
Daniel 5:20-21	7
Daniel 5:22-31	8

Daniel	Page 3
Daniel 105, Chapter 5	a Grace Notes study

Daniel 5

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.

A number of years transpire between chapters 4 and 5. Nebuchadnezzar is now gone. A number of kings ruled between chapters 4 and 5. Nabonidus and Belshazzar rule as co-regents 23 years after Nebuchadnezzar. Nabonidus was a son-in-law to Nebuchadnezzar and married a widow of a previous king.

About 70 years have elapsed since the capture of Jerusalem. The Persians captured Nabonidus by the time of the writing of the fifth chapter of Daniel.

This chapter describes the downfall of the Neo-Babylonian Empire.

Critics aggressively attack the idea that Belshazzar ever lived. They say he most certainly was not a king in Babylon. However, recent discoveries of Babylonian cuneiform BEL-SHARRA-UTSUR, Bel protect the king, show that Belshazzar was a real person. He was the eldest son of Nabonidus (born 575 B.C.). He was fourteen years old when Nebuchadnezzar died. He was twenty years old when his father Nabonidus ascended the throne. At twenty-seven years of age, he was the commander-in-chief of the army. We know much more about his worship and other activities.

Archeology discovered the Annalistic Tablet of Cyrus showing the death of Belshazzar. This tablet describes the fall of Babylon. The capture of Nabonidus by the Persians made Belshazzar the king. Later, the Persians took Babylon very easily (cf. 5:30,31). Cyrus says that when Babylon fell the king's son died. Daniel says, that night Belshazzar was slain.

The name Belshazzar fell out of known recorded history. Herodotus visited Babylon around 460 B.C. and did not mention

Belshazzar. No other historian heard of him. The critics were clearly wrong by following ancient historians. No historian today denies the authenticity of Belshazzar. Far from error, the name Belshazzar stands as witness to the authenticity of Scripture. The critics are also wrong about many other things. Archeology will eventually manifest the truth of Scripture.

King Belshazzar gathered a thousand people to a huge feast in Babylon. Outside of Babylon, the Persian armies of King Darius laid siege to the city for four months. Belshazzar did not believe that the Persians could conquer Babylon.

Belshazzar was decadent and dissolute. Although he was co-regent with his father Nabonidus, he sat in the seat of regency the night Babylon fell. Nabonidus married into the royal family and his wife had a son by the name of Belshazzar.

PRINCIPLE: Archeology established the truth of Scripture.

APPLICATION: Critics constantly meet their comeuppance. They claimed that there was no such person as Belshazzar in extra biblical literature. Since there was no mention of Belshazzar in ancient historians such as Xenophon, Herodotus, Berosus and Abydenus, they assumed that he was a mythical figure. All critics agreed that Nabonidus was the last king of Babylon. They discredited Daniel.

When archaeologists discovered The Nabonidus Cylinder, they found the first record of Belshazzar. This Cylinder is now in the British museum. There is no adequate basis for questioning the existence of Belshazzar since the publication of Raymond Dougherty's research on Nabonidus and Belshazzar based on the Nabonidus Cylinder and other sources. Again, the critics meet their comeuppance.

Daniel 5:2-8

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

Daniel	Page 4
Daniel 105, Chapter 5	a Grace Notes study

been in Jerusalem, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them.

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.

They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone.

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.

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.

Now all the king's wise men came, but they could not read the writing, or make known to the king its interpretation.

The ancients often used father for grandfather. Nebuchadnezzar was Belshazzar's grandfather.

The vessels taken from the temple in Jerusalem were trophies of war and stored away in one of the heathen temples of Babylon. This was an act of sacrilege.

During this debauchery, the Persian army of Cyrus under General Gobryas was encamped outside Babylon. This is no time for the king of Babylon to be inebriated. Belshazzar showed little regard for his own empire. He lived in a

world of escapism, self-indulgence and sublimation. He breached every decent norm for a king.

Belshazzar praised the gods of Babylon over the God of Israel. These gods may have been:

1. Marduk, the chief god of the Babylonian pantheon and the patron god of the city of Babylon, he was also known as Bel, the sun god.
2. Nebo, Nabu, the god of literature and wisdom.
3. Nergal, the god of war.
4. Ishtar, the goddess of fertility of the phallic cult. She was equivalent to Aphrodite or Venus.

God directly intervened into Belshazzar's party. He received a sign from God in the middle of the celebration of his gods – the fingers of a man's handwriting on the plaster wall.

Revelry turned to panic. The king's face grew pale and his joints knocked together. Terror obsessed his mind.

The king called for his scholars. He offered the reward of royalty to anyone who could interpret the writing on the wall. The third ruler would follow Nabonidus and Belshazzar in authority.

The king's wise men could not read the writing nor interpret the writing. This amplified the concern of Belshazzar. His dependence on human faculty failed.

PRINCIPLE: Dependence on human viewpoint exclusively does not give assurance in time of trial.

APPLICATION: Dependence on human faculty does not give assurance in time of crisis. They cannot attain assurance in time of adversity. This is the recourse of all those who reject revelation. We find the prerogative of confidence in crisis in those who believe the Bible. God is the only source of refuge.

Daniel	Page 5
Daniel 105, Chapter 5	a Grace Notes study

Psalm 50:15. Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.

Psalm 118:8,9. It is better to trust in the Lord Than to put confidence in man.

It is better to trust in the Lord Than to put confidence in princes.

Jeremiah 17:5-7. Thus says the Lord: 'Cursed is the man who trusts in man – And makes flesh his strength, Whose heart departs from the Lord.

For he shall be like a shrub in the desert, And shall not see when good comes, But shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, In a salt land which is not inhabited.

Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, And whose hope is the Lord.

Daniel 5:9-12

Then King Belshazzar was greatly troubled, his countenance was changed, and his lords were astonished.

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.

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.

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.

Not only did this shake the theologians but it also shook the political leaders. Their wild party turned into a very troubled scene. The clever and learned men of the Royal State Department could not offer an answer to the writing on the wall. Divine intervention stumped them. Belshazzar's brawling party turned to terror. Fear immobilized them.

The queen here may be the queen mother and may have been a wife of Nebuchadnezzar.

The queen mother suggests that they bring Daniel to interpret the event. Nebuchadnezzar used the phrase in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God years prior (4:8-9,18). This is Daniel's spirit, not the Holy Spirit.

Three terms describe Daniel: excellent spirit, knowledge and understanding. Excellent spirit refers to his attitude. The other terms describe his mental facility and discernment.

Daniel dives directly into the interpretation of the writing on the wall and gives details about the fall of the Babylonian Empire. The interpretation has to do with the fall of the Empire.

PRINCIPLE: Our conscience governs our norms and standards.

APPLICATION: God gave each of us a conscience. The word conscience means to know with. Each of us has standards of life, some valid and some not valid. We measure ourselves by these standards. Sometimes our conscience condemns us.

Conscience does make cowards of us all. The person living in sin is afraid of things unknown. As Belshazzar's knees knocked together, so many knees knock today.

Daniel 5:13-17

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?

Daniel	Page 6
Daniel 105, Chapter 5	a Grace Notes study

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.

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.

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.

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.

Belshazzar heard of Daniel by reputation. He had not given Daniel the honor that Nebuchadnezzar had. Belshazzar declares that Daniel is a man of wisdom.

The wise of this world do not have answers dealing with revelation. The leaders of the world will not seek answers from God until their bankruptcy becomes evident.

Belshazzar asked Daniel to do what his wise men could not do. If he fulfilled the king's request, the king would reward him.

Daniel declined the king's gifts. He would not allow himself to be bought off by material means. He was a man of great spiritual stability. Daniel was under no obligation to the king so that he could speak freely.

PRINCIPLE: Only divine revelation can ultimately declare the meaning of the sovereignty of God in history.

APPLICATION: God is the God of history and He is sovereign over history and the future. He has authority over every nation of the world. All nations that do not align themselves with

God's righteousness will inevitably fall. The handwriting is on the wall for any nation that does not heed who and what God is.

God will destroy the final Babylon as recorded in Revelation 17 and 18. That Babylon will be revived. This is a religious and political Babylon of the future located in Europe.

Matthew 11:21-24. Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you.

And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you.

Daniel 5:18-19

O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father a kingdom and majesty, glory and honor.

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.

Daniel now reminds Belshazzar of God's sovereign working in the life of Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel reminded Belshazzar of the sovereignty of Jehovah in dealing with Nebuchadnezzar. It is this sovereign God who put the writing on the wall. God taught Nebuchadnezzar this lesson in chapter four.

Daniel	Page 7
Daniel 105, Chapter 5	a Grace Notes study

The Bible says more about Nebuchadnezzar than any other gentile ruler. The family of Nabopolassar and his son Nebuchadnezzar made a meteoric rise to power. This family of four generations left behind more material evidence than any family mentioned in the Bible.

Nebuchadnezzar's conquests were far-flung. Jeremiah foretold these conquests (Jeremiah 25:1ff.; 27:1ff.; 43:10). Ezekiel did as well (Ezek 26:7; 29:19; 30:10).

PRINCIPLE: God works sovereignly in history.

APPLICATION: The story of Babylon throughout the Bible is a major theme. This story begins in Genesis 10:10 where Nimrod built the city of Babel (Babylon). Hammurabi, the Amorite lawgiver was one of its great kings. The empire of Babylon reached its zenith in the eighteenth century B.C. known as one of the great metropolises of the world. The city went into eclipse after Hammurabi. It was not until the rise of the Neo-Babylonian Empire a thousand years later that Babylon rose to world dominion under Nebuchadnezzar. Throughout history, it is a type of the final city of the world in Revelation 17 and 18.

The Assyrians dominated the Mesopotamian Valley and most of the civilized world after old Babylon declined. Their capital later was Nineveh and the Tigris River. Her people were ruthless and war oriented. The last great ruler Ashurbanipal died in 625 B.C. His son was unable to keep the empire together. The king of the Chaldeans, Nabopolassar, was Ashurbanipal's viceroy in Babylon. Nabopolassar rebelled against Assyria and took Babylon. Nabopolassar and Cyaxares joined forces and took Nineveh from Assyria. Nineveh fell in 612 B.C., according to the prophecy of Nahum 2:1-3:19.

The Assyrians retreated to Carchemish on the banks of the Euphrates River with the Egyptians. The future of the world was decided on by one of the great battles of history, the

Battle of Carchemish (605 B.C.). Egypt never rose again and Babylon ruled the world.

While Nabopolassar mopped up the cities along the Tigris-Euphrates Rivers, he sent his son Nebuchadnezzar to stop Pharaoh-Necho of Egypt at Carchemish. Necho had killed the good king Josiah at Armageddon on his way to Carchemish in Palestine. Nebuchadnezzar crushed Necho and the Egyptians. This was the final defeat of the Assyrians. The Egyptians never again rose to a world power. Judah became a vassal of Babylon (Is 39:5-8). Daniel as a member of the royal family came to Babylon as a captive and as a person of great influence to the world power.

Daniel 5:20-21

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.

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.

God called Nebuchadnezzar "my servant". God used him to work out His purposes. He uses Nebuchadnezzar to rule and reign for His own purposes.

Jeremiah 25:89. Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Because you have not heard My words,

'behold, I will send and take all the families of the north (Israel),' says the Lord, 'and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land, against its inhabitants, and against these nations all around, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, a hissing, and perpetual desolations.

Daniel	Page 8
Daniel 105, Chapter 5	a Grace Notes study

Jeremiah 27:6. And now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant; and the beasts of the field I have also given him to serve him.

Jeremiah 43:10. ...and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: 'Behold, I will send and bring Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and will set his throne above these stones that I have hidden. And he will spread his royal pavilion over them.'

Nebuchadnezzar's downfall was due to pride. He learned his lesson through divine discipline.

PRINCIPLE: Nothing can interdict God's purposes.

APPLICATION: God knows and rules the kingdoms of men. He also knows the future. God is never surprised about any event in history because He knows all events simultaneously. He is not a sequential being. Neither is He a time or space being. God transcends time and space.

Isaiah 39:5-8. Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, 'Hear the word of the Lord of hosts:

'Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,' says the Lord.

'And they shall take away some of your sons who will descend from you, whom you will beget; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.'

So Hezekiah said to Isaiah, 'The word of the Lord which you have spoken is good!' For he said, 'At least there will be peace and truth in my days.'

Romans 11:25-29. For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;

For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins.

Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers.

For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

When God purposes a thing, nothing can interdict it. To rebel against Nebuchadnezzar was to rebel against God's will for it was God's will to send nations into captivity (Jeremiah 2:2-11; Isaiah 20:2; Ezekiel 12:5-7; Ac 21:11).

Daniel 5:22-31

But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this.

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.

Then the fingers of the hand were sent from Him, and this writing was written.

And this is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.

This is the interpretation of each word. Mene: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it;

Tekel: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting;

Peres: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.

Daniel	Page 9
Daniel 105, Chapter 5	a Grace Notes study

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.

That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain.

And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.'

Belshazzar knew of God's sovereign moves on Nebuchadnezzar so he was culpable. He would not humble his heart before God's sovereignty. His sin was the same as Nebuchadnezzar (vv. 18-21).

Now Daniel sets forth four charges against Belshazzar:

1. Belshazzar did not humble himself although he knew about Nebuchadnezzar (v.22).
2. He defiled the sovereign God by sacrilegiously abusing the vessels of the Temple (v.23).
3. He was guilty of idolatry (v.23).
4. He did not glorify the true God (v.23) who gave him his very life.

Some men do not learn the lessons of God's judgment. Belshazzar and his crew violated the vessels of the temple; therefore, God will remove the Neo-Babylon Empire from its power.

God sent Belshazzar a warning by direct revelation.

Daniel now begins to interpret the writing on the wall. He interprets each word. The three words refer to measures of weight.

MENE is an Aramaic word and means numbered, set the limit. The number of years for the Neo-Babylonian Empire has come to an end. Daniel repeats MENE for emphasis – number, number. God numbers each day and hour of the Neo-Babylonian kingdom. This is

the last day of the Neo-Babylonian Empire. It lost its world power in one day.

Psalm 90:12. So teach us to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom.

TEKEL means weighed. God weighed Belshazzar and his kingdom and found him flagrantly wanting in conceding the sovereignty of God. UPHARSIN means half. God puts Neo-Babylon on divine scales and finds them wanting. Babylon did not meet God's standard.

PERES means to divide, break. This word explains UPHARSIN. The U is the Aramaic word and PHARSIN is the plural for PERES. Belshazzar's kingdom will divide into two parts: Medes and Persians. This kingdom immediately followed the Neo-Babylonian Empire. They were right outside the city ready to fulfill God's prophecy.

Belshazzar kept his promise to honor Daniel. However, this honor only lasted a few hours until the fall of the Neo-Babylonian Empire to the Medes and Persians. The Persians diverted the Euphrates River that flowed through Babylon into a lake to the north of Babylon. They entered through the riverbed through thigh deep water.

Belshazzar did not make it through the night for the Persians invaded Babylon that night and executed him. He met his reckoning. Isaiah and Jeremiah predicted this fall (Isaiah 13:17-22; 21:1-10; 45:1; 47:1-5; Jeremiah 50:1-3, 9-10, 21, 24, 30-31 35-37; 51:1-2, 11-13; 30-64). As described in the Nabonidus Chronicle, Babylon fell on Tishri 16 (October 11, 12 or 13) 539 B.C. Herodotus and Xenophon both confirm that the end of the Babylonian empire was sudden. Relevant extra-biblical records describing the fall of Babylon include portions of Berosus (cited in Josephus), the Cyrus Cylinder, and the Babylonian Chronicle.

Critics claim that Daniel erred in setting forth a separate Median kingdom that ruled over Babylon when the Persians gained victory over Babylon. However, Daniel does not say that the

Daniel	Page 10
Daniel 105, Chapter 5	a Grace Notes study

kingdom was the Median kingdom but only that the king was a Mede.

PRINCIPLE: God sits in sovereign judgment over all the nations of the world.

APPLICATION: The purpose of chapter five of Daniel is to record the historic fulfillment of prophecy. It also demonstrates God's dealings with pagan empires. Contemporary pride in great achievements of man will produce the same results – the fall of national entities.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-3. But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you.

For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.

For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.

God sits as Judge over all the nations of the world. He works in human government through His sovereign decision. There is meaning and purpose to history, even in secular governments.

1 Chronicles 29:11, 12. Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, The power and the glory, The victory and the majesty; For all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, And You are exalted as head over all.

Both riches and honor come from You, And You reign over all. In Your hand is power and might; In Your hand it is to make great And to give strength to all.