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The Great Banquet of Belshazzar and the Fall of Babylon
5: 1-31



Dani'el is one of the most significant books in the Bible in terms of the chronology of future events because **it** contains essential information concerning the key figures and time sequences of **the far eschatological future**. It is difficult to understand prophetic chronology without consulting the book of **Dani'el**. There are visions in **Dani'el** that detail what **YHVH** would do beginning in the sixth century BC until **the Messianic Kingdom**. Thus, **Dani'el** can be seen as the foundation for the key themes of biblical prophecy. **Dani'el** did not attempt to write history when **he** wrote **his** book; rather, **he** was developing a theme.[248] **The banquet** described in the introductory verses of **Chapter 5** took place in 539 BC. Twenty-three years had passed since the events detailed in **Dani'el 4** (**to see link click Bt – The Dream of the Great Tree**). **Dani'el's** first vision in **Chapter 7** took place fourteen years earlier in 553 BC, and **his** vision of **Chapter 8** took place in 551 BC. By the time of the great banquet, **Dani'el** had been in **Babylon** for at least sixty-six years, and had already experienced additional information regarding **the times of the Gentiles** (see **Ao – The Times of the Gentiles**) and the transference of power from the **Babylonian** Empire to the Medo-Persian Empire. Therefore, the events of

Chapter 5 would not have taken **Dani'el** by surprise. Here is an overview of **Dani'el's** prophecies in chronological order:

602 BC prophecy of **the Great Statue (2:1-45)** when **Dani'el** was 18.

553 BC prophecy of **the Four Beasts and the Ancient of Days (7:1-28)** when **Danie'l** was 67.

551 BC prophecy of **the Ram and Male Goat (8:1-27)** when **Dani'el** was 69.

539 BC prophecy of **the Fall of Babylon (5:1-31)** when **Dani'el** was 81.

539 BC prophecy of **the Seventy-Weeks (9:1-27)** when **Dani'el** was 81.

536 BC prophecy of **the Future Nations (11:2-45**) when **Dani'el** was 84.

536 BC prophecy of **the Future of Isra'el (12:1-13)** when **Dani'el** was 84.

Dani'el 5 begins with the words **King Belshazzar**, and we are somewhat puzzled to find that the writer has suddenly dropped **Belshazzar** into our laps. We have just come from two chapters concerning **Dani'el's vision** of **four beasts (7:1-28)**, and **his vision** of **the ram and male goat (8:1-17)**. Unexpectedly, we are staring **Belshazzar** in the face. Who is **he**? Where did **he** come from? We need to play some historical catch-up.

Nebuchadnezzar died in 562 BC, after a reign of forty-three years. However, in less than another twenty-five years all was lost. Evil-Merodach (561-560 BC), **Nebuchadnezzar's** son, followed his father on the throne. But he was apparently assassinated by his brother-in-law Neriglissar, who had a tenure of about four years and was succeeded by his son, Labashi-Marduk. Unfortunately for him, he was killed within a month and one of the conspirators, Nabonidus, became king (555-539 BC). It seems that Nabonidus didn't have designs on the throne himself, but may have been placed there as a "compromise candidate" by the conspirators. Some think that **Belshazzar**, Nabonidus' son, was the real mover behind the conspirators. In any case, as far as **the Babylonians** were concerned, Nabonidus had a religious "problem." He was a passionate disciple of the moon god Sin, to such a degree that he alarmed the **Babylonian** clergy, for he seemed intent on replacing the god Marduk from his supremacy among the **Babylonian** pantheon. This may have led to a "relocation program" for Nabonidus, because he spent the next ten years at Tayma, an oasis in the North Arabian desert, five-hundred miles from **Babylon**. His

son, **Belshazzar**, acted as co regent with **his** father delegating control of the royal affairs to **him**, and being very pro-Marduk, kept the **Babylonian** clergy from revolting. Which is why we are suddenly staring **Belshazzar** in the face at **Dani'el 5:1**.[249] **He** ruled until **Babylon** fell to Cyrus the Great in 539 BC. Because **he** was the city's *de facto* king, **he** is considered the last ruler of **Babylon**.

This status fulfills a prophecy made by **Jeremiah**. **Now I will give your countries to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, who is my servant. I have put everything, even the wild animals, under his control. All the nations will serve him, his son, and his grandson until his time is up. Then many nations and great kings will conquer and rule over Babylon (Jeremiah 27:6-7). Jeremiah** prophesied that **Nebuchadnezzar's** family line would end with **his grandson**. **Belshazzar** was that **grandson**. **His** name means *Bel Protect the King.* It is very close to **Dani'el's Babylonian** name, **Belteshazzar**, which means *May Bel Protect His Life.*[250]

It is not easy to reconstruct the events surrounding the fall of **Babylon**. The so-called Nabonidus Chronicle (preserved on a single clay tablet now kept at the British Museum in London) is incomplete, but it tells of the return of Nabonidus to **Babylon** to perform a new year festival. The date is missing, but "seventeenth year" is assumed, for the armies of **Darius**, were closing in. **Darius** was made **king (9:1-2)**, called **king (6:8)**, and exercised the authority of **a king (6:9)**. **He** is called **king** twenty-eight times in **Chapter 6**. So the evidence suggests that **Darius the Mede** was none other than **Cyrus king of Persia** (see **Ag – Darius and Cyrus**).

The month Tashritu (the seventh month) is named in connection with the attack of **Darius** on the **Babylonian** army at Opis on the Tigris River and the revolt of the city and its massacre. "The fifteenth day Sippar was seized without a fight. Nabonidus fled, (but was captured by **Darius**). On the sixteenth day, the army of **Darius** entered **Babylon** without battle." Presumably this was the event referred to in **Dani'el 5:30**, though it was during the next month that **Darius** entered **the city** in person on November 2, 539 BC. Thus, when the banquet began, **Babylon** was under siege.

In the light of this background, **Belshazzar's** banquet was sheer chutzpah, the last fling of a terrified ruler unsuccessfully trying to drown **his** fears in alcohol. Little wonder that panic seized **him** and made a fool of **him** as soon as **he** realized **his** dangerous position. The fact that **his** father abandoned the capital and left **him** to face the fierce enemy alone arouses a certain amount of sympathy for this weak

and blasphemous “king.”[251]

This **chapter**, **verses 1** through **31** can be broken down in chiastic fashion, resulting in a mirror effect as the ideas are “reflected” back in the passage: **A** to **A**, **B** to **B**, **C** to **C**, with **D being the turning point of the chiasm where the queen mother reintroduces Dani’el, since he was apparently a forgotten figure in the royal court**.

A. Belshazzar’s Great Banquet – 5:1-4 (Cp)

B. The Handwriting on the Wall – 5:5-9 (Cq)

C. The Advice of the Queen Mother – 5:10-12 (Cr)

B. Dani’el Interpreted the Handwriting on the Wall – 5:13-29 (Cs)

A. Belshazzar was Killed – 5:30-31 (Ct)