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Belshazzar’s Great Banquet
5: 1-4

Belshazzar’s great banquet DIG: Who was Belshazzar the king? Why did he have such a great banquet? Why was he so unconcerned with the enemy camped outside the city gates? What was so wrong about using the sacred vessels from the Temple? How was Belshazzar similar to the rich fool in Yeshua’s parable?

REFLECT: What contemporary examples come to mind of people mocking God? Then and now, does it seem that ADONAI is quick, or slow, to judge such sacrilegious behavior? How could understanding the past (his grandfather’s encounters with God) have helped Belshazzar understand the present more clearly?

Belshazzar’s heart was a factory of rebellion against God (October 12, 539 BC).



King Belshazzar (**to see link click Co – The Great Banquet of Belshazzar and the Fall of Babylon**) **gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles (5:1a).** The extravagance of the banquet described here is not without parallels. The description of this boisterous party reminds us of the opening of the book of **Esther** (see the commentary on **Esther Ak – The King Gave a Grand Banquet in Susa, and Displayed the Vast Wealth**). Greek historians like Herodotus recorded many such lavish feasts on the part of **the Babylonians**, and this was one of the best. Everyone was dressed in their finest clothes and the tables were set with the most ornate silverware. Yet, by focusing our attention on this elaborate **feast** as the sole event worth mentioning in his account, the writer subtly underlines for us the emptiness at the end of **Belshazzar's** life. Unlike **his** famous grandfather, King Nebuchadnezzar, who destroyed cities and carried off plunder **(1:2)**, made statues **(3:1-7)**, and built the wonders of royal **Babylon (4:30)**, the only thing that **Belshazzar** could make was a banquet. The former built an empire, the latter planned a party.[252]

The timing of **the banquet** seemed to be sheer chutzpah. According to the Nabonidus Chronicle (preserved on a single clay tablet now kept at the British Museum in London), **the Babylonians** had suffered a crushing defeat just days before at the hands of the Medes and Persians. **Belshazzar** knew that the enemy was camped outside **the city** walls. Only the great city of **Babylon itself** remained unconquered, and the situation looked pretty bleak. Perhaps the celebration was meant to build morale and encourage **his** citizens. But **the king** was so confident of **the city's** massive walls, being 320 feet tall and 80 feet thick, that **he** literally let down **his** guard. In an attempt to quiet any fears that **his** subjects may have had, **Belshazzar** made the fatal decision to remove the guards from the walls of **the city**. As a result, no one was watching what was happening outside **the city** on that fateful night.[253]

As a result, **Belshazzar's wives, concubines,** and **a thousand nobles** were **feasting** and **drinking**, **Darius**, **king of the Medes and Persians** advanced outside **the city** gates, ready to invade. The Euphrates River ran through **Babylon** so there was an ample supply of water, and within **the city** were supplies that would sustain **it** for twenty years! Therefore, **the king** felt **he** had little cause for concern. **And Belshazzar drank wine before them (5:1b).** Normally, **the king** was hidden from the sight of **his** guests, but here **he** deliberately sat in full view of **his** subjects and took the lead in **drinking himself** under the table as a demonstration of **his** bravado. **Drank** is a rendering of an Aramaic participle (see

Ac – Dani'el from a Messianic Jewish Perspective: languages) that, in this context, probably carries the idea of *continuous* **drinking**. **The king's** actions encouraged those attending the party to **drink**, and **drink**, and **drink**. And probably within a short amount of time, **the king** and **his guests** were well on **their** way to a **drunken** orgy.[254] This **feast** was a microcosm of the world focused on **the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (First John 2:16).** Why worry about the enemy when you have security and plenty to eat?

Belshazzar was doubtless ignorant of **Isaiah's** words concerning **Babylon's** ultimate humiliation. But even had **he** known, there is little doubt that **he** would have acted any differently: **You have trusted in your wickedness and have said, 'No one sees me.' Your wisdom and knowledge mislead you when you say to yourself, "I am, and there is none besides me." Disaster will come upon you, and you will not know how to conjure it away. A calamity will fall upon you that you cannot ward off with a ransom; a catastrophe you cannot foresee will suddenly come upon you** (see **Isaiah Ih – Go Down, in the Dust, Virgin Daughter of Babylon**). **Belshazzar** is perhaps the supreme parallel in the TaNaKh to the rich fool in **Yeshua's** parable (see **Hd – The Parable of the Rich Fool**). Having already given expression to their lust for more (in the case of the rich fools his lust for more money), they would never be satisfied without more. Blinded by the pursuit of that lust, they were oblivious to the possibility that **this very night your life will be demanded from you (Luke 12:20).**[255]

While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver vessels that Nebuchadnezzar, his "father", had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem. The Aramaic term for **"father,"** *av*, literally means just that, **"father."** However it can also refer to one's **ancestors (Dani'el 2:23; Ezra 4:14** and **5:12).**[256] **Nebuchadnezzar** had decreed that **all peoples** were to give respect to **the God of the Jews (3:29)**, and **he himself** praised **ADONAI** for **His** sovereignty and greatness (see **By – Redemption: The King's Deliverance**). Evidently, **he** considered **the vessels** too precious to actually use. But as the years passed, **the** great **king's** words were forgotten, and **his drunken grandson Belshazzar** had no problem treating **the God of Isra'el** disrespectfully. **So they brought in the gold vessels that had been taken from the Temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them (5:2-3).** Both **the men** and **women** at **the drunken** orgy brazenly used those holy **vessels** like common drinking cups. But **Belshazzar** went

even further in **his** sacrilege. **He** not only committed blasphemy; **he** combined it with idolatry. Here is where **his** profanity surpassed even that of **Nebuchadnezzar**. **Belshazzar** used **God's** holy **vessels** to toast the lifeless **idols** of **his** own religion. **As they drank the wine, they praised the** false **gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone (5:4).**[257] **He** spits in **God's** face, as it were, and then goes over to **an idol** that **he himself** has created and expected that lifeless **statue** to protect **him** from what was to come.[258]

But, why did **Belshazzar** choose to challenge and blaspheme **the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob** rather than one of the countless other foreign deities? Most likely, **Belshazzar** also desecrated the holy objects of other nations as well as those of **Isra'el** in an attempt to demonstrate the superiority of **the gods of Babylon** over the deities of other nations. This would have been an act of propaganda intended to bolster the confidence of **his** citizens in light of the presence of **the Medo-Persian** army outside **the city** walls.

But he didn't stop there, **5:22-24** indicates that this was a deliberate act of defiance against **God's** authority and power. **Belshazzar** knew that **YHVH** had humbled **his grandfather** (see **Bx – Humiliation: The King's Discipline**), yet he deliberately defiled **the God of Isra'el**. By his blasphemous actions **the king** was saying, "**God**, **you** may have humbled **Nebuchadnezzar**, but **you** will never conquer me!"[259] **Belshazzar's** heart was a factory of rebellion against **God**. Now he cast off all restraint and showed it. What **Nebuchadnezzar** had not dared to contemplate even in **his** worst moments, **Belshazzar** easily did on that fateful night. **He** knew exactly what those **vessels** were and where **they** were from. **He** did not sin in ignorance, but with full knowledge. **Paul's** words provide all we need to know about **the** evil **king, "Since they have not considered God worth knowing, God has given them up,** literally, *God handed them over,* **to worthless** (Greek: *adokimos*, meaning *depraved*) **ways of thinking; so that they do improper things . . . who, knowing God's righteous decree that people who do such things deserve to die, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them (Romans 1:28** and **32). Belshazzar** sought to mock **God**, but the lesson for us today is this: **Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful nature will harvest decay and death from that sinful nature. But those who live to please the Spirit will harvest everlasting life from the Spirit (Galatians 6:7-8).**[260]

*Dear heavenly **Father**, praise **You** that **You** are always in control, no matter how bleak and dark the situation looks. **You** are the almighty **Sovereign** of the world and **You** absolutely will defeat all evil, in **Your** perfect timing **(Revelation 19:20** and **20:10). You** judge and **You** reward **(1 Cor 3:12-14),** not by the size of the good deed done for you, but **You** judge by faith. If faith is the motive behind why the deed was done, then **You** are pleased; but if the deed was done out of pride, it is a worthless deed. No one can fool **You** by the number of deeds they have done, nor by how big a deed they have done for **You** can see clearly into each person’s heart. **For man looks at the outward appearance, but ADONAI looks into the heart (First Samuel 16:7c).** What false security money and fame provides. Sometimes wealthy people look so happy, doing whatever they want and spending lots of money on whatever seems to fit their fancy at the moment; but their time will be cut short, as **Belshazzar’s** time was cut short. Eternity is of far more value than living for any momentary pleasure. Eternity goes on forever and ever; life now will be over in a moment and this life’s earthly pleasures will soon be forgotten. In **Messiah Yeshua’s** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*