

Daniel Chapter 5

As is so often the case, the narrative is chiasitic:

- A. Belshazzar throws a blasphemous feast for his great men (vv. 1–4)
- B. The inscription is written and no one can read or interpret it (vv. 5–9)
- C. The queen reminds Belshazzar of Nebuchadnezzar (vv. 10–12)
- D. Belshazzar insults Daniel and asks him to interpret (vv. 13–16)
- C' Daniel reminds Belshazzar of Nebuchadnezzar (vv. 17–23)
- B' Daniel reads and interprets the inscription (vv. 24–28)
- A' Belshazzar honors Daniel as a great man, and is killed that same night (vv. 29–30)

Belshazzar's Feast (5:1-12)

“Without any explanation or indication of date the narrative leaps from the reign of Nebuchadnezzar to the very end of the Babylonian empire, the night on which its last ruler was killed and the city fell to the Medes and Persians.”¹ So, “About thirty years have passed since the last chapter. Nebuchadnezzar died in 562, and the banquet of this chapter takes place in October 539.”²

The Neo-Babylonian Kings

Nabopolassar	626–605 B.C.
Nebuchadnezzar II	605–562/563 B.C.
Amel-Marduk	562–560 B.C.
Neriglissar	560–556 B.C.
Labashi-Marduk	556 B.C.
Nabonidus	556–539 B.C. ³

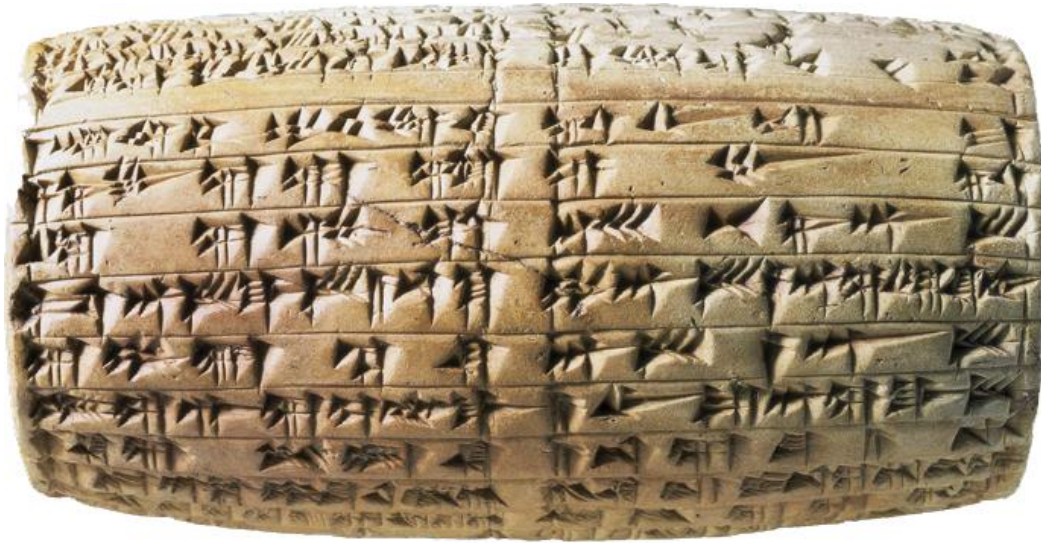
“Nebuchadnezzar had died in 563, succeeded by his son Evil-Merodach (Akkad. *Amel-Marduk*, “man of Marduk”), who released the captive Jewish king, Jehoiachin, from prison and gave him an honorable place at the court (2 Kings 25:27–30). But two years later Evil-Merodach was assassinated by his brother-in-law, General Neriglissar (Akkad *Nergal-shar-ušur* “Nergal, protect the king!”), who had served under Nebuchadnezzar when Jerusalem was destroyed (587–586 B.C.). Neriglissar died just four years later (556), and his son Labashi-Marduk, who succeeded him, was murdered nine months later (556). This revolt placed its leader Nabonidus (Akkad. *Nabu-na'id*, “Nebo is exalted”) on the throne. He does not seem to have been related to the royal house by blood but apparently married a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar in order to legitimize his

¹ Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 23, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 132.

² Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Da 5:1.

³ John H Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 522.

seizure of the throne. During the last ten years of his life, he seems to have spent most of his time in Teima, an important Edomite or North Arabian capital ... and left the central administration to the charge of his son Belshazzar in Babylon itself—the situation still obtaining during this final year of the Chaldean Empire, 539 B.C.



Nabonidus cylinder inscription from Ur naming Belshazzar

“Back in the 550s Nabonidus apparently supported the revolt of Cyrus of Anshan against his father-in-law, Astyages, king of Media.

The Medo-Persian forces soon vanquished the Babylonian troops near Opis [about 47 miles from Babylon on the Tigris River]. The 16th day, Gobryas (Ugbaru) the governor of Gutium and the army of Cyrus entered Babylon without battle.” Apparently Nabonidus had commanded the troops in the field, while Belshazzar headed the defense of Babylon itself. Meeting with reverses, Nabonidus retreated south toward his salient at Tema (or Teima), leaving the Persians free access to the capital. Here they [the Babylonians] shut themselves up and made light of his siege, having laid in a store of provisions for many years in preparation against this attack.”

Babylon was considered impregnable because of its magnificent fortifications. Earlier in the same book Herodotus described it as 120 stadia square [about 16 miles], surrounded by a large moat, and defended by a wall 50 royal cubits wide [about 150 foot wide] and 200 royal cubits high (about 330 ft.), with 100 strongly fortified gates.

.... these besieged Babylonians were completely unconcerned about the enemy forces encamped outside their walls.all the leaders of government, society, the armed forces, and the priests were there—along with the king’s wives and concubines.

Unknown to them, Cyrus’s resourceful commander, Ugbaru ... had diverted the waters of the Euphrates to an old channel ... suddenly reducing the water level well below the river-gates. Before long the Persian besiegers would come wading in at night and clamber up the riverbank walls before the guards knew what was happening.”⁴

⁴ Gleason L. Archer Jr., “Daniel,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Daniel and the Minor Prophets*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelain, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 68–69.

5:1 Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in the presence of the thousand.

Nabonidus's son was Belshazzar, Nabonidus "was the last king of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, reigning from 556–539 B.C.. He [Nabonidus] seized power in a coup, toppling King Labashi-Marduk. He also angered the priests and commoners of Babylon by neglecting the city's chief god, Marduk, and elevating the moon god, Sin, to the highest status. In fact, Nabonidus left the capital for ten years to build and restore temples – mostly to Sin – leaving his son, Belshazzar, in charge. While leading excavations for the restoration effort, he initiated the world's first archaeological work.



Picking up on the story: "In the past few days the Persians have taken the city of Opis (fifty miles north on the Tigris) in a bloody battle and then crossed over to the Euphrates, where the city of Sippar surrendered without a fight on the fourteenth of Tashritu."⁵

"Meanwhile, the Persian Achaemenid Empire to the east, led by Cyrus the Great, had been gaining strength. King Cyrus had become popular among the residents of Babylon by posing as the one who would restore Marduk to his rightful place in the city. As the Persians advanced to Babylon, Nabonidus returned. He was captured by the Persians in 539 B.C., and Babylon was occupied, thus ending the Neo-Babylonian Empire. Cyrus was welcomed into the city, where he performed the rites of Marduk. Nabonidus' fate is uncertain, though it is believed he was exiled to Iran and allowed to occupy a government post."⁶

a great feast.... "The banquet is taking place in mid-October (15 Tashritu) 539."⁷
"...both the Greek historians, Herodotus and Xenophon, testified that a banquet was in progress on the night Babylon fell ... about thirty years after the events of chap. 4."⁸

⁵ Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Da 5:1.

⁶ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nabonidus>

⁷ Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Da 5:1.

⁸ Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, vol. 18, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 150–151.

Just outside the gates are the Persians.

and drank wine in the presence of the thousand.... “With the armies of a conqueror pressing at the capital this deputy ruler took refuge in an orgy of wine.”⁹ These words “before them,” “suggest ... sitting at high table facing them...).”¹⁰

5:2 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 been in Jerusalem, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them.

vessels...Jerusalem.... “Everyone in the ancient world understood the significance of sacred vessels. The fact that these had not been melted down suggests that they had been preserved because of their sacred character. Since the god of Babylon was seen as the conqueror, the things that belonged to the “conquered” gods would have been taken as booty into the temple of Marduk. Perhaps the use of the vessels was a way of calling to remembrance the god’s previous victories....”¹¹

“And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the articles of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the articles into the treasure house of his god.” (Daniel 1:2, NKJV)

“...Belshazzar desecrated the holy objects of other nations as well as those of Israel in an attempt to demonstrate the superiority of the gods of Babylon over the deities of the nations.” ...the presence of the Medo-Persian armies outside of the city walls. Belshazzar was assuring his subjects that the gods of Babylon, and he as their earthly representative, were capable of protecting them.”¹²

his father Nebuchadnezzar.... He uses the word “father” in the sense of ancestor. “It is likely that Nabonidus wed a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar, making the great king both Belshazzar’s “predecessor” and grandfather.”¹³

“The time had come for offering toasts and pouring out libations to the gods of Babylon. In his drunken bravado, he thought of a novel way of entertaining his guests. What about those beautiful golden goblets and bowls from Solomon’s temple (v.2)? Why not

⁹ Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 23, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 132.

¹⁰ John E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, vol. 30, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1989), 100.

¹¹ Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Da 5:2.

¹² Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, vol. 18, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 154.

¹³ Ted Cabal et al., *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2007), 1278.

use them? After all, they had been fashioned for a defeated god named Yahweh, worshiped by the captive people of Judah.”¹⁴

“We cannot be certain what was going on in Belshazzar’s mind at this time. But surely he did not just run out of his everyday goblets and called for the spares.”¹⁵ It is more like that Belshazzar is here portraying before his gods’ symbols of previous victories of Marduk and the other gods of Babylon in an effort to again call his gods to action. “The enemy is at the gate. It is time to act; we need more victories like these.”

So, it appears that Belshazzar is displaying before his gods the symbols of the defeated God of Judah. Belshazzar is reminding his gods how great they are and asking for the same help they once gave Babylon to the current enemy, Persia.

5:3 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.

“After all, they had been fashioned for a defeated god named Yahweh, worshiped by the captive people of Judah”¹⁶

5:4 They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone.

praised the gods.... “Belshazzar and his administration are well aware that the empire hangs by a thread and that the next several days will be of utmost significance. They are hoping that their gods will bring victory for them as they had in the days of Nebuchadnezzar’s great conquests. To that end they are “toasting the gods” and celebrating their past victories.”¹⁷ And their hope for new ones.

“The sacred vessels, laid away for forty-seven years, were brought to the banquet hall. Belshazzar began to regale his guests by taunting Yahweh, *whose reputation Nebuchadnezzar’s decrees had established a few decades before*, and by praising Marduk, Bel, Nebo, Ishtar, and the other gods (v.4).”¹⁸

5:5 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.

¹⁴ Gleason L. Archer Jr., “Daniel,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Daniel and the Minor Prophets*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 70.

¹⁵ Tremper Longman III, *Daniel*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 137.

¹⁶ Gleason L. Archer Jr., “Daniel,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Daniel and the Minor Prophets*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 70.

¹⁷ Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Da 5:4.

¹⁸ Gleason L. Archer Jr., “Daniel,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Daniel and the Minor Prophets*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 70.

the fingers of a man's hand.... “The vision of a detached hand writing remains one of the most haunting images in literature.”¹⁹ “A lifeless, detached hand would have suggested a defeated enemy. Casualty counts were made by cutting off the right hands of all of the dead The effect might be similar if the head of a decapitated victim began to speak.”²⁰

opposite the lampstand.... In a place well lit and easy to see.

on the plaster of the wall.... “the Aramaic word translated *plaster* literally means *chalk*. Any dark object moving across this *white* surface would stand out particularly.”²¹

5:6 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 joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other.... “...he lost the strength to stand.”²² “...he has lost control of his most basic bodily functions, which has undermined his posture of composure.”²³

5:7 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.”

The king cried aloud.... “Evidently Belshazzar was screaming for his “wise men”—“the enchanters, astrologers and diviners.”²⁴

shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around his neck.... “These are marks of honor and royal approval (Gen. 41:42; Est. 8:15). Purple clothing was made using an expensive dye and was normally only worn by royalty.”²⁵

¹⁹ John Joseph Collins and Adela Yarbro Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, ed. Frank Moore Cross, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 246.

²⁰ Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Da 5:5.

²¹ Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 120.

²² John E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, vol. 30, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1989), 101.

²³ Tremper Longman III, *Daniel*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 138.

²⁴ Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, vol. 18, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 157.

²⁵ John H Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 542.

the third ruler in the kingdom.... While “Nabonidus the king was in Arabia. Belshazzar was his vice-regent. **The third ruler** would have been next in line to the throne.”²⁶

5:8 Now all the king’s wise men came, but they could not read the writing, or make known to the king its interpretation.

“One might wonder why these counselors, or for that matter the king and his nobles, could not read the writing. ... Most likely the words were understood, but they “simply did not convey any intelligible meaning.”²⁷

5:9 Then King Belshazzar was greatly troubled, his countenance was changed, and his lords were astonished.

5:10 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.

“That she can enter the king’s presence unbidden and that her memory goes back beyond that of Belshazzar suggests that the “queen” is the queen mother.”²⁸

5:11 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.

Josephus says, “Now when the king’s *grandmother* saw him cast down at this accident, she began to encourage him, and to say, that there was a certain captive who came from Judea, a Jew by birth, but brought away thence by Nebuchadnezzar when he had destroyed Jerusalem, whose name was Daniel, a wise man, and one of great sagacity in finding out what was impossible for others to discover, and what was known to God alone; who brought to light and answered such questions to Nebuchadnezzar as no one else was able to answer when they were consulted.”²⁹

“It is not surprising that the queen mother was more familiar with Daniel’s life and prominence than was Belshazzar. Daniel would be in his eighties by 539 B.C. He had been brought to Babylon as a young man sixty-six years before in 605 B.C....”³⁰

²⁶ Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald Barclay Allen, and H. Wayne House, *The Nelson Study Bible: New King James Version* (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), Da 5:7.

²⁷ Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, vol. 18, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 159.

²⁸ John H Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 543.

²⁹ Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 283.

³⁰ R. C. Sproul, ed., *The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version* (Orlando, FL; Lake Mary, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2005), 1221.

Daniel's "credentials stemmed from his notable service to Nebuchadnezzar, who found him so far superior to all the rest of his wise men that he placed him in charge of them all: "magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners."³¹

12 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."

interpreting dreams.... "The ability to interpret dreams forms a link to chaps. 2 and 4 but was probably Daniel's best-known characteristic."³²

solving riddles, and explaining enigmas.... "Resolution of riddles and problems is precisely the skill called for in this situation."³³

The Writing on the Wall Explained (5:13-29)

Daniel had already learned from God what was ahead. The advance of the armies of Persia held no mystery for the prophet. He knew what was ahead. We read in Daniel 8:

"In the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar a vision appeared to me—to me, Daniel—after the one that appeared to me the first time. I saw in the vision, and it so happened while I was looking, that I was in Shushan, the citadel, which is in the province of Elam; and I saw in the vision that I was by the River Ulai. Then I lifted my eyes and saw, and there, standing beside the river, was a ram which had two horns, and the two horns were high; but one was higher than the other, and the higher one came up last. I saw the ram pushing westward, northward, and southward, so that no animal could withstand him; nor was there any that could deliver from his hand, but he did according to his will and became great." (Daniel 8:1–4, NKJV)

"Then it happened, when I, Daniel, had seen the vision and was seeking the meaning, that suddenly there stood before me one having the appearance of a man. And I heard a man's voice between the banks of the Ulai, who called, and said, "Gabriel, make this man understand the vision." So he came near where I stood, and when he came I was afraid and fell on my face; but he said to me, "Understand, son of man, that the vision refers to the time of the end." Now, as he was speaking with me, I was in a deep sleep with my face to the ground; but he touched me, and stood me upright. And he said, "Look, I am making known to you what shall happen in the latter time of the indignation; for at the appointed time the end shall be. The ram which you saw, having the two horns—they are the kings of Media and Persia." (Daniel 8:15–20, NKJV)

³¹ Gleason L. Archer Jr., "Daniel," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Daniel and the Minor Prophets*, ed. Frank E. Gaebel, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 72.

³² John Joseph Collins and Adela Yarbro Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, ed. Frank Moore Cross, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 249.

³³ John Joseph Collins and Adela Yarbro Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, ed. Frank Moore Cross, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 249.

Daniel knew this day was coming.

5:13 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?”

“Such an address intends to remind Daniel of his place before Belshazzar. Belshazzar is king; Daniel is his captive.”³⁴

5:14 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. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ 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.”

The fact that Daniel is not a part of the wise men that first appeared before the king might suggest that being a very old man, “Daniel was no longer chief of the magicians.”³⁵

and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.” “The most likely view is that the interpreter was to be promoted to the third position of authority in the kingdom, as virtually all translations have understood.”³⁶

5:17 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.

Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another.... Daniel knows the outcome of this revelation, he has received prior notice from God. Belshazzar has nothing to offer Daniel.

We note that “The curtness of Daniel’s response contrasts with the gracious speech of the king that precedes it and also with Daniel’s address to Nebuchadnezzar in 4:19, 27.”³⁷

“Daniel enters the narrative after having received an introduction from the queen mother. Unlike the other court tales, Daniel rebukes the king, interprets the writing,

³⁴ Tremper Longman III, *Daniel*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 140.

³⁵ Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 123.

³⁶ Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, vol. 18, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 158.

³⁷ John Joseph Collins and Adela Yarbro Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, ed. Frank Moore Cross, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 249.

pronounces the judgment, and leaves. God's retribution on the sacrilege of Belshazzar is dealt with swiftly."³⁸

5:18 O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father a kingdom and majesty, glory and honor. 19 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. 20 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. 21 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.



5:22 "But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this.

³⁸ John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016), Da 5:13–31.

“The difference between Nebuchadnezzar in the previous chapter and Belshazzar here is that the latter has had an example set before him, and so he is now given no reprieve.”³⁹

5:23 *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.*

“Belshazzar had not learnt the lesson of history and was in all the greater danger than his father because he had deliberately defied the *Lord* (Aram, *mārē*: see note on 2:47) of *heaven* (23) by profaning what had been dedicated to him, worshipping lifeless gods, and giving not even a passing nod to the God to whom he owed his very existence.”⁴⁰

“Belshazzar had the opportunity to know something but neglected it in his devotion to gods who know nothing.”⁴¹ Now, “He was guilty of blasphemy in using the Lord’s holy vessels as common dishes for his drunken orgy (v.23).”⁴²

“Not only has he not humbled his heart, but he has actually vaunted himself against God by defiling the vessels of His temple. His act has been one of folly for he has praised gods which are inanimate, but has not glorified the true God who has given him life.”⁴³

5:24 *Then the fingers of the hand were sent from Him, and this writing was written.*

5:25 *“And this is the inscription that was written:*

MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN

“Aramaic, like Hebrew, is usually written without vowels, and this very short inscription would have been ambiguous.”⁴⁴

“The three terms, *Mene*, *Tekel* and *Parsin* (the ‘u’ of *Upharsin* of av, rv is ‘and’) were meaningful to readers of Hebrew and Aramaic and did not represent some strange

³⁹ John Joseph Collins and Adela Yarbro Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, ed. Frank Moore Cross, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 250.

Aram Aramaic.

⁴⁰ Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 23, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 136–137.

⁴¹ John Joseph Collins and Adela Yarbro Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, ed. Frank Moore Cross, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 250.

⁴² Gleason L. Archer Jr., “Daniel,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Daniel and the Minor Prophets*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 73.

⁴³ Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 125.

⁴⁴ R. C. Sproul, ed., *The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version* (Orlando, FL; Lake Mary, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2005), 1222.

tongue, as they do for most modern readers. For the king the difficulty was not to give the 'dictionary definition' of the terms, but to see what significance they had for him."⁴⁵

5:26 This is the interpretation of each word. Mene: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it; 27 Tekel: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting;

"The first two were identical: *m^enē*, meaning "numbered," "counted out," "measured" (passive participle of *m^enā* , "to number"). This signified that the years of Belshazzar's reign had been counted out to their very last one, and it was about to terminate (v.26)."⁴⁶

"The second word (v.27) was "Tekel" Daniel explained it as the passive participle *t^eqīl* ("weighed") and applied it to Belshazzar himself. God found him deficient in the scales and therefore rejected him."⁴⁷

5:28 Peres: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians."

"The third word is *p^erēs*, which is derived from a root *p^erēs*, meaning "to divide." Daniel read it as a passive participle (*p^erīs*, "divided") and interpreted it to mean that Belshazzar's kingdom, the Babylonian Empire, had been divided or separated from him and given over to the Medes and Persians besieging the city."⁴⁸

and given to the Medes and Persians. "Nothing could be plainer, in the light of this triple wordplay, than that the author understood the Persians to be the dominant element in empire number two, with the Medians being associated with them as a federated nation. The theory of a Median kingdom as empire number two is devoid of support in the text of Daniel itself. The important consequence of this identification of the combined Medo-Persian Empire as the second kingdom in Daniel's series of four (embodied in Nebuchadnezzar's four-part dream-image in ch. 2) is that the third kingdom must be the Greek one; therefore, the fourth empire must be the Roman Empire—which, of course, did not actually take over the Near East till 63 B.C., a century after the Maccabean uprisings. Therefore, this handwriting on the wall demolishes the Maccabean date hypothesis, which insists that nothing in Daniel prophesies any event later than the death of Antiochus Epiphanes in 164 B.C...."⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 23, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 137.

⁴⁶ Gleason L. Archer Jr., "Daniel," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Daniel and the Minor Prophets*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelain, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 73.

⁴⁷ Gleason L. Archer Jr., "Daniel," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Daniel and the Minor Prophets*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelain, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 73.

⁴⁸ Gleason L. Archer Jr., "Daniel," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Daniel and the Minor Prophets*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelain, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 73.

⁴⁹ Gleason L. Archer Jr., "Daniel," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Daniel and the Minor Prophets*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelain, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 74.

“...there is no excuse for ignoring, as liberals generally do, the fact that Daniel 5:28 explicitly states that Babylon fell to the Medes *and* the Persians!”⁵⁰

5:29 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.

“Daniel’s interpretation must have greatly disturbed Belshazzar, for it spelled his imminent doom. His natural response would have been to have the prophet executed on the spot for his bold condemnation of the king in front of the court. But perhaps the God-given authority Daniel spoke with awed Belshazzar, and he was afraid of incurring still greater wrath if he laid a hand on God’s spokesman. Whatever his motives, the king fulfilled his promises to the letter, bestowing the royal chain of gold on Daniel and having him proclaimed the third ruler in the kingdom. Possibly he thought that Yahweh might relent and not destroy Babylonia if his prophet became prime minister.”⁵¹

Belshazzar’s Fall (5:30)

5:30 That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain.

That very night.... “(October 12, 539 B.C.) Babylon fell to the Persian army commanded by Gubaru.”⁵²

“Xenophon (*Cyropaedia* 7.5.17–29) claims that Babylon fell to a nighttime attack. Cyrus tells his troops: “Tonight we go against them when some are asleep and some are drunk, and all are unprepared.” He adds that a detachment under Gobryas and Gadatas made its way to the royal quarters and massacred the king and his retinue.”⁵³

One document speaks of ***Belshazzar***, “the Babylonian king, a riotous, indulgent, cruel, and godless young man.”⁵⁴

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

Who was Darius the Mede?

“...“Darius the Mede” is in all probability to be identified with the Gobryas [Gubaru] of Herodotus’s account.... Cyrus sent greetings to all Babylon. Gubaru, his governor, installed sub-governors in Babylon....

⁵⁰ John S. Evans, *The Four Kingdoms of Daniel*, (Xulon Press, 2004), 66.

⁵¹ Gleason L. Archer Jr., “Daniel,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Daniel and the Minor Prophets*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 75.

⁵² Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald Barclay Allen, and H. Wayne House, *The Nelson Study Bible: New King James Version* (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), Da 5:30. Xenophon Xenophon, of Athens (c. 430–354 B.C.), pupil of Socrates, author of various historical, philosophical and scholarly works, ed. E. C. Marchant, 1900 ff.

⁵³ John Joseph Collins and Adela Yarbro Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, ed. Frank Moore Cross, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 252–253.

⁵⁴ John H Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 543.

.... It was ... Gubaru whom Cyrus appointed vice-regent of the Chaldean domains on 29 October. The Nabonidus Chronicle and other cuneiform texts of that era indicate that he continued on as governor of Babylonia for at least fourteen years, even though Cyrus may have taken over the royal title at a solemn public coronation service two years later. Presumably urgent military necessity drew Cyrus away from his newly subdued territories to face an enemy menacing some other frontier. Until he could get back and assume the Babylonian crown with appropriate pomp and ceremony, it was expedient for him to leave control of Babylonia in the hands of a trusted lieutenant like Gubaru. "In his dealings with his Babylonian subjects, Cyrus was 'king of Babylon, king of lands.' ... But it was Gobryas [Gubaru] the satrap who represented the royal authority after the king's departure."

...the name "Darius" may have been a title of honor, somewhat as "Caesar" or "Augustus" became in the Roman Empire.

.... It was only natural that this honorific title be used of the official viceroy of the Medo-Persian Empire in this account, rather than his personal name. Darius the Mede "received" (Aram. *qabbēl*; NIV, "took over") the royal authority from one who was empowered to invest him with it—presumably Cyrus himself. Daniel 9:1 states that he "was made ruler" (Heb. *homlak*) over the realm of the Chaldeans—a term never applied to one who seizes the sovereignty by force of arms but rather to one who is appointed to kingship by a higher authority. All this fits Gubaru perfectly, and it is only reasonable to conclude that he was the one referred to in Daniel 5:31 as "Darius the Mede."

.... It would seem that after he had taken care of more pressing concerns elsewhere, Cyrus himself later returned to Babylon (perhaps a year or two afterward) and formally ascended the throne in an official coronation ceremony. It was in the third year of Cyrus's reign (presumably as king of Babylon) that Daniel received the revelations in chapters 10–12. Yet it is also evident from the cuneiform records referred to above that Gubaru continued to serve as governor of Babylon even after Cyrus's decease. The tablets dating from 535 to 525 contained warnings that committing specified offenses would entail "the guilt of a sin against Gubaru, the Governor of Babylon and of the District beyond the river [i.e., the regions west of the Euphrates]"....⁵⁵

Another well received option to this question on the name of Darius the Mede is that this is the throne name of Cyrus. Throne names were rather common in the near east, note, "Tiglath Pileser III (745–727 B.C.) ruled as king of Babylon from 729 as Pul; his son Shalmaneser V ruled in Babylon under the name Ululai. It was far from uncommon to adopt more than one name."⁵⁶

"Cyrus is known to have been related to the Medes, to have been called 'king of the Medes' and to have been about sixty years old on becoming king of Babylon. The suggestion requires that 6:28 be translated, 'So this Daniel prospered in the reign of

⁵⁵ Gleason L. Archer Jr., "Daniel," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Daniel and the Minor Prophets*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelien, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 76–77.

⁵⁶ Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 23, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978).

Darius, that is, in the reign of Cyrus the Persian'.⁵⁷ “But Cyrus was a Persian, not a Mede, and was the son of Cambyses (not Ahasuerus)....”⁵⁸

“In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the lineage of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans—” (Daniel 9:1, NKJV)

⁵⁷ Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 23, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 30.

⁵⁸ Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Da 6:1.

