

Daniel 5

A Time of Reckoning

Read Daniel 5:1-4: Now we leave Nebuchadnezzar behind. We move forward twenty years, to a time when Belshazzar, his grandson, was the king. He was the last king of this empire. Nebuchadnezzar had gained respect for Daniel and God the hard way. His grandson really did not care about all of that family history. It is difficult to pass on values from one generation to the next. He did not graduate from *the school of hard knocks*. He had an insulated life.

How could his grandson be ruling? What happened to his dad? Evil Merodach was the son of Nebuchadnezzar, and father of Belshazzar. He was assassinated by his brother-in-law (Neriglissar) after two years.

It is interesting that the king was throwing a big party as the Medo Persian empire was ready to sack them. He was trying to increase his popularity. He was not a popular king with the military and the priesthood. He chose the moon god (Sin); against the majority of priests and Babylonians who worshipped Marduk. He was also preoccupied traveling and performing archaeological digs. In other words, he was disconnected with his people. He probably seemed like an oddball. This created resentment and disconnection with the troops. Instead of reassessing his duties, he just tried to silence his critics. It is similar to a tactic used by Roman emperors. They instituted something called '*Bread and Circus*'. It was a continuum of events in the coliseum. The idea is that Cesar could win popularity back for bad management with entertainment.

Belshazzar was ignorant, disrespectful and disconnected. He was disrespecting Daniel and his friends and the real God. He was using the precious and holy vessels from the temple in Jerusalem for worshipping the gods of precious metals, wood and stone. He was trying to curry favor to gain more riches and solicit the idols of treasures..

Honor is not Fitting for a Fool

Read Daniel 5:5-9: God used the Babylonian Kingdom to make some corrections in Judah. He used their quest for greatness to fix his family national problem. God had to evict his people from the property. Babylon was prophesied to become the *Hammer to the Nations*. God revealed himself to Nebuchadnezzar through Daniel and his friends. He corrected Nebuchadnezzar's view; but the king tried to sidestep it. God brought him down hard, until he saw that his life was in God's hands. Now, the following generations of kings have disregarded all of this history and knowledge...and they are basically entertaining themselves. God is essentially pulling Belshazzar aside and saying; "This is how you are using your God-given authority?".

The time had come to replace the Babylonian kingdom; and also to replace the spoiled grandson of Nebuchadnezzar. God has historically killed our idols, or shown them to be powerless.

Belshazzar had just praised the gods of rocks and gold and minerals. God had a hand appear and write on the plaster wall a written evaluation and judgement against Belshazzar.

Today we have an idiom that came from this event. If we say: “*The handwriting is on the wall*”, it is a foregone conclusion that something bad or disastrous is imminent. It is foolish to proceed against all signs and communications and evidence to the contrary. Belshazzar was offending Jews and God, and everything that is decent and holy. Another idiom related to this event is the saying: “*It is written in stone*”.

As snow in summer and rain in harvest, So honor is not fitting for a fool. Like a flitting sparrow, like a flying swallow, So a curse without cause shall not alight. A whip for the horse, A bridle for the donkey, And a rod for the fool's back. Do not answer a fool according to his folly, Lest you also be like him. Answer a fool according to his folly, Lest he be wise in his own eyes. (Proverbs 26:1-5)

The Bible tells us that we can be judged by scripture, or by our own laws. Perhaps Belshazzar was also being judged by his own laws, that he enforced.

For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law (Romans 2:12)

The Code of Hammurabi was one of the earliest and most complete written legal codes and was proclaimed by the Babylonian king Hammurabi, who reigned from 1792 to 1750 B.C. Hammurabi expanded the city-state of Babylon along the Euphrates River to unite all of southern Mesopotamia. The Hammurabi code of laws, a collection of 282 rules, established standards for commercial interactions and set fines and punishments to meet the requirements of justice. The black stone stele containing the Code of Hammurabi was carved from a single, four-ton slab of diorite, a durable but incredibly difficult stone for carving. At its top is a two-and-a-half-foot relief carving of a standing Hammurabi receiving the law—symbolized by a measuring rod and tape—from the seated Shamash, the Babylonian god of justice. The rest of the seven-foot-five-inch monument is covered with columns of chiseled cuneiform script. The text, compiled at the end of Hammurabi's reign, is less a proclamation of principles than a collection of legal precedents, set between prose celebrating Hammurabi's just and pious rule. Hammurabi's Code provides some of the earliest examples of the doctrine of “lex talionis,” or the laws of retribution, sometimes better known as “an eye for an eye.” During his reign, which lasted from 1792 to his death in 1750 B.C., Hammurabi in many ways also served as a model for how to combine military power, diplomatic finesse and political skill to build and control an empire that stretched from the Persian Gulf inland for 250 miles along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. But Hammurabi also made sure everybody knew he was responsible for all of the good fortune. When he built his canal, for example, he made sure everyone knew that he was only keeping up his obligation to the gods, who had entrusted him with the land. Hammurabi's legal

system included features that are familiar today, such as the principle that evidence had to be gathered and proof established in order to convict someone of a crime. "The 'innocent until proven guilty' theme still resonates with us,"



The Hammurabi Code dictated that those in control had responsibilities. It dictated that evidence had to be gathered to convict someone. This plays in exactly to the supernatural judgement written in stone by God.

The original language tells us that this king turned pale in shock, and his bowels opened up. His knees were knocking. The king offered a huge reward for whoever could interpret the dream. He offered a position of rulership and riches to whichever wise man could interpret the dream.

Read Daniel 5:10-16: The queen, Belshazzar's grandmother came in. She said that she had heard that her grandson was very troubled over this ominous and imposing dream. She suggested that he call in Daniel; who was known to be very skilled in interpreting dreams and mysteries.

Read Daniel 5:17-24: Now Daniel tactfully schools the grandson-king. He begins by reminding him that his grandfather was a great man; and had ultimate control and power over the kingdom. There was no rift between Nebuchadnezzar and his troops. He had the full support of his wise men too. He was feared and respected. His grandfather got as far as he could get. He had to bow his knee to the one true God. God had to pull him down, and straighten him out when he overstepped his purpose. God turned him into an animal-like man. He was transformed to live like a wild animal for 7 years, until he was humbled...and he knew first-hand who was in charge of all kings and kingdoms.

Then Daniel turns to the grandson and tells him respectfully, that he really messed things up. He had the benefit of knowing where this behavior would lead. He had the account of his grandfather at his disposal. Afterall, he was a history buff. Instead, he became a detached self-promoter, who ignorantly spoke against the real God. Nobody can do that and be unaffected. He had disrespected the real God by desecrating the holy things from the temple, as if it was a big joke. Then Daniel really tells him that he was worshipping gods that do not even exist. He tells him that the God who is putting breath into his lungs has completed his periodic revue; and it has resulted in Belshazzar losing what has been entrusted to his care, custody and control.

Read Daniel 5:25-31: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN are Aramaic consonants; without contextual vowels.

Outline of Biblical Usage [?]

- I. (P'al) mina, maneh
 - A. a weight or measurement; usually 50 shekels but maybe 60 shekels

Strong's Definitions [?](Strong's Definitions Legend)

מָנֵה mené', men-ay'; (Aramaic) passive participle of H4483; numbered:—**Mene**.

verb

- II. to weigh
 - B. (P'il) to be weighed
 - C. masculine noun
- III. tekel, shekel
 - D. (P'al) tekel - a unit of weight, shekel

Strong's Definitions [?](Strong's Definitions Legend)

תְּקֵל teqal, tek-al'; (Aramaic) corresponding to H8254; to balance:—**Tekel**, be

- IV. (P'al) to break in two, divide

- V. masculine noun
- VI. half-mina, half-shekel
 - E. a unit of measure and weight

Strong's Definitions [?](Strong's Definitions Legend)

פְּרָאֵס per-aṣ'; (Aramaic) corresponding to H6536; to split up:—divide, (U-) pharsin.

The Aramaic basically says: You have been measured as a man in keeping your responsibilities. Your grand total has been completed on your performance review. You are light; and only exhibiting competency in a percentage of what is required of you.

It was an understood language, but it was still cryptic. It was interpreted by Daniel to mean that:

- *God has numbered your kingdom; and it is finished.* This is despite Nebuchadnezzar's efforts to erect timeless images of himself as the only world kingdom. God was gracious to the repentant Nebuchadnezzar.
- *You have been evaluated; and you are not worthy to keep your job.* Belshazzar was just not suited to run the kingdom or be in a position of power.
- *Your kingdom will be divided to the Medes and Persians.* This was previously shown in the chest and arms of silver. Just like Babylon (the hammer to the nations), Medo Persia had its place in prophecy.

Daniels interpretation of the first dream is taking place in real time. As we close the chapter on the head of gold; we need to look ahead to the chest and arms of silver.

In one of the most amazing prophecies of the Bible, the Lord revealed Cyrus's decree to free the Jews to Isaiah. One hundred fifty years before Cyrus lived, the prophet calls him by name and gives details of Cyrus' benevolence to the Jews: "This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him . . . 'I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honor, though you do not acknowledge me'" ([Isaiah 45:1, 4](#); see also 41:2-25; 42:6). Evincing His sovereignty over all nations, God says of Cyrus, "He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please" ([Isaiah 44:28](#)).

Cyrus's decree releasing the Jewish people, in fulfillment of prophecy, is recorded in [2 Chronicles 36:22-23](#): "Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: 'Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, "The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the LORD his God be with him. Let him go up.'" Other Old Testament books that mention Cyrus include Ezra and Daniel.

King Cyrus actively assisted the Jews in rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem under Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest. Cyrus restored the temple treasures to Jerusalem and allowed building expenses to be paid from the royal treasury (Ezra 1:4-11; 6:4-5). Cyrus's beneficence helped to restart the temple worship practices that had languished during the 70 years of the Jews' captivity.

Belshazzar was killed that night; and Darius the Mede stepped into prophetic fulfillment.