

The Great Feast

📖 Daniel 5:1-31

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Daniel 1-4¹ tells the story of Daniel, his three friends and Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. Chapter 1 recounts the story of Daniel and his friends being captured, exiled and trained, which occurred from 605-603BC. Chapter 2 is the four metal statue and stone dream which occurred in 603BC while Daniel was still in training. Chapter 3 reports on Nebuchadnezzar's building of the image on the plain to get loyalty in his kingdom, -probably in 594/593BC. Chapter 4 was probably from around 580-570BC, Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom was solidified and flourishing as signified by the great tree, but he became arrogant and God took his kingdom from him and he went around acting like an animal for seven years. After this he came to faith and humility and God restored his kingdom to him and it flourished even more than before. That story had a good ending. He reigned 43 years and died in 562BC.

After him, if you have Chart 5, you see that a series of much weaker Babylonian kings came to rule. Evil-Merodach ruled from 562-560BC, only two years and he was killed, then Neriglissar from 560-556BC, he was a son-in-law of Nebuchadnezzar who died of natural causes, then Labashi-Marduk came to the throne in 556BC, he was a grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, a young boy of nine years old when he came to the throne, he was conspired against and beaten to death within a few months of taking the throne, then Nabonidus and he is going to rule from 555-539BC and note his son Belshazzar ruling as co-*rex* from 553-539BC. He is the king we see in Daniel 5:1.

To introduce Daniel 5, we need to make several observations. First, Belshazzar was Nebuchadnezzar's grandson. It will seem to say that he is his son, but in many cultures they simply say son of to refer to a descendant. That's why Jesus Christ is referred to as the Son of Abraham, the Son of David. He is a descendant of those men. It doesn't relate to how many generations have passed. Second, the events in this chapter occur in the last regal year of both Nabonidus and Belshazzar. It was a fateful night for the Babylonians in the year 539BC when an enigmatic hand wrote a message on the wall.² It's from this event we get the saying, "the handwriting is on the wall." So Dan 5 is still in sequence, but later chapters will break the sequence and take us back to events prior to this fateful night. For example, Dan 7 was already known to Belshazzar and significantly it deals with the depiction of the four Gentile kingdoms followed by the kingdom of God just like Dan 2. So Belshazzar had both

Daniel 2 and 7 which both depicted the future of world history as four Gentile kingdoms followed by the kingdom of God. And the reason I bring this up is to pose a question. His grandfather Nebuchadnezzar had one of these pictures before him and he distorted it but he eventually learned the lesson after he went around on all fours eating grass for seven years, and he came to faith and ruled with humility. The question with Belshazzar is, did he learn the lesson from his grandfather and come to faith? Did he humbly admit that God rules in the heavens and gives rule to whomever He wishes so that he could enjoy a continuation of his kingdom? Or did he get entrenched in arrogance and go to destruction? Third, by the end of the chapter you get your answer because Belshazzar is no longer the king but a kingdom shift has occurred and Darius the Mede is king. So the Medo-Persian's have come to rule. We switch from the head of gold to the breast and arms of silver. That is what this chapter is about and it shows that great kingdom changes are brought about by the sovereignty of God acting in relation to human responsibility. Fourth, there's a connection between Dan 5 and Dan 4 that we have learned from the chiasm. Remember, the chiasm is a literary structure where the first and last element are parallel and then the second and second to last element are parallel and so forth and so on. 2 and 7 deal with the four Gentile kingdoms followed by the kingdom of God; 3 and 6 characterize the four Gentile kingdoms as a trial that believing Jews will survive and enter into the kingdom of God. 4 and 5 characterize the rule of Gentiles as one tending toward arrogance but how they can enjoy blessing in their kingdom by coming to faith and humility before God or face cursing if they reject Him and entrench in arrogance. The times began with faith, Nebuchadnezzar had faith, and will end with rejection, the anti-Christ will not have faith. Fifth, there are three main players in Dan 5. Daniel you already know, all I want to add about Daniel in this chapter is that since its 539BC he's an old man now; he's in his early 80's and he wasn't in the top echelons of governmental administration anymore. He enjoyed that high rank under Nebuchadnezzar, but it's been almost 25 years and there have been a whole series of kings. So it's unclear if Daniel is even in the government anymore, he's certainly not personally known by the king, but he does live in Babylon and he may be serving in a lower governmental office. The second person I want to introduce you to is the queen or probably more properly, the queen mother. You're going to meet her in verse 10, her name is Nitocris. She is not a wife of Belshazzar because in verse 2 all of Belshazzar's wives were present for the great feast but she doesn't come in until later. So I take it she's the queen mother and wife of Nabonidus. She is of great importance in the kingdom because she just waltzes into the feast like she owns the place and speaks to the king in a very commanding way. She is definitely older than he is from the fact that she is very familiar with what happened during Nebuchadnezzar's reign and she knew Daniel and what he had done for her father in interpreting the dreams and she knew both his Hebrew and Babylonian names. Further I take it from some of the things she says that she is a believer, that she followed in the faith of her father, Nebuchadnezzar, and worshipped the one true God. So the queen mother is Nitocris, she is the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar, a believer and through her Belshazzar received his royal blood and she is the wife of the co-king at the time, Nabonidus. The third person we meet in this chapter is Belshazzar himself and he's the most troubling figure in the Book of Daniel because for a long time there was no extrabiblical evidence of this man even existing and so the liberals used this for many, many decades, to criticize Daniel

because if Daniel is truly prophesying these things from the 6th century BC then their anti-supernaturalist philosophy must be rejected. However, when archaeologists discovered the Nabonidus cylinder Belshazzar's name was on it. That put to rest this criticism of the Book of Daniel.

Now we come to the great feast and the ominous "handwriting on the wall" and how this saying came to signify "imminent doom." We still use this in our own day and it came from God himself who wrote on the plaster walls of the great banquet hall in Babylon. When you hear this saying "the handwriting is on the wall," it's an expression of certainty of the future. You can see the pieces lining up and it's just a matter of time. The handwriting on the wall in Babylon was that the kingdom was coming to an end and a new kingdom was rising, Medo-Persia. And so in accordance with the dream in Dan 2 of the four metal statue, today we see the kingdom of gold come to its end and the beginning of the kingdom of silver. So these are definitely successive kingdoms and that is important for understanding premillennialism, the idea that after the four successive kingdoms have run their course Christ will come and establish His kingdom on earth.

Beginning in verse 1, **Belshazzar the king held a great feast for a thousand of his nobles**, the situation was that Belshazzar lived and ruled from Babylon, his father Nabonidus was co-rex but he lived in the city of Teima and only came to Babylon occasionally for official governmental matters. As of verse 1 it's apparent he was not in the city, however, secular history reports that he had recently come to the city and set out from Babylon with his armies to fight off the Medes and the Persians. Darius the Mede³ and Cyrus the Persian had allied to defeat Babylon. Nabonidus and his armies were routed by Cyrus and he took flight to Borsippa and shut himself up. So Nabonidus is not in the picture anymore and we don't know his spiritual status, but Belshazzar was in the city of Babylon holding a great feast and Darius the Mede and his armies were just outside, surrounding the city.

Now the city of Babylon is reported by Herodotus, probably in exaggerated terms, but to have been a fantastic fortress city, it was double walled with a moat in between, the outer walls he says were 87 feet thick, 350 feet tall and four chariots in breadth, with occasional towers reaching another 100 feet in the air. The Euphrates River flowed into the city through arched gateways as a water source. And with these resources and defenses you get an idea of why Belshazzar was holding **a great feast for a thousand of his nobles** with Darius and his armies right outside. He's arrogant and he's sending a message to Darius that we are untouchable, we are housed within an impenetrable fortress, so secure are we within our fortress city that we're having a drunken party inside. So it's a grand display of a false sense of security arising from arrogance. That's the key characteristic of Gentiles rulers, they always place their trust in their own devices, whether it be a fortress city or their military or their geographical position, they place their trust anywhere but in God, they don't want to trust Him.

Now you notice there in verse 1 he is **drinking wine in the presence of the thousand**. The scene is that the king is in the pre-eminent position. They've discovered in Babylon a large room with a single niche in the wall and it may be the very room, if so the king is seated on an elevated platform in this niche in the wall and the majority of the torches are burning in his presence so he can be seen by the thousand and what's he doing? He's

getting drunk on wine. The Babylonians were given to wine and wine makes a man haughty, it makes a man arrogant, it makes a man overconfident in his abilities.⁴ And Hab 2 reports on the drinking in Babylon and how it made them even more arrogant! Now we will see his arrogance come out.

Verse 2, **When Belshazzar tasted the wine**, meaning it had taken hold of him, not that he taken the first sip but when the wine had gotten a hold of him look what he does. **He gave orders to bring the gold and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar his father⁵ had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them.** Now what are these vessels? Do you remember the story of these vessels? His grandfather **Nebuchadnezzar**, it says **his father**, and it could be, but it can equally be used of a grandfather and that's the way I take it. His grandfather had taken them from the temple in Jerusalem in 605BC along with some of the royal family and nobles, including Daniel and his friends, that was 66 years before this incident. And if you recall that incident Nebuchadnezzar interpreted it as a demonstration that his gods were superior to Israel's God. So he placed those vessels in the house of one of his gods. When he became a believer in Dan 4 I think he removed them and stored them in a safe place to be restored to Jerusalem when the Temple was rebuilt. But here we see his grandson making a request that they be brought to him at this drunken revelry.

Verse 3, **Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God which was in Jerusalem; and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them 4They drank the wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.** So they got drunk and they were toasting to their pagan gods, gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, stone, note the similarities to the earlier statue. So we have a Gentile king making a very strong statement that the gods of Babylon are superior to the God of Israel. He's not just grabbing a few nice glasses for a drink; this is a deliberate attack on the God of Israel. So we see this man is rebellious toward one God in particular, the God of Israel and while you may not see it clearly yet, later in the passage you'll see it very clearly, this man hates the God of the Jews.

You should not be surprised when Gentile kings get arrogant and for some strange reason hate the God of the Jews. Its part and parcel of Satan's program. Satan is the ruler of this world and the prince of the power of the air and he hates God and the Jews more than anybody. The reason he hates the Jews more than anybody is because God made covenants with the Jews and one of those promises involves the seed, the seed that would come and save the world and overturn Satan's program. So Satan is always stirring up pagan Gentile rulers to hate the Jews and the God of the Jews. That's what we have a display of here with the taking of the vessels, a deliberate attack on God.

Now I don't know about you but that's not what I think you'd want to do with Darius and his armies outside the city walls. But that's what he's doing. And the reason he's doing this type of thing is because arrogance always oversteps its bounds. Especially if you are drunk; arrogance gives you a distorted view of reality. Its self-

exaltation is what it is, it's an over evaluation of self and the very fact he's having this great feast and getting drunk with all his top officials and his wives and concubines is because he's got an over-evaluation of himself and his kingdom. So now with the security of his fortress city and the security of his gods and the wine talking he's making this aggressive move against the God of Israel.

And verse 5 notice how God gets to Him and note that anyone is immediately accessible to God. It doesn't take Him much to get to us. **Suddenly the fingers of a man's hand emerged and began writing opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, and the king saw the back of the hand that did the writing.** Now what happened exactly is the fingers of a man's hand emerged, not the hand, the hand of a man wasn't observed, it was just the fingers of a man's hand and the fingers were pressing down into the plaster wall like you would in wet concrete and leaving a message and it was right near the king, where the torches were burning the brightest, so this is out in the open, everyone sees this.

In verse 6 you have about as graphic a picture of terror as you will find anywhere in literature. **Then the king's face grew pale and his thoughts alarmed him, and his hip joints went slack and his knees began knocking together.** This man who was doing a fairly good job standing up can now barely stand. This man who was drunk is suddenly sober. And notice that this man knows exactly who is talking to him. This is interesting because unbelievers often say that God can't speak to us. In other words, God is such a blubbering fool that He can't communicate to His own creatures and certainly not in the Bible. And then you see a scene like this when He does talk to one of His creatures and the creature is drunk and does God have a problem getting through to this man? God has no problem communicating and we have no problem identifying who He is, we just don't like the confrontation.

Here's a man like all Gentile rulers, a man who hasn't given thanks to God for his kingdom, acting as if he built his kingdom, he solidified his kingdom, and he is in control of his kingdom. Baloney. The hand that wrote on the wall is in control of all kingdoms. So in verse 7 the king is screaming for the wise men to come in, literally screaming for them, this was standard operating procedure, it's in all the manuals, these guys have degrees, they can explain what is going on. **The king called aloud to bring in the conjurers, the Chaldeans and the diviners. The king spoke and said to the wise men of Babylon, "Any man who can read this inscription and explain its interpretation to me shall be clothed with purple and have a necklace of gold around his neck, and have authority as third ruler in the kingdom."** He offers this reward and you can see from this he's nowhere near as strong a ruler as his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar dealt in rewards but he also dealt in punishments, I'll have you torn limb from limb! But Belshazzar is much weaker. And notice that the reward is **third ruler in the kingdom**. Why third and not second? Because he and his father Nabonidus were first and second, which is another evidence of a co-rex going on at the time. But the king was much weaker than in the days of Nebuchadnezzar.

So here come the wise men again, the men who supposedly had access to the gods, they're summoned and in verse 8 they couldn't do a thing! What's new? It makes you wonder how these characters could ever hold their professions when time after time they draw blanks. Daniel had spared them in his time but they were still around after he was out of the limelight.

Verse 9, **Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, his face grew even paler, and his nobles were perplexed.** So we have a situation and God is intensifying the situation. One of the worst things to a pagan or to the sinful nature, which we share, is not being able to access information, having a mystery out there that no one can solve, it's an unknown and when that happens chaos starts to reign in the heart. And unless you come back to the One who is in control of the future you will fall into the trap of chance and chance is ultimate and the future is completely up in the air, anything could happen and you become anxious and scared. He's even more scared now and his nobles are **perplexed**. How can this be, our own wise men can't explain this? What has happened to all of Babylon's glory?

But then verse 10, **The queen entered the banquet hall.** Now remember, this is not Belshazzar's wife because all his wives were already in the banquet hall, verse 2, so this must be the queen mother, Nitocris, who was actually his mother and the wife of his father, Nabonidus who had already been routed by Cyrus the Persian. And you can tell she's powerful because she just walks into the room, no problem, and she says, **"O king, live forever!"** Standard public greeting. **Do not let your thoughts alarm you or your face be pale. 11 There is a man in your kingdom in whom is a spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of your father, illumination, insight and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods were found in him.** Now the first thing you can tell is that this lady knows her history, she lived this history and she's filling him in on Daniel or at least reminding him of Daniel because he apparently did know some of this, he had taken a few history courses. **And King Nebuchadnezzar, your father, your father the king, appointed him chief of the magicians, conjurers, Chaldeans and diviners.** She knew all this because her father was Nebuchadnezzar and taught her about the dream in Dan 2, which revealed the outline of future history, he taught her about the incident in Dan 4, the great tree which was cut down signifying the zoanthropic state he went into until he praised the God of heaven. And he introduced her to Daniel who explained all these things.

And she says Daniel did this because verse 12, **an extraordinary spirit, knowledge and insight, interpretation of dreams, explanations of enigmas and solving of difficult problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar.** She's attributing it to **Daniel** even though it was Daniel's God, but notice she's not calling him **Belteshazzar**. She knows the name but by what name is she referring to him? **Daniel**. She says, **Let Daniel now be summoned and he will declare the interpretation.** Now I think that's an indication that this woman was a believer like her father Nebuchadnezzar, otherwise she would have expressed her loyalty to the Babylonian gods by referring to him as **Belteshazzar** and that name means "protector of the king of Belti" and Daniel did at that time protect the king. But she referred to him by His beautiful Hebrew name **Daniel** which

means what? God is judge. Now you have to imagine from Nitocris' background. When she was a little girl she saw her daddy get struck with zoanthropy and go around on all fours eating grass like an animal for seven years. That had to be a very powerful event in this little girl's life. And then God restored his reason and splendor and he was able to explain to her later that he was so arrogant about His kingdom that God had to teach him some theology about kingdoms, God had to shatter his pride and that's why he was absent from her life for seven years and went around on all fours like an animal. But after it all he looked up to heaven and praised the one true God and proclaimed that God is the One who's dominion is an everlasting dominion and God's kingdom is the kingdom that endures from generation to generation and gives kingdoms to whomever he wishes. And I think this little girl got the picture and I think she believed. So what you have is the transmission of truth from one generation to the second generation. This is good. The only question is, what about the third generation? Did the truth transmit to Belshazzar?

One of the things you are having to watch here, one of the terrible things, is this breakdown in the family. There's been a failure to take the truths of God and pass them on to the third generation. It was passed from the first generation to the second, Nebuchadnezzar taught these things to his daughter Nitocris, she received them, then comes Belshazzar and I'm sure she at least taught them to this boy, we don't know the spiritual condition of her husband Nabonidus, but she at least was a believer and taught these things to this boy. But Belshazzar is just as arrogant as he could possibly be. He's taken the vessels out of the house of the one true God and is drinking wine out of them and praising the pagan gods of gold, silver, bronze, wood and stone. This was not wise.

Let's see what happens. Verse 13, and apparently Daniel wasn't over this school of wise men anymore; we don't know what transpired, but the king doesn't seem to know him personally. **Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king spoke and said to Daniel, "Are you that Daniel who is one of the exiles from Judah, whom my father the king brought from Judah?"** He asks the question, the question reveals that he did at least know of Daniel because he asks, are you that Daniel who is one of the exiles from Judah and the queen mother didn't say that in her history lesson. So he did know of Daniel from his history lessons and this means that at least he knew at this point that the very vessels he and his nobles were drinking wine from were from the house of Daniel's God. This man knew exactly what he was doing when he ordered the temple vessels brought to him.

Verse 14, **Now I have heard about you that a spirit of the gods is in you, and that illumination, insight, and extraordinary wisdom have been found in you.** And I'm sure Daniel was saying, yeah, yeah, I've heard all this before, I'm not impressed, and don't be impressed with me, but be impressed with the God who made this known to me, I can't do anything without God. Verse 15, **"Just now the wise men and the conjurers were brought in before me that they might read this inscription and make its interpretation known to me, but they could not declare the interpretation of the message."** Well surprise, surprise, I'm sure Daniel was real surprised. I think, after looking at this for the third time, this failure among the wise men of Babylon; that God is telling us something. Gentiles may have experiences but they do not have it in them to access the meaning of

the experiences. God reveals the meaning verbally through the Jews. You'll note that Jews are always there to interpret. They are mediators of the word of God. Gentiles may have a vague idea but it takes a Jewish prophet to tell all. Anything else you may hear is a sham.

Verse 16, **"But I personally have heard about you, that you are able to give interpretations and solve difficult problems. Now if you are able to read the inscription and make its interpretation known to me, you will be clothed with purple and wear a necklace of gold around your neck, and you will have authority as the third ruler in the kingdom."** So he repeats the reward, he's going to make Daniel third in the kingdom if he can do this, third behind himself and his father Nabonidus, give him a big gold necklace and a purple robe, signifying royalty. Daniel would be royalty. It's statements like these that make me think he was no longer holding a high office in the administration of Babylon at this time, he may have held an office of some lower status, but it was not like it was in the days of King Nebuchadnezzar. Somewhere along the way he'd lost his rank.

Verse 17, **Then Daniel answered and said before the king, "Keep your gifts for yourself or give your rewards to someone else;"** You know I'm an old guy, what does an old guy like me need all this stuff for? He doesn't want it. He's not doing it for the glory. He's not in it for the money or the power. **However, I will read the inscription to the king and make the interpretation known to him."** Now in verse 18 he's going to review his grandfather's kingdom, he's going to give a little history lesson of his own, he's going to trace the course of Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom which was revealed in the dream of the Great Tree; there was some great theology that tree was supposed to teach Nebuchadnezzar and Nebuchadnezzar learned the lesson and taught it to his daughter Nitocris who taught it to Belshazzar. But had Belshazzar learned the lesson? Was the truth transmitted to him with a positive response? **O king, the Most High God granted sovereignty, grandeur, glory and majesty to Nebuchadnezzar your father. ¹⁹"Because of the grandeur which He bestowed on him, all the peoples, nations and men of every language feared and trembled before him; whomever he wished he killed and whomever he wished he spared alive; and whomever he wished he elevated and whomever he wished he humbled.** Nebuchadnezzar was great, this kid was a pip-squeak. **²⁰"But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit became so proud that he behaved arrogantly, he was deposed from his royal throne and his glory was taken away from him. ²¹"He was also driven away from mankind, and his heart was made like that of beasts, and his dwelling place was with the wild donkeys. He was given grass to eat like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until he recognized that the Most High God is ruler over the realm of mankind and that He sets over it whomever He wishes. ²²"Yet you, his son,⁶ Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this,** now that's the clincher, that last phrase, **you knew all this.** Belshazzar had been taught all this, either by his mother or his mother and his grandfather, but he rejected all of it. It didn't matter to him if God had made his grandfather walk around on all fours and eat grass for seven years. His attitude was, "That was my grandfather but I am stronger than my grandfather, that could never happen to me! The God of Israel could never bring me down from my throne!" So he had become colossal

in his own mind and failed to accept the lesson. In just two generations the truth was totally rejected in this family. And further, verse 23, **you have exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines have been drinking wine from them; and you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which do not see, hear or understand.** You know the story. Humans must worship, there is no neutrality, you're either going to worship the God of Creation or you're going to worship some aspect of creation. And if you reject the Creator you turn to worship the creation, but everybody worships, atheists worship, agnostics worship, everybody worships because you must give an account for all that is and that requires appealing to something that has explanatory power, and whatever that is, that is your god. And Belshazzar's god is the materials of the universe, that is what he is worshipping, things that neither see, nor hear nor understand. **But the God in whose hand are your life-breath and all your ways, you have not glorified.** He did not worship the Creator, he worshipped the creature. There are no other options. It's one of the other and Belshazzar had made his choice.

Verse 24, **Then the hand was sent from Him and this inscription was written out. 25 Now this is the inscription that was written out: 'MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.'**⁷ The word **MENE** means 'number'. **TEKEL** means 'weighed' or 'evaluated.' **UPHARSIN** means divided.⁸ Just the three words; numbered, weighed, divided. And then Daniel gives the interpretation, verse 26, **This is the interpretation of the message: 'MENE'—God has numbered your kingdom and put an end to it. 27 'TEKEL'—you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient. 28 'PERES'—your kingdom has been divided and given over to the Medes and Persians.** So the kingdom would be removed from him. And when Daniel gives the interpretation he changed it from UPHARSIN to **PERES**, which is a change in form of the same word, so that PERES looks at it as having already been accomplished. The picture is that while this was going on in the banquet hall Darius and his armies were already in the city on their way to the banquet hall.

Greek history records that Darius and his armies diverted the Euphrates River where the river ran under arches in the walls to deliver water to the city of Babylon. With the waterways dried up he and his soldiers could march into the city unnoticed. The Nabonidus Chronicle states that they entered "Babylon without a battle." They proceeded immediately to the banquet halls where they found the Babylonians feasting in a drunken revelry. On that night, as verse 30 tells us, **Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain.** So as Daniel made this interpretation the soldiers were already passing under the arch, through the dried waterway and on their way to the royal banquet hall. The days of his kingdom had been numbered, Belshazzar had been weighed and found wanting, the kingdom was divided.

In verse 31, **Darius the Mede received the kingdom.** Darius had an alliance with Cyrus the Persian to overthrow Babylon, and in this overthrow the political power that had been in Babylon passed to the Medes and the Persians with the power eventually coming to rest in the Persians. We'll have a little more of that when we get

into chapter 7. But this records the downfall of the Babylonian kingdom. And why did it fall? Because of arrogance. Belshazzar knew but rejected the theology lesson that God had given to his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar, that God rules in the heavens and He gives kingdoms to whomever he wishes and He only prospers those kingdoms who humble themselves before Him. And when a kingdom gets entrenched in arrogance God's plan moves forward in the sense that the king or kingdom change takes place. And here a kingdom-change takes place from Babylon, the head of gold, to Medo-Persia, the breast and arms of silver. This is a first-hand example of how kingdom-changes in the plan of God work out in history through military conquest.

Alright, what lessons can we learn from this passage? First, that God rules kings and all in governmental offices. He raises them and lowers them, He raised Belshazzar and he lowered him. He replaced him with Darius. He exalted Daniel to third highest in the kingdom, but actually he was first because both Nabonidus and Belshazzar were killed. God does this over and over in Gentile kingdoms. He raises and lowers who He wants to through genuine human decisions. Second, that God rules kingdoms. He raises kingdoms and lowers kingdoms. He raised Babylon, He lowered Babylon. He replaced it with the Medes and the Persians. He's done it before; He'll do it again. The times of the Gentiles is a set piece in the prophetic plan of God; there are four Gentile kingdoms that must run their course, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome, which in time turned out to be in two phases. And the way God works it out is through the responsible choices of the kings and rulers within His plan. Third, that arrogance will characterize Gentile kings. Nebuchadnezzar was arrogant and he learned the lesson, came to faith and enjoyed prosperity in his kingdom. Belshazzar was taught the lesson but he rejected it, he exalted himself and his kingdom went to destruction. You can multiply this picture in every ruler, one way or the other and the consequences that come from the way they go. Fourth, that because of the chiasmic structure and what these six chapters are teaching in the big picture the times of the Gentiles began with a man who is the epitome of faith, Nebuchadnezzar, but will end with a man who is the epitome of arrogance, the anti-Christ. He will exalt himself above every so-called god or object of worship and take his seat in the future Temple of God displaying himself as being God and then God will do to him and his kingdom what He did to Belshazzar and his kingdom, He will slay him and take the world's kingdoms as His own and establish His own kingdom. It will be done very easily just as Darius the Mede did it very easily the night they took Babylon without a fight. Finally, I think there is hope for the nation Israel here in that Daniel survived this change in kingdoms and became a part of the Medo-Persian administration. In other words, God preserved Daniel and I think that shows that God will preserve the nation Israel through the times of the Gentiles and one day the believing remnant in the nation will be equal to the entire nation of Israel, and they will enter into the great stone kingdom. God is a covenant making and covenant keeping God. Alright, next time Daniel and the Lion's den and that will bring us back to fiery trials, so it will correspond to chapter 3.

¹ Dan 4 was Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the Great Tree. Nebuchadnezzar, as he was lying on his bed had a dream of a Great Tree and this alarmed him because he sensed that what he saw and heard had to do with him and his kingdom, something dreadful was going to happen. What he saw was a tree growing up, growing larger and larger; lifting up into the sky and its branches reaching out to what was then the inhabited earth. The tree produced an abundance of fruit and the fruit fed the beasts that were under it and the birds that dwelt in it. So it was a source that supplied the needs of all who were associated with the tree. Then an angelic being came and chopped down the tree, but the tree didn't fall as a unit, it wasn't just one cut, it was a series of cuts that removed the branches from the main trunk. So the birds that were in the branches flew away; the beasts that were under its shade ran away because there was a disruption of the tree's ability to provide their needs. And all that was left was a stump in the ground and the angel came and put a band of bronze around it signifying the tree would be preserved. In the meantime, the mind of the tree would be changed from that of a man into that of a beast and would roam around eating grass and sleeping outside for seven periods of time. This is what alarmed Nebuchadnezzar; the idea that the tree had the mind of a man but was given the mind of a beast and the kingdom went into disarray. I think Nebuchadnezzar had a fairly good idea what the dream signified. Daniel confirmed that he was the tree and explained that his kingdom grew great like a tree, he conquered many peoples and brought them under his dominion and he was providing all the needs of these peoples but suddenly his ability to lead his kingdom was disrupted because he would be subjected to a frightening condition known as zoanthropy, where a person thinks they are an animal and they go around acting like an animal, eating grass and walking around on all fours. During that time the peoples that he had conquered would break out in civil war to try to regain their freedom. Daniel didn't like that this was scheduled to happen to the king but he was a very arrogant man and one day he was walking around saying, look at the great kingdom I have built and look at my majesty and just as pride cometh before a fall so this man was instantly subjected to this condition. It was designed to teach him theology, the theology that God is the ruler over mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes, that human beings do not build their kingdoms by their own power, might and majesty, but they are given to them by God. For seven years Nebuchadnezzar was taught this theology lesson; he went around on all fours, eating grass, his hair grew out like eagle's feathers, his nails like bird claws until the completion of the time, at which point he raised his eyes toward heaven and his reason returned to him, and I take it this man was believed and his splendor was restored to him, his nobles started seeking him out again and his kingdom flourished even more than before. So by the end of Dan 4 Nebuchadnezzar had learned the theology, his pride was crushed, he had faith and he humbled himself, recognizing that God's dominion is an everlasting dominion and God's kingdom endures from generation to generation.

² Harold Hoehner dates this event to Saturday, October 12, 539BC. Andy Woods, *Introduction to Daniel*, fn 53, p 28.

³ Darius the Mede is said to be unknown from secular history and therefore a historical mistake by Daniel who confused him with Darius son of Hystaspes. The identification of Darius the Mede will be given some attention in the next chapter.

⁴ See Hab 2:4-20 that deals with both the near and far defeat of Babylon, with particular mention of arrogance as evidence of a soul not right with God, wine and its revealing of arrogance and the false trust of those in Babylon upon idols carved out of gold, silver, wood, et. al.

⁵ The word "father" has been shown by Robert Dick Wilson to have been used seven ways in the time of Nebuchadnezzar (cf Wood, 133) so the relationships assumed by this author are not in any way inconceivable.

⁶ The word "son" has been shown by Robert Dick Wilson to have been used twelve ways in the time of Nebuchadnezzar (cf Wood, 133) so the relationships assumed by this author are not in any way inconceivable.

⁷ The words in the biblical text are in Aramaic, a language that was known to the Chaldeans. I suspect that the words were in a language other than Aramaic and Daniel is here translating them. They could not be known by natural means, they had to be revealed to Daniel by supernatural means.

⁸ These are all monetary denominations; MENE = 50 shekels, TEKEL = 1 shekel, UPHARSIN = ½ shekel