
BIBLE STUDIES

“Men From The Past
With A
Message For The Present”

The study of Bible Biographies is one of the many ways to study the Bible. Surprising to some is the fact that the study of ancient lives can teach us how to live in modern times.

There are both positive and negative principles that we can learn from the over 2,500 named persons that God included in the Bible. And, you can meet yourself somewhere in one or more of them!

In the studies which follow in this series we will include the good, the bad and the ugly. So, let's get started! The first fellow that we will look at is:

BELSHAZZAR: THE WEIGH-IN OF A LIGHT WEIGHT KING

Daniel 5

BELSHAZZAR: THE WEIGH-IN OF A LIGHT WEIGHT KING Daniel 5

The setting for this story is in the country of Iraq. The exact location is the city of Babylon situated 55 miles south of the city of Bagdad. It was the site of the ancient Tower of Babel. The main characters are five: God; a king with a long, hard to pronounce name called Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; another king, Belshazzar, Darius the Mede and a young Israelite named Daniel. There are others, but for the purpose of this story we will focus on these five.

This how it all began: King Neb invaded Jerusalem, confiscated all the gold in the temple and took some of the young Israelite men back to Babylon, including Daniel. God blessed Daniel with wisdom to interpret dreams and he found favor with the king, was inducted into his service and elevated to a high position in the king's cabinet.

Neb changed Daniel's name to "Belteshazzar" (Dan.4:8,9). It means "*protect his life.*" After Neb died his son Belshazzar became king. So here we have two very similar names: Belteshazzar, Daniel's new name and Belshazzar the new king. This is where the plot thickens - this is where the story of the "Light Weight King" begins.

There is nothing on T.V. that can equal this story for drama and suspense and this story is fact not fiction! All through Belshazzar's reign there had been a war between Babylon and the Medes and Persians. At the outset Darius the Median and Cyrus the Persian were attacking the city of Babylon with great hordes. This ancient and mighty city of Babylon was the only one that had held out against the army. For two years he besieged the city but because of the strength of the walls of Babylon and the fortifications atop the walls he had not gained entrance. But he continued his assault.

Meanwhile, inside the walls of the city business went on as usual because the citizens considered their fortress to be impregnable. Belshazzar felt indomitable and secure in his great fortress. Let us learn more about Belshazzar and the city in which he lived as he ruled the Babylonian Empire. Let us look at: The Greatness He Attained; The God He Angered and the Grave That Awaited Him.

THE GREATNESS HE ATTAINED

Belshazzar's power extended over what we call the Fertile Crescent or Mesopotamia, at the head of the Persian Gulf – present day Iraq and Kuwait.

Where Belshazzar Lived.

Babylon was the capital of the empire and its name means, in Semitic, "the gate of god." Founded by Nimrod (Gen.10:9,10), it was the most magnificent and luxurious city in the ancient world. The city was a great square each side 14 miles long and was surrounded by a wall 87 feet thick and 350 feet high. On the walls were 250 watchtowers. It was surrounded by a moat supplied with water from the Euphrates River. The population was over one-million.

The city straddled the Euphrates River and had 100 brass gates, 25 in each of its four walls.

It was one of the wonders of the ancient world. It had fallen into ruin by the time Nebuchadnezzar came to power and he rebuilt it into the greatest and most beautiful city in the world. He said, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built?" (Daniel 4:30) He had made the city one of the wonders of the world. It was here that Belshazzar had his throne.

(Interesting updated facts: In 1983, Saddam Hussein started rebuilding the city on top of the old ruins. He inscribed his name on many of the bricks in imitation of Nebuchadnezzar who had inscribed his name on the bricks when he rebuilt the city. One frequent inscription reads: "This was built by Saddam Hussein, son of Nebuchadnezzar, to glorify Iraq". These bricks became sought after as collectors' items after the downfall of Hussein. He also installed a huge portrait of himself and Nebuchadnezzar at the entrance to the ruins. When the Gulf War ended, Saddam began to build a modern palace on a hill and named it Saddam Hill. As of May 2009, the provincial government of Babil reopened the site to tourism.)

How Belshazzar Lived.

To say that he lived an opulent or affluent or luxurious lifestyle would be an understatement. He lived in the midst of such splendor and plush lavishness that even in our materialistic, modern, sensuous day, it would be difficult to surpass the furnishings and fineries of the Babylonian Palace. Gold was as common to him as aluminum is to us. Everything and anyone he desired was available to him at his beckon call and he wanted everything!

He had gained everything that a sinful heart could desire – power, prestige, fame, fortune and fleshly satisfactions. He had gained everything that earth had to offer and nothing that heaven had to offer. But, *"What profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"* (Matt. 16:26) There is no one so rich as the one who is rich toward God and there is no one so poor as the one who is poor toward God. Belshazzar had bounty on earth but was bankrupt in heaven!

THE GOD HE ANGERED.

As the story unfolds in Daniel chapter five, King Belshazzar is having quite a feast in his palace: *"Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in the presence of the thousand."* (Daniel 5:1)

Heathen Revelry.

This feast soon became a drunken orgy. The sound of revelry filled the royal palace. Hundreds of lamps filled with perfumed oil hung from the palace ceiling on chains of gold to light the scene. Lounging on the comfortable couches were the beauties of Babylon. The laughter was loud, the scents scintillating, the obscenity exceeded only by the blasphemy!

The king, the most inebriated of all, at the height of the party, ordered that the sacred vessels that had been plundered from the temple in Jerusalem by his father, be brought to the banqueting room. They were then filled with wine and raised to toast the *"the gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know."* (Daniel 5:23)

Belshazzar's philosophy was "eat, drink and be merry." He was like the rich man who bragged saying, *"And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.'"* But God said to him, *'Fool! This night your*

soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ “So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” (Luke 12:19-21)

Heaven’s Response.

Unknown to Belshazzar, the party was over - this was his last party – turn out the lights! What happened next filled him with fear for, *“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. 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.” (Dan.5:5,6)*

Who’s laughing now? His lips quiver, knees knock, eyes bulge as he watched a disembodied, ghostly hand slowly writing upon the plastered wall. What was written and what the king read stunned him and silenced the awestricken crowd, ending the laughter, sobering the drunken revelers and ending the party. What message could be so devastating? What could threaten so powerful a king turning his legs into jelly!

The Word From God.

God always has the last word. He gave this message to Daniel to deliver: *“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.” (Dan.5:23)*

The Writing On The Wall.

“This is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. (That’s Chaldee language) This is the interpretation of each word. MENE: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it; TEKEK: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; PERES: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.” (Daniel 5:25-28) Darius the Mede took over the kingdom (Daniel 5:30) although Cyrus, the nephew of Darius, was leader of the assault, yet all was done in the name of Darius his uncle.

Weighed and wanting! This king carried much weight with man but he was underweight with God. He did not measure up to God’s standards. He had *“sinned and come short of the glory of God.” (Rom 3:23)* I am reminded of what Hannah said in her prayer of praise to God. She said, *“Talk no more so very proudly; Let no arrogance come from your mouth, for the LORD is the God of knowledge; and by Him actions are weighed.” (I Samuel 2:3)* How will you do at the final weigh-in?

THE GRAVE THAT AWAITED.

The scene shifts from the palace to the pool above the city. Yes, a containment pool. You see, Nebuchadnezzar had constructed a catchment basin up the Euphrates River above the city of Babylon to collect water during flood-stage and thereby protect the city. This holding area was huge. It was 52 miles square and 55 feet deep. There was a dam between the river and the lake and at flood time, it was to be breached so that river water would flow into the dry reservoir and not rise up into the city, through which the river flowed.

The Warriors Outside.

Cyrus with his forces, had been digging through the dam between the river and the lake day and night. Finally, they succeeded in diverting the river into the lake. His soldiers were able to march along the Euphrates riverbed into the city of Babylon and capture it.

The Wailing Inside.

Now, as Paul Harvey would say, "The rest of the story": "*That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain.*" Daniel 5:30) End of life for Belshazzar! How are the mighty fallen! What lessons for all, especially for those not prepared to meet God. The writer of Hebrews warned his readers: "*It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*" (10:31).

Lord Byron wrote a poem that sums up the story titled:

The Feast of Belshazzar

"The king was on his throne,
The Satraps thronged the hall;
A thousand bright lights shone
O'er that high festival.
A thousand cups of gold,
In Judah deemed divine--
Jehovah's vessels hold
The godless Heathen's wine.

In that same hour and hall,
The fingers of a hand
Came forth against the wall,
And wrote as if on sand:
The fingers of a man;--
A solitary hand
Along the letters ran,
And traced them like a wand.

That night he was slain on the throne,
He died unnoticed, the hand unknown;
Crownless and sceptreless, he lay,
A robe of purple round a form of clay."

"It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment." (Hebrews 9:27)

How will you do at your "weigh-in"?

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