

The Writing's on the Wall at Belshazzar's Feast



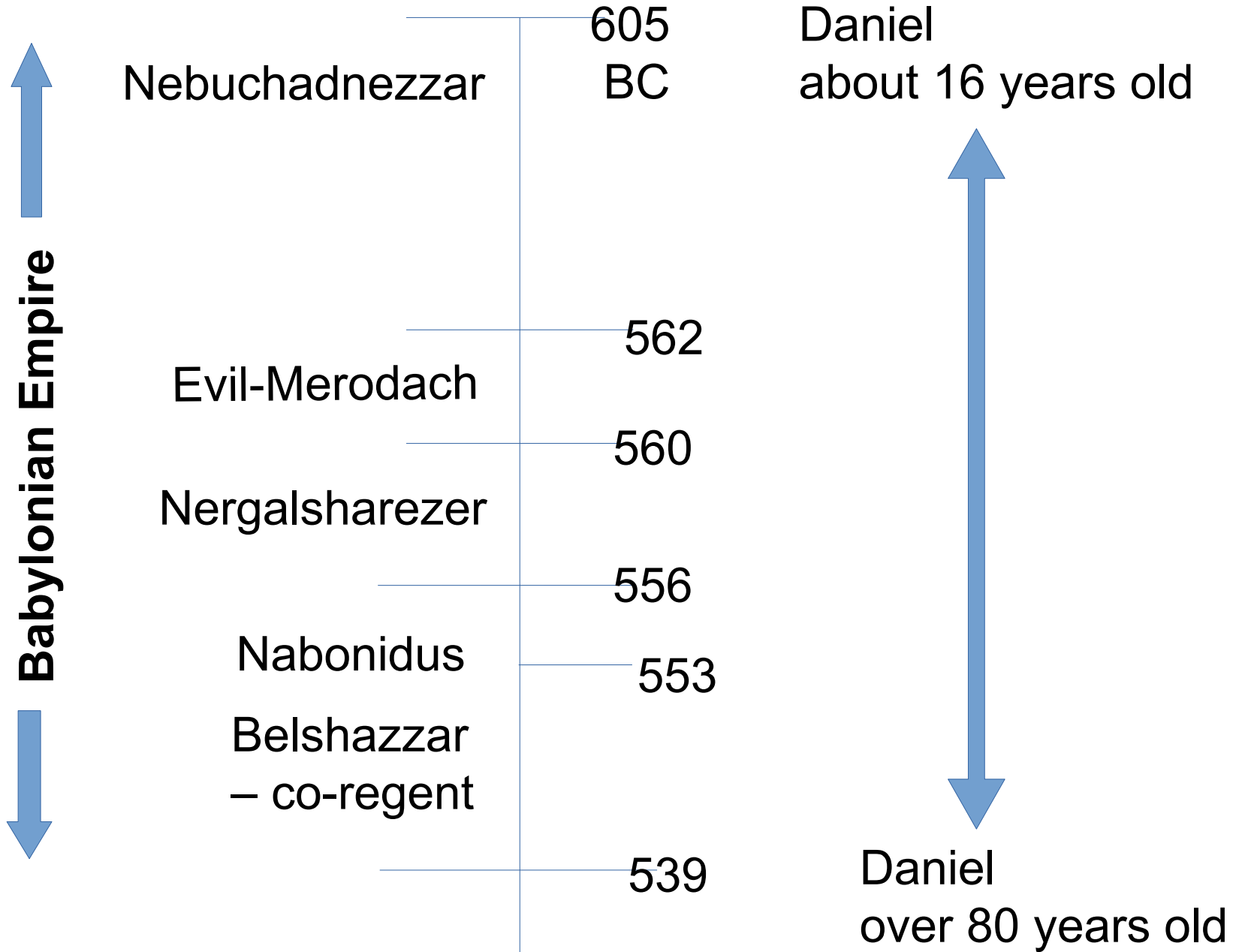
Daniel Chapter 5

The Background History

The ancient historian Berosus gives us the following order of events:

- Nebuchadnezzar died after a 43-year reign.
- His son, Evil-Merodach ruled for only two years. He was assassinated by his brother-in-law Neriglassar,
- Neriglassar ruled for four years until he died a natural death.
- His son, Laborosoarchod, only a child, ruled for only nine months when he was murdered by a gang of conspirators.
- The conspirators appointed Nabonidus to be king. He ruled until Cyrus the Persian conquered Babylon.
- Nabonidus's son Belshazzar ruled as co-regent during his father's absence.

The Background History





During the last part of his reign Nabonidus lived in Arabia and left the running of the Kingdom of Babylon to his eldest son Belshazzar.

King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them.



The folly of false security and presumption

At this time, Cyrus, the King of Persia had laid siege to Babylon. However, a system of inner and outer walls and moats made the city very secure. Cyrus diverted the river!

While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem,



The vessels had been safely stored in Babylon as trophies of the victory over Jerusalem.

Nebuchadnezzar was called Belshazzar's father in the sense that he had previously occupied the throne Belshazzar now sat on. He, his predecessor

While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them.



This was an insult and a blasphemous act. It was part of Belshazzar's bravado and perhaps he thought it would encourage the people to withstand the siege, by way of a reminder of Nebuchadnezzar's victories.

So they brought in the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them.



The text reminds us where the vessels had come from.

They didn't think it mattered.

As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.



This is idolatry. The God of Israel is not to be compared with these man-made things.

Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace.



The hand appeared in a very visible place in the room so that it could be clearly seen.

The text was permanently burned into the plaster.

“The writing’s on the wall”

The king watched the hand as it wrote. His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way.



The party's over

He is terrified.

God can change things in an instant.

He was unable to stand up.

He has got Belshazzar's attention.

The king called out for the enchanters, astrologers and diviners to be brought and said to these wise men of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing and tells me what it means will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around his neck, and he will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom."



There would be rich rewards for the one who could explain what the writing meant.

- 1, clothed in expensive purple
- 2, a prestigious gold chain
- 3, promotion – the top job next to him.

Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or tell the king what it meant.



Was it written in some strange script that they couldn't read?
Or did it simply baffle them?

Whatever it was, they couldn't help the king.

So King Belshazzar became even more terrified and his face grew more pale. His nobles were baffled.



Their inability only deepened the mystery and terrified him even more.

The queen, hearing the voices of the king and his nobles, came into the banquet hall.



Since his wives were already present in the hall, this must have been the queen mother. She heard the commotion and came to see what it was all about.

God was going to provide and interpreter through her.

"O king, live forever!" she said. "Don't be alarmed! Don't look so pale! There is a man in your kingdom who has the spirit of the holy gods in him."



She remembered Daniel, but uses pagan terminology to describe his gift.

She may have been one of Nebuchadnezzar's daughters

In the time of your father he was found to have insight and intelligence and wisdom like that of the gods.

He used to have great gifts.
She too had been impressed.



King Nebuchadnezzar your father--your father the king,
I say--appointed him chief of the magicians, enchanters,
astrologers and diviners.

Some 40 years before he had been appointed chief.



This man Daniel, whom the king called Belteshazzar, was found to have a keen mind and knowledge and understanding, and also the ability to interpret dreams, explain riddles and solve difficult problems.

She reminded the king of Daniel's Babylonian name although she speaks of him by his Hebrew name.

She knew his abilities were outstanding.

He is the man you need now!



Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means."

"Take my advice, he will do it – she is confident.
He will, (not 'might be able') to tell you what it means.



So Daniel was brought before the king, and the king said to him, "Are you Daniel, one of the exiles my father the king brought from Judah? I have heard that the spirit of the gods is in you and that you have insight, intelligence and outstanding wisdom.



Are you the man my 'father' spoke about?

The wise men and enchanters were brought before me to read this writing and tell me what it means, but they could not explain it. Now I have heard that you are able to give interpretations and to solve difficult problems.

Here is a challenge for you.

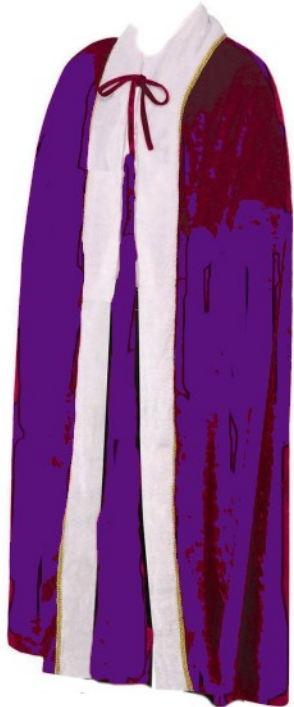
The best of my people couldn't do it. Can you?



If you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around your neck, and you will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom.

The rich rewards still stand

Money is the answer for everything to some people.



Then Daniel answered the king, "You may keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else."



You can keep the rewards!
Phrased nicely but firmly.
Besides Daniel knows they
won't last out the day
And a man over 80 years old
hasn't much use for them.

Nevertheless,
I will read the writing for the king and tell him what it means.



He really needed to know what this message meant, and Daniel was going to tell him.

"O king, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendour. Because of the high position he gave him, all the peoples and nations and men of every language dreaded and feared him. Those the king wanted to put to death, he put to death; those he wanted to spare, he spared; those he wanted to promote, he promoted; and those he wanted to humble, he humbled.

But first, an introductory history lesson that God taught Nebuchadnezzar

The King really was top of the pile then.



But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory. He was driven away from people and given the mind of an animal; he lived with the wild donkeys and ate grass like cattle; and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and sets over them anyone he wishes.

But the most high God taught him a very important lesson – He is in charge – and some respect would be in order.

Historical introduction is now over ...



"But you his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this. Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven.



Accusation Number 1
Belshazzar already was aware of this but hadn't take it to heart. Rather he had arrogantly mocked God.

You had the goblets from his temple brought to you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines drank wine from them. You praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honour the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways.



Accusation Number 2

You deliberately used the sacred vessels for one of your 'parties'

Accusation Number 3

You worshipped idols rather than God.

How did Daniel know all this?

Therefore he sent the hand that wrote the inscription. "This is the inscription that was written.. MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPARSIN "



The Aramaic words are numbers (or weights)

60, 60 , 1 , 1/2

Or taking the words as verbs

Numbered, numbered

Weighed

Divided

What does that mean?

This is what these words mean..

<**Mene**>.. God has numbered the days of your reign
and brought it to an end.

<**Tekel**>.. You have been weighed on the scales
and found wanting.

<**Peres**>.. Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes
and Persians."



Two 'mene's may suggest it is
fixed and about to happen.
cf. Pharaoh's double dream.

It's a 'gospel' message and a
prophecy

(REPENT??)

Then at Belshazzar's command, Daniel was clothed in purple, a gold chain was placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom.



This was completely the wrong response.

That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, at the age of sixty-two.



He didn't listen – and so the prophecy was fulfilled.

The Medo-Persian Empire consisted of an alliance of the Medes and Persians under King Cyrus.



Nothing else is known about this Darius.

The Nabonidus chronicle says that Cyrus's general, Gubaru captured Babylon.

Cyrus may have made him king of the captured city. Darius may be the title he was given.

At the age of 62, he was getting old and it appears that he died a couple of years later.

King Nebuchadnezzar



King Belshazzar

The two accounts of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar set before us the choice between obedience and life or rejection and death.

Deuteronomy 30:19

This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live