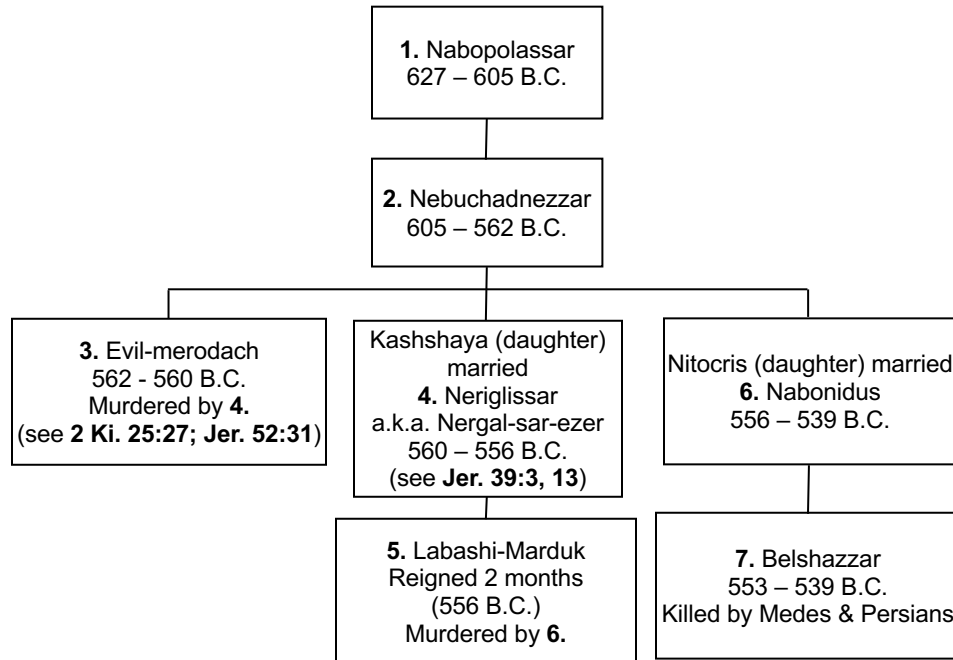


When God Gives You the Finger Daniel 5

- I. **The Foolish Feast** (vv. 1 – 4) III. **The Foreboding Forecast** (vv. 13 – 28)
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Kings of the Neo-Babylonian Empire



I. **The Foolish Feast** (vv. 1 – 4)

Greek historians tell us the Babylonians were famous for their lavish feasts. And this was certainly one of them. Everyone was dressed to the nines. The banquet hall was beautifully decorated. The tables were set with the finest place settings. The food, the “wine,” the music, and the entertainment would have ranked up there with a White House state dinner. But as the evening wore on and the “wine” began to take effect, it would turn into a very depraved, immoral, and self-indulgent “feast.”

This was also a very **Foolish Feast** – for a couple of reasons. ***First***, as Belshazzar and “his lords” partied the night away, the armies of the Medes and Persians were camped outside the city walls. However, Belshazzar was unconcerned. He believed the city was well protected and well supplied. Therefore, “Belshazzar” was overly self-confident and indifferent to the danger lurking all around (**Luke 12:19**).

The ***second*** reason this was a **Foolish Feast** can be found in **verses 2 – 4**. Belshazzar defiantly mocked the God of Israel.

The word “tasted” (*tě’ēm*) refers to far more than sensing the flavor. It refers to feeling its effects and being under its influence. Therefore, it seems the alcohol served to inflame his arrogance and pride.

These “vessels of gold and silver that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple in Jerusalem” almost 50 years earlier, had been in storage, a trophy of war. Yet, even Nebuchadnezzar, as prideful as he was, never committed an atrocity like this.

Belshazzar orders “the vessels,” once consecrated to the God of Israel, to be brought to a drunken orgy where they will be used in the worship and praise of their false “gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.” Therefore, he treats God with contempt. He blasphemes God (**Gal. 6:7; 1 Thess. 5:2 – 3**).

II. The Frightening Fingers (vv. 5 – 12)

God has a way of sobering people up very quickly. Daniel says, “immediately.” “Immediately,” all the revelry came to an abrupt halt. God’s patience had run out with Belshazzar. Without warning, “the fingers of a” disembodied “hand” appears and writes a message. “The king” saw it and his face turned as white as a ghost. In Aramaic, it literally says the “knots of his joints were loosened,” which is a symptom of extreme panic. In other words, he lost it.

In **verses 7 – 9**, we see that in a time of crisis, “the king” turned to his faith. He **screams** for his priests and prophets to be brought in to interpret the message. He offers them the highest honor he could bestow. The person who interpreted the dream would be promoted to “be the third ruler in the kingdom” after himself and his father, Nabonidus. But “the king’s wise men” failed miserably. This meant that despite the vast resources available to him in this world – wealth, power, authority, and human wisdom – they were all helpless to solve this problem.

The identity of the “queen” in **verse 10** is unknown. She is not the wife of Belshazzar because “his wives” are at the banquet. Therefore, she is likely either Belshazzar’s mother or grandmother.

At the end of **verse 10** she says, “O king” get a grip! She then tells Belshazzar of “a man” who had made quite an impression upon her over the years. Daniel, to her, was different than anyone else she had ever met. He was a man of great faith who brought “light and understanding and wisdom” to the Babylonian kingdom. Daniel possessed “an excellent spirit, knowledge, and understanding to interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve problems.” She is so confident in Daniel that she says, “Now let Daniel be called, and he **will** show the interpretation.”

This is one more reminder that the world is always watching us. They look at how we carry ourselves. They look at the decisions and choices we make. Therefore, when they speak of us, may we have lived in such a way that they notice a difference in our lives that only God can make (**1 Peter 2:12; Titus 2:7 – 8**).

Daniel seems to be unknown to Belshazzar. In his eighties by now, and 23 years removed from Nebuchadnezzar’s death, perhaps Daniel had retired or was relegated to a minor role in Belshazzar’s government. Nevertheless, the table has been set for Daniel’s grand entrance onto the scene.

III. The Foreboding Forecast (vv. 13 – 28)

The king summons Daniel. In an ironic twist, Daniel happens to serve the God who Belshazzar has mocked and ridiculed.

In **verses 17 – 21**, Daniel reminds Belshazzar of what he already “knew.” He reminded Belshazzar of Nebuchadnezzar’s power, “greatness and glory and majesty.” Daniel also reminded Belshazzar that “**God gave** Nebuchadnezzar” all of that. But when Nebuchadnezzar’s “heart was lifted up” in pride, God literally put him out to pasture!

Then in **verse 22**, Daniel almost sarcastically says, ²²“And you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, **though you knew all this**,”

When he was a boy, Belshazzar had likely seen the Nebuchadnezzar exhibit at the Babylonian Zoo. Surely as a young man he had read the public decree (or testimony, if you will) of his grandfather after Nebuchadnezzar got out of the zoo.

Now mark this. Belshazzar was nowhere near the man or the king that Nebuchadnezzar was. Nebuchadnezzar was the head of gold. He was far greater than Belshazzar and yet God humbled him. And now, Belshazzar mocks and insults the God of Israel? Don't you remember what God did to your grandfather?

Belshazzar knew all these things, but never took them to heart. This makes his guilt all the greater. Therefore, having the right knowledge doesn't guarantee a proper response. Belshazzar knew and it didn't matter.

Paul tells us we are all born with a knowledge of God. The law is written in our hearts and our conscience bears witness of God (**Rom. 2:15**). God's invisible attributes have been put on display in creation. Therefore, we are all without excuse (**Rom. 1:20**). And yet, because of our sin, we suppress the truth. Claiming to be wise, we become fools. We exchange the truth about God for a lie. We lift ourselves up “against the Lord of heaven” and wind up with the insanely crazy mess the world is in right now (**Rom. 1:18 – 32**). And Jesus and His gospel are our only hope.

God's message is revealed in **verses 25 – 28**. “MENE” is mina. Jesus told *The Parable of the Ten Minas*. “TEKEL” is Aramaic for shekel, which is 1/60 of a mina. “PARSIN” is equal to a half shekel.

However, Daniel interpreted them as verbs. Therefore, “MENE” means ‘numbered,’ and is repeated for emphasis. Belshazzar's time was up. His evil rule and life were over. “TEKEL” means ‘weighed.’ God's word and His law were placed on one side of the scale and Belshazzar's righteousness on the other, and the king came up short. “PARSIN” not only means ‘divided,’ but is also a form of the word Persia. This didn't mean the Babylonian kingdom would be cut in half but that it would be cut to pieces & destroyed.

IV. The Fatal Finish (vv. 29 – 31)

In **verse 29**, true to his word, Belshazzar gave Daniel the gifts he had promised.

Little did Belshazzar know that while he partied the night away, about 10 miles north of the city Cyrus had thousands of men working feverishly to dig a canal from the Euphrates River to a nearby lake.

“That very night,” on October 12, 539 B.C., the river was finally diverted, and the flow of water through the city receded, low enough for some of Cyrus' men to walk across the now shallow riverbed and enter the city from underneath the wall. They killed the guards, threw open one of the gates, and Cyrus' army descended upon Babylon and captured it.

As some point “that...night” “Belshazzar...was killed” and the **head of gold** passed off the scene. It was now time for the **arms and chest of silver** to rule in its place.

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

“Darius” is also known as Gubaru. He was a general in Cyrus' army whom Cyrus made ruler of the Babylonian province.