

THE HANDWRITING IS ON THE WALL (DANIEL 5)

SETTING UP CHAPTER 5. Nebuchadnezzar's rule ended in 562 BC. After him, Amel-Marduk (562-560 BC), Labashi-Marduk (560-556 BC), Neriglissar (556 BC), and Nabonidus (556-539 BC) ruled until Babylon's fall in 539 BC. In the past, Belshazzar appeared to be a historical mistake in the Bible. However, in the 1940s, cuneiform tablets mentioning "Bel-shar-usur" were discovered which likely correspond to our Belshazzar. He was the son of Nabonidus. After Nabonidus took the throne, he eventually moved his palace to an oasis in Tayma (modern day Saudi Arabia) while leaving his son, Bel-shar-usur (Belshazzar), to reign in Babylon as his coregent.⁸

By the time Daniel 5 opens, it is likely that Nabonidus was fighting Cyrus, king of Persia, or had already fallen in battle to him in Opis (roughly 50 miles north of Babylon). The Medes and the Persians had already conquered everything else in the empire — Babylon was the last city standing. A massive army like Cyrus' was not moved quietly. If Babylon fell that very night, there is almost no doubt that Belshazzar knew the Medes and the Persians were outside his gates. Belshazzar and the rest of the city were likely very aware of their bad situation — and yet, the king throws a drunken party for his thousand nobles, his wives, and his concubines.

BIG PICTURE. *What is/are the central message(s) God intends to communicate through this chapter? Explain the significance of what you see and how this must impact thinking and living then and today.*

GOLDEN NUGGETS. *What else stands out to you as instructive or significant? Explain.*

WHOLE BIBLE CONNECTIONS. *Consider this text alongside the prophecy against Jerusalem in Isaiah 22:8-14, Paul's encouragement in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, and any other related text that come to mind — how does this expand and/or drive home what we have already seen in Daniel 5?*

⁸ My information comes from Longman III, *How to Read Daniel*, 23-24.