

# You Have Been Measured

Long Beach Alliance Church • July 26, 2015 • Pastor Chris Lankford

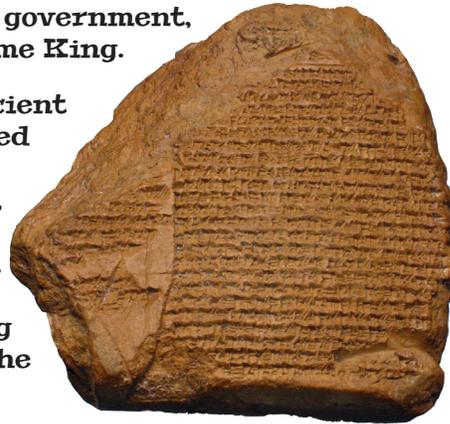
And this is the writing that  
was inscribed: MENE, MENE,  
TEKEL, and PARSIN.

מֵנָּה מֵנָּה תְּקֵל פֶּרְסִין

~Daniel 5:25 (ESV)

## 1) King Belshazzar Ascends To The Throne

- A) Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar died in 562BC, and was followed by his son, King Evilmerodach, and a couple of military officers, all of whose reigns were very short. A widowed daughter of King Nebuchadnezzar, (probably Nitocris), was married to Nabonidus, a high ranking official in Nebuchadnezzar's government, who reluctantly rose to become King.
- B) In an ancient cuneiform (ancient literature composed of wedged characters, preserved on baked clay tablets, cylinders, or prisms), known as the Nabonidus Chronicle (shown here to the right), it is scandalously noted that King Nabonidus did not worship the Babylonian god Marduk.
- C) Nabonidus disliked the administrative aspects of being king, preferring religious pursuits of the "moon-god Sin" and archaeological exploration for antiquities, especially those with religious value.
- D) Because King Nabonidus' had diverse religious interests, he bizarrely established a separate royal court in Tema (near Israel), over 500 miles away! He left the rulership and functional "co-regent" kingship of Babylon under the authority of his eldest son, Belshazzar (Daniel 5:1).



- D) The historical accounts of Belshazzar portray him as a deviously evil leader. Nabonidus, his father, actually ascended to Babylon's throne through the assassination of the previous king (Labashimarduk). The assassin? Yes, you guessed correctly! It was his oldest son, Belshazzar.
- E) Further example of King Belshazzar's evil character was provided by a Babylonian governor who related the story of a royal hunting trip. During the hunt, King Belshazzar became furious with rage, killing his only son. The king was jealous of his only son's hunting prowess and success.
- F) King Belshazzar was a known murderer and assassin. He became king because his absentee father had obsessive religious compulsions. In essence, his father abdicated his throne to his murderous son and fled from his kingship. For these reasons, and many others, Belshazzar was known outside and inside of Babylon as "the wicked king."
- G) Given these things, it is not surprising that Belshazzar is introduced in Daniel 5 saturated in compromise and wickedness, actively abusing his leadership (Daniel 5:1-4).

## **2) The Blasphemy Of Belshazzar**

- A) King Belshazzar intentionally drank wine "in front of" his many guests (5:1), using his kingship to incite a raucous party. The wording used depicts a drunken scene at which Belshazzar's judgment becomes increasingly impaired.
- B) Showing a profound lack of decorum and an overt defiance of God, Belshazzar orders Israel's "golden vessels" (goblets used in the Jerusalem Temple for worship) be brought so that his guests could participate in idolatry (5:4).
- C) We find out later in the story (5:22-23) that Belshazzar purposely had God's golden vessels used for idolatry, as a defiant act. Belshazzar intentionally blasphemes God, trying to communicate to his subjects that his authority and power in Babylon were greater than God (5:1-4).
- D) But why? Why would King Belshazzar purposely challenge God? While we cannot know all the reasons, there are some which stand out and probably made sense to Belshazzar.
- E) According to the "Nabonidus Chronicle," Babylon had suffered a terrible defeat at the hands of the Persian army just days earlier. Nabonidus had fled after the battle and was hiding, nowhere to be found. Belshazzar's party was meant to instill confidence, build morale, and show power in the face of the approaching Persian army.

- F) Since the people would have known about Nabonidus' defeat, and since Babylon was a heavily fortified city with ample food and water resources capable of supporting the entire city for years, Belshazzar placed a heavy amount of confidence in trusting Babylon's defenses.
- G) Further, King Belshazzar and his people would have known about the extraordinary 150-year-old prophecies of Isaiah which predicted the fall of Babylon to a man named Cyrus, a Persian King (Isaiah 44:24-45:1ff).
- H) Finally, Belshazzar was King Nebuchadnezzar's grandson, but he also served as a high ranking leader during the latter days of Nebuchadnezzar's reign! He was a witness of Nebuchadnezzar's humiliation (Daniel 4:28-37)! He had not just heard about it, he was there as a witness (5:22)!
- I) King Belshazzar was measuring himself against a Persian army on his doorstep. He was measuring himself against the loyalty of his subjects. He was measuring himself against his own father who had abandoned Babylon's gods, abdicated the throne, the people, and now his son. He was measuring himself against haunting predictions of destruction by enemies. He was measuring himself against the legacy of his grandfather, the greatest king in Babylon's history; and most of all, against the mysterious God who he watched humiliate his grandfather.
- J) If the people were to follow Belshazzar, with all his flaws and deficits, this was how it could happen. You can almost feel how it all came together in his head as the liquid courage of the wine poured and he made the fateful decision to have God's golden vessels brought to the party.

### **3) God's Shorthand Note To King Belshazzar**

- A) Quite suddenly, disembodied fingers begin miraculously writing on the white plaster wall of the palace, which Belshazzar and his guests clearly see (5:5). The sight terrifies Belshazzar, nearly causing him to pass out (5:6).
- B) King Belshazzar is dizzy with panic, screaming for his advisers. The advisers could read the words on the wall (they were written in Aramaic), but have no clue regarding the significance of the message (5:7-9).
- C) The confusion of the king's advisers races through the palace, and soon brings the "Queen" (Queen-Mother), who tells Belshazzar about Daniel, the chief adviser to his "father" (predecessor), King Nebuchadnezzar. She notes Daniel's fame, and the Spirit of God in Daniel (5:10-12).

#### **4) God Speaks In History Through Daniel**

- A) After welcoming Daniel into the palace (Daniel is probably close to 80 years old by this point in the story and it had been over 20 years since King Nebuchadnezzar had died), King Belshazzar updates Daniel on the current situation (5:13-16), making the same generous offer to Daniel as he had previously made to his group of advisers (5:7).**
- B) Note that King Belshazzar is offering the highest position in the kingdom he is able (third ruler). This is because he is unclear on the whereabouts of his father (Nabonidus), and he stands in the second position to his father (5:7, 16).**
- C) But Daniel will have none of it (5:17). Perhaps because God has already given him a prophecy of Babylon's demise to the Persians already (Daniel 8:1-4 & 15-20), or for other reasons noted earlier (Isaiah's prophecies, Belshazzar's wickedness), Daniel shows little diplomacy to the king.**
- D) In fact, despite this being Daniel's first audience with King Belshazzar, he takes the opportunity to provide the king with a quick lesson in "practical theology" (5:18-23).**
- E) Daniel unflinchingly proclaims the greatness of God to Belshazzar, emphasizing "the Most High God" (5:18) from the outset of his speech. Daniel fearlessly takes the king to task, condemning his arrogance, idolatry, and blasphemy against God, even though the king "knew all this" (5:22).**

#### **5) God Reveals The Mystery**

- A) Daniel then aims God's judgment clearly between the eyes of King Belshazzar, telling him the hand he saw was sent from the same Most High God, and that the four words written on the wall (MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN, 5:25) are judgments extending from their meaning (5:26-28).**
- B) Mene was a measure, like a measure of grain or weight. Tekel was a weighing process, like weighing gold. Parsin (or Peres (5:28), the singular) means to divide a measure, like taking a bag of bread and dividing it into two parts.**
- C) Daniel bluntly shares God's judgment against Babylon and King Belshazzar. You have been carefully (twice) measured, and then you were weighed. God has found you do not measure up, you are too light. So what you have is to be divided among your enemies, the Medo-Persians.**
- D) Daniel is made third ruler in the kingdom (for a night), but as Daniel predicted, Belshazzar is killed by an invading Darius the Mede, just as God had judged (5:30-31).**