

## Chapter 5 - The Writing on the Wall

### Belshazzar's Feast

*5 Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in the presence of the thousand.*

The chapter opens with a pretty significant problem from a historical perspective: there was no Babylonian king called Belshazzar. Nebuchadnezzar II was succeeded by Amel-Marduk, his son, after an impressive 43-year reign. Jeconiah, the last King of Judah, was released by Amel-Marduk after 37 years of imprisonment. Amel-Marduk's reign was short and contentious, ruling for only two years before being overthrown and murdered by his brother-in-law Neriglissar. He was possibly present at the Siege of Jerusalem in 597 BC, described in Jeremiah 39:13, as an individual named 'Nergalšarešer' is present. A land owner and not of royal blood, Neriglissar's claim came through marriage to one of Nebuchadnezzar's daughters and waged a successful campaign in Anatolia before laying waste to mountain passes on the western border to Lydia. On his way home from this victory, Neriglissar died in April 556 BC. He was succeeded as king by his son, Labashi-Marduk, whose reign would only last for two or three months before being deposed and killed in favour of Nabonidus. Notably, Belshazzar, Nabonidus' son, played a pivotal role in the coup d'état that overthrew Labashi-Marduk around 556 BC.

The Nabonidus Chronicle is one of the best sources of information about the last years of Nabonidus' reign before he was overthrown by the Persian king Cyrus the Great. Tension had been progressively rising with Persia before war opened with Cyrus leading a major invasion. More on this will be discussed in later chapters.

In September of 539 BC, Nabonidus and Cyrus clashed at Opis, a city north of Babylon but also on the Tigris River. There was an important bridge over the river and the city was an important, strategic fortification protecting the main city. Nabonidus was clearly defeated although ancient sources were heavily divided about what happened

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to him. The 3rd Century BC Babylonian historian Berossus suggests he was captured shortly after the battle and exiled.

Although there is no recognition that his son, Belshazzar, was ever actually made king, it would not have been unusual for him to have been promoted to the throne automatically on his father's capture. What's more, considering the fractured political nature that the kingdom was in at the time of the battle, naming his son Belshazzar as a co-ruler would have been a reasonably normal move for any king. Xenophon in the *Cyropaedia* (4.6.3), which we must state is partly fiction, describes that a father and son were both reigning over Babylon when the city fell, and that the younger ruler was killed. This would support the conclusion that Belteshazzar was co-ruler with his father, and therefore also King. Regardless, the power Belshazzar exercised would have been king-like, as he clearly had his father's confidence. If he was officially put on the throne is lost to history. Belshazzar had acted as regent for his father during a self-imposed exile between 552 and 542 or 543BC, during which time it's possible he was named Co-Ruler. The reason for the exile is unclear but Belshazzar's authority was clear during this time.

That leads us up to this moment. Belshazzar's feast is an anomaly; in the middle of a war and after a crushing defeat, Belshazzar gets a thousand of his nobles together and the King himself gets drunk with them. In theory, there are three possible reasons why this feast would be taking place.

Firstly, the presence of the thousand nobles would indicate that there is also a large army and force with them. In medieval terms, this could be the equivalent of calling the vassals together to defend the kingdom. The feast could be a demonstration of their overconfidence in the fight to come and, frankly, makes the most sense considering. By this point the size and composition of Cyrus' army would be clearly known and tactics to counter known movements would have been prepared.

On the other hand, the opposite is also a very valid theory. The nobles assembled, knowing the army and tactics coming against them, may be having their last party together before the battle they know is coming that will bring all their deaths. This is

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reflected in the text with the fact that Belshazzar was willing to drink with his nobles, and there is a distinctly depressive tone to the story overall.

The third option sits somewhere between the two with this possibly being the wake for Nabonidus, or a religious ceremony of some kind to protect him and them in the next phase of the Persian invasion. This explains what can be seen as a depressive tone and the religious nature of events about to be discussed.

*<sup>2</sup> While he tasted the wine, Belshazzar gave the command to bring the gold and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple which had been in Jerusalem, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. <sup>3</sup> Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken from the temple of the house of God which had been in Jerusalem; and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. <sup>4</sup> They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone.*

Although it is not clear, there is strong speculation that Nabonidus is the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar II through one of his other daughters. Regardless, the fact that he has taken the throne makes Nebuchadnezzar II his father in terms of the royal history, so the familial language here is not unusual.

Nabonidus seems to have attempted to reform and reorganise the Babylonian religion early in his reign, promoting the status of the moon god Sîn, elevating him above the traditional deity, Marduk. Many temples and statues of Sîn were erected across the empire to promote this new religious order. Belshazzar's call for the sacred Israelitish vessels is not, necessarily, the insult to God per se that later commentators have interpreted it to be. It is certainly an insult, no question, but it is intended to act as a demonstration of the dominance of Belshazzar and Sîn over Israel and YHWH. Furthermore, the Babylonian Chronicle records that Babylon was captured on the night before the akitu festival in honour of Sîn, the moon god.

One should question why Belshazzar asked for the vessels in the Holy Temple, specifically, to be so brought forth? What brought them to his mind? It is possible that, in this collection of nobles, Israelitish and Jewish leaders were present. Belshazzar is clearly demonstrating his authority over everything he surveys which is an important

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psychological action in light of the defeat at Opis. My using the spoils of ancient wars, to demonstrate the power of his “[gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone](#)” over the divine of Israel, Belshazzar is trying to demonstrate to his people that they have overcome defeats and setbacks in the past and will move from victory to victory in the future.

The story, as presented here, is a different interpretation of that of Nebuchadnezzar's madness, where a Babylonian leader declares his dominance over God and is destroyed for it. That is not surprising but also does not prove that these events did not happen. Historic events often follow patterns and here is no different. This does not prove that these events are fabricated, only that we should be sceptical about their happening.

*[5 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.](#)*

This sudden appearance would have been shocking to all present and, at first, its lack of record in other parts of history is remarkable. More on this shortly.

From our modern perspective, this is an insane occurrence, but for those of the time, events like this would have been much more happenstance. Although certainly not common, the Gods did interact very personally and physically with people in the Ancient world, although rarely so disembodied. In the Greek world alone, Prometheus stole fire from Hephaestus and gave it to the world; Atlas held the world in his sphere and Zeus made love to everything that he could. These were, for ancient people, very real entities that were really interacting with the world.

This had was not unusual because it was there, it was unusual because it was a hand with no body. To write these things in the wall was making them permanent and unambiguous. Messages from the Gods were common; this message, however, was public and for everyone to see.

*[6 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. 7 The king](#)*

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*cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. The king spoke, saying to the wise men of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing, and tells me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around his neck; and he shall be the third ruler in the kingdom." <sup>8</sup> Now all the king's wise men came, but they could not read the writing, or make known to the king its interpretation. <sup>9</sup> Then King Belshazzar was greatly troubled, his countenance was changed, and his lords were astonished.*

This reaction is not surprising. The King would, naturally, freak out when he saw a disembodied finger upsetting his plasterwork, writing in a language he cannot understand. What is noteworthy is that nobody else could read it either. This would indicate that it was not written in Hebrew, as is often assumed, but some other language known to few.

Much has been made of the fact that this is a modified form of a repeat of both Nebuchadnezzar's dream stories but with the twist that, where Nebuchadnezzar was threatening his advisors, Belshazzar is promising wealth and power to whomever can translate.

The fact that "*the king's countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him*" so dramatically when he saw the finger and the writing would indicate that he was exceptionally confident in winning the oncoming battle. As stated above, the power of the nobles assembled has probably given him confidence that is now shattered by what appears to be a judgement. He must now be questioning that confidence.

We can see an element of him rallying with the promises that "[w]hoever reads this writing, and tells me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and *have* a chain of gold around his neck; and he shall be the third ruler in the kingdom." He starts to offer wealth and power that, in hindsight, looks feeble. This inclusion, again, gives credibility to this as a historic text. If the King was expecting to lose the next fight, then he would not offer such a position of high power in the regime; it would mean nothing. By including this element, we get an insight into Belshazzar's mindset that was discussed above.

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Nabonidus had spent much time moving the kingdom's worship over to Sîn and list the earlier battle. Now, on the eve of Sîn's important festival, Belshazzar had assembled the nobles of the kingdom, and was celebrating in the name of his God. Whatever Judgement Sîn had passed over his father would not be his experience. Moreover, Belshazzar was insulting the other Gods that his ancestor had conquered, possibly in the presence of their representatives in his court who would shortly go to battle on his behalf. Suddenly, a finger appears and writes some statement literally on the wall plaster. At first, Belshazzar is shocked and afraid but probably quickly assumed this was some positive message from Sîn to encourage him. He asked all around him to translate and promises wealth and riches. So confident is he that he offers the third position in the empire to whoever is able to translate.

This third position is exceptionally noteworthy as it is illogical. Why is he offering the third position? Why not second under himself? Why not command of literally one third of the land as a vassal king? If we remember, while his father, Nabonidus, may be in disgrace at this point, he is king nevertheless and if we read between the lines here, Belshazzar may have usurped his father's position while not wanting to depose him entirely. Picking the person that Sîn has anointed to interpret his message is both the most logical person to help manage the kingdom after Belshazzar and his father, for who better than who the Gods bless, but also is possibly meant as a further insult to the Jewish God that Nebuchadnezzar was so happy to bless.

This also explains why it is only after his people could not explain what the message was that “[Belshazzar was greatly troubled, his countenance was changed, and his lords were astonished.](#)” The fact that “[his countenance was changed](#)” clearly indicates that his earlier knee-knocking episode was much more of surprise than it was of actual fear. However, it may also demonstrate that he had doubts about devoting the kingdom to Sîn which were now being proved true.

*<sup>10</sup> The queen, because of the words of the king and his lords, came to the banquet hall. The queen spoke, saying, “O king, live forever! Do not let your thoughts trouble you, nor let your countenance change. <sup>11</sup> There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God. And in the days of your father, light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, were found in him; and*

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*King Nebuchadnezzar your father—your father the king—made him chief of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers. <sup>12</sup> Inasmuch as an excellent spirit, knowledge, understanding, interpreting dreams, solving riddles, and explaining enigmas were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar, now let Daniel be called, and he will give the interpretation.”*

It is interesting that this woman is referred to as “[t]he queen” and does not seem to speak to the King with any personal affection. This may be due to the formality of the moment, but could also be that this is not Belshazzar's queen; it is Nabonidus'. Her husband deposed by a petulant son, this queen may not be willing to offer any happy countenance toward Belshazzar and his court. It is also possible that she was Nebuchadnezzar's queen. Although unlikely, it is only 23 years between Nebuchadnezzar's death and the moments talked about here, so it is not impossible that his queen was still alive. That would also make a lot of sense as she speaks fondly of Nebuchadnezzar and acts here as a voice of reason, to remember the earlier stories.

Her reminding the King of Daniel has been made a feminist strongpoint, but that is not entirely historical. Being a woman of power and influence; a queen regardless as to who her King was, her voice held weight. When she comes to the King to say that she has an answer to her problem, naturally, she will be listened to.

What she tells him, however, is probably the last thing in the world that Belshazzar wants to hear at that moment. “I've know this guy who can help whose God you've been insulting and who your great grandfather listened to... Why don't you give him a call?” The fact that she talks Daniel up so much, in modern language, looks like she is intending to insult Belshazzar but that might not have been the original intention. Whether or not that was her intention is unclear.

This also raises an interesting question. Where was Daniel this night? If Nebuchadnezzar's laws were still in place, it is highly likely that Daniel was exempt from attending religious ceremonies like this. He also may well have been doing something else for the empire or might have been dismissed as a part of the Sîn reforms. This question cannot be answered but is an interesting one.



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*<sup>13</sup> Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king spoke, and said to Daniel, “Are you that Daniel who is one of the captives from Judah, whom my father the king brought from Judah? <sup>14</sup> I have heard of you, that the Spirit of God is in you, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you. <sup>15</sup> Now the wise men, the astrologers, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing and make known to me its interpretation, but they could not give the interpretation of the thing. <sup>16</sup> And I have heard of you, that you can give interpretations and explain enigmas. Now if you can read the writing and make known to me its interpretation, you shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around your neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.”*

“Are you **that** Daniel” (my bolding). What a pejorative way of introducing yourself to Daniel. The King is clearly agitated and there is no love lost here. Daniel, “I have heard of you”. You’re supposed to have “light and understanding and excellent wisdom” but so are these “astrologers [who] have been brought in before me”. This lot should be able to “read this writing and make known to me its interpretation, but they” are pretty pathetic and “could not give the interpretation of the thing.” Same deal with you, however. Explain it and you get “clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around your neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.”

The king here is clearly annoyed and is only extending this offer because he has little choice. The implications of what is happening are not lost on him; if the advisors devoted to Sîn cannot interpret the message but this devotee of YHWH can, then obviously YHWH is much more powerful than Sîn. But, a message from the Gods is a message from the Gods, so he might as well find out what it says.

*<sup>17</sup> Then Daniel answered, and said before the king, “Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another; yet I will read the writing to the king, and make known to him the interpretation.*

Daniel’s dismissiveness here demonstrates just how far he has come working for God and for his people. He probably still holds a position of authority amongst the Jews in Babylon and is probably known to the king, at least by reputation, but his attitude here



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would have gotten a lesser man's head cut off. There is no fluff here; no preamble. He makes it clear that he understands what the message says and that he will translate, but he is rudely dismisses the glory and riches about to be laid on his shoulders. To be so confident, Daniel surely knows what the message says and what is going to happen, so it's certainly not unreasonable that God has told him that this would be the night that the events of Chapter 2 come to pass.

There are a couple of possible reasons for this.

First, and most likely, the movement over to the god Sîn have probably upset and insulted Daniel and he has probably had to advocate for his people delicately. What this would have involved, especially with his reputation, could have required some very careful interactions with government officials and dire threats to his life.

Secondly, Daniel may know from God that the end of Babylon is near, and Daniel does not want to be anywhere near the king who is about to die.

Thirdly, it is possible that Daniel just recognises the futility of having power and riches heaped on him which would be worthless, literally by the next morning.

Fourthly, knowing the message, Daniel may recognise that there is a decent chance the King will execute him for it. As we will see now, it is not something that Belshazzar would find encouraging.

*<sup>18</sup> O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father a kingdom and majesty, glory and honor. <sup>19</sup> And because of the majesty that He gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whomever he wished, he executed; whomever he wished, he kept alive; whomever he wished, he set up; and whomever he wished, he put down. <sup>20</sup> But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him. <sup>21</sup> Then he was driven from the sons of men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till he knew that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses.*

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Daniel reminds Belshazzar of the story of Nebuchadnezzar, reminding him of what had happened. He is careful in his language compared to the way he spoke to Nebuchadnezzar, wanting to make clear the fact that YHWH gave him his position and power, but also not wanting to put too much emphasis on YHWH's power. Instead, he keeps the focus on Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar was the one who had the authority and responsibility, and it was he who went mad from the arrogance of his pride. Daniel does not say that his madness was a judgment from YHWH, but instead says that it was a lesson that YHWH was teaching him at the time.

This is a very good example of one keeping the Almighty in the position of ultimate authority, while not labouring the point. He clearly states that “[the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints ... whomever He chooses](#)” while keeping the focus on the King. We have to remember that, when talking about God, he does not, necessarily, need to fill all the space. Daniel here demonstrates the result of a very relaxed relationship with God.

*<sup>22</sup> “But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this. <sup>23</sup> And 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. <sup>24</sup> Then the fingers of the hand were sent from Him, and this writing was written.*

Daniel is pretty blunt. Knowing what he does about the night's events, whether God told him earlier or in reading the message, he now knows what is going on. His tone here is, as a result, rather frank. He has chosen to tell the truth and so he is going to do so in a way he thinks is the simplest and most relatable for the King, knowing the potential of it costing him his life.

His preamble does, however, raise a question. When did Belshazzar have a chance to humble himself before God? Did Daniel give advice before Opis and was rejected? This is not clear but must have been something that was available to the King which is not recorded in scripture. Generally we accept this as him praising “[the gods of silver and](#)

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gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know” but that is included in the second part of the judgement. The first section is distinct.

In reading Nebuchadnezzar’s story, one could be forgiven for believing that he devoted the entire kingdom over to YHWH’s worship and removed the Babylonian pantheon altogether; something both historically and logistically impossible. There is no way that the Chaldeans and other rulers of the kingdom would have accepted an entirely new God coming from a subjugated people to rule over all; that is simply ludicrous. What instead must have been the case that God worked with Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar to establish the Babylonian pantheon in a form acceptable to the empire but also leave the Jews free to worship as they saw fit. Devoting the empire to Sîn probably forced a reform that impacted this balance and God is judging Belshazzar for promoting his ways over YHWH’s.

Daniel goes further than just this, reminding Belshazzar of the promises made amongst all the peoples who were subjugated, not just the Jews. While this is heavily focused on one foreign God, YHWH, other conquered peoples like the Philistines etc would certainly have seen the insult as being against their gods too. Sîn was to dominate the entire pantheon and although YHWH’s artefacts were being used this particular night, this sort of offense had probably been going through Gods for some time.

The difference here, of course, is YHWH can stand up for Himself. Daniel reminds the king that “you have praised the gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know... the God who *holds* your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified.” YHWH is not advocating for all the lesser names of Gods that nobody now remembers and are also idols, but he does recognise at this point that when you take Him on, oppress His people and insult His memory, then you have a major problem on your hands. YHWH wants to make clear that he is not an idol “which do not see or hear or know” but a God “*holds* your breath in His hand and owns all your ways”. The writing was on the wall because this night you have insulted the wrong person.

*<sup>25</sup> “And this is the inscription that was written:*

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*MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.*

*<sup>26</sup> This is the interpretation of each word. MENE: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it; <sup>27</sup> TEKEL: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; <sup>28</sup> PERES: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.” <sup>29</sup> Then Belshazzar gave the command, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a chain of gold around his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.*

This inscription is not a judgement. It is a statement. Judgements have consequences and possibilities of appeal and reprieve. Statements are simple facts.

These words are in Aramaic and literally translate to “numbered or counted, weighted and divided”. Even if someone in the room could read the language, they would not have known the proper meaning of the words themselves.

“**MENE**” is repeated twice, to reinforce the argument. It is a reference back to Daniel 2 and to what was told to Nebuchadnezzar years ago. The promise made that the kingdom would last but a short time is now to be accomplished. Your time is up.

The fact this comes first references the authority of YHWH to decide times and laws. Nabonidus and Belshazzar have tried to subjugate all the other deities to Sîn. YHWH is stepping forward, on this evening devoted to the moon god, and reminding Belshazzar of what his grandfather knew; He is in charge.

“**TEKEL**” is a much more personal attack on Belshazzar, but what for we can only speculate. Oftentimes this is discussed in the context of Babylon oppressing God’s people and them being judged for that; but that fails in the light of Daniel’s other prophecies. In Chapter 2, Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that his kingdom would fall so there is no point to say that its also done the wrong thing; which is essentially what is happening here.

Furthermore, Babylon was an unashamed pagan kingdom. This is not like Israel that apostatised, this is a pagan kingdom that offers little allegiance to YHWH.

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Instead, this must be a much more personal judgement on Belshazzar himself. What that is has been lost to history, but in the light of the context we have looked at, we can speculate, almost all of which has been stated before. Daniel's attitude toward this king could indicate that he has advocated for YHWH while Belshazzar and his father were devoted to converting the empire to Sîn and has been heavily rebuffed for his efforts. This arrogant promotion in the face of his grandfather's experience would clearly be as offensive to God as the usurpation of his father, Nabonidus, clearly is to the queen. Furthermore, this entire assembly, if it is to demonstrate a faithless overconfidence toward the oncoming battle, could be another reason that this Judgement is laid on him. There are many options as to what the root of this judgement could be.

“**UPHARSIN**” This is the most interesting one and Daniel's way of saying it tells us a lot about where he, the kingdom and the message are up to. Daniel offers no comfort, simply saying “**Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.**” In other words, whatever you are trying to do here; your attempt to assemble hosts to push back against the incoming forces, you will lose. Your empire is finished. What you are obviously terrified of is about to come to pass. Daniel does not personalise it; it is exceptionally clinical.

What is most interesting about this is the way that Belshazzar reacts to this; the complete opposite of how one would expect such news to be received. Although we can speculate that he might have pushed back or negotiated in earlier versions of the story lost to history, in the preserved one there is no debate and no question. Belshazzar simply anoints Daniel with the promised glory and riches for one who can translate the message.

By giving Daniel these rewards, Belshazzar is demonstrating that he is resigned to the fate he was sure he would be able to overcome. This, again, should give us confidence in the story as no king would react this way. Even when convinced they would not win, like James II in 1688, the duty of a Monarch is to withdraw and continue the fight at a later point from strength. Especially at this time, to show weakness was a death sentence for both the individual and the power. For a story written even during the later Roman empire, the fact that Belshazzar is resigned to the loss of his empire would not have been something that ancient readers easily accepted, nor is the fact that

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Daniel was not punished for the actions of his God. As we saw in Chapter 2, priests were punished for the messages of their Gods. An ancient fabricator would have at least had Daniel arrested for his impudence only to be saved by the invading force, led by a king who is often regarded as a friend to the Jews.

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*30 That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. 31 And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.*

The question of why this story is not recorded elsewhere is answered in this verse. On the same night that the writing was interpreted, the King and his people were slain and Babylon conquered by Darius the Mede, also known as Cyrus the Great, King of Persia. Anyone at that feast would have either been killed or taken off as slaves to serve the new regime, their power broken. Anyone that was at the feast wouldn't have had either the ability or the interest in supporting their captors by saying the last group was not worthy of staying on the throne.

The story of the capture of Babylon remains one of the most retold tales in history. Xenophon and Herodotus agree with Daniel that the city was taken by surprise, at the time of a festival, and with some (but apparently not much) loss of life. Modern historians disagree, as they tend to do. Knowing that the akitu festival was about to start, and Cyrus having captured the important bridgeheads, he did not want a long siege that could have cost his army dearly. Instead, he dispatched General Ugbaru with a detachment to divert the river Euphrates.

Babylon was a city built on the Euphrates River, which ran through the city. Knowing the imminent festival and that the season was for the river to be low anyway, Ugbaru's forces timed their movements along with General Gobryas, who was prepared on the outskirts of the city with a small but determined strike force. With the river was diverted, on 12 October, 539BC, Gobryas and his troops moved in the knee-deep water under the wide walls and into the city. Finding everyone drunk, the limited guard was easily dispatched or captured, the gates flung open, and the Persian army flooded in. The invading troops imitated drunken revellers to cover the shouts of battle and to

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keep the city quiet while they moved swiftly to the palace. When there, they found the guard drunk around a roaring fire and easily dispatched them before moving to the King's chamber itself. Moving in, they found them as ready for a fight as could be expected in the situation, but the King and his nobles were overwhelmed by the weight of numbers.

Obviously, Daniel was not there, or he too would have been killed and, frankly, there was almost no reason for him to be there. He had given the message and then would have made some excuse like "Well, if I'm going to govern your kingdom for the next few hours, can I go back to bed now?" Not only would Daniel have not wanted anything to do with celebrating Sîn, he also would have just wanted to be in his own bed when the events overtake the city. It would also make it clear that, while Daniel had now been made a senior official, he was also not a part of that regime, which makes his nomination as one of the senior leader in the next chapter very understandable. A conquering King wants to put leaders in charge of the empire who have a relationship with the people, and Daniel demonstrated he was one of those. There will be more on this in the next chapter.

The note that the Kingdom was given over to "[Darius the Mede](#)" is a historical anomaly. History does not record a 'Darius the Mede' but it is my considered opinion that he and Cyrus the Great are the same person. The evidence given here is that "[Darius the Mede](#)" conquered the kingdom when he was "[about sixty-two years old](#)." As Cyrus was born in 600BC, 539 makes him 61 but as we are talking about late 539 (October), an early birth would make him around 62 years of age. What's more, in Daniel 6:28 it is written that "[Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius, and the reign of Cyrus the Persian](#)". The conjunction 'and', however, can also be translated to 'even', making a just as accurate translation of the English to read that "[Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius, \*\*even\*\* the reign of Cyrus the Persian](#)". Conjunction words like 'and' in English are more or less explicit while in other languages are highly open to interpretation.

There are several other examples of this connection being made. Chapter 11 opens with the lines "[in the first year of Darius the Mede](#)" before commenting shortly thereafter



## Chapter 5 - The Writing on the Wall Belshazzar's Fall

that “three more kings will arise in Persia”. Why is a Mede in Persia so prominently if not to lead?

The use of double names is not unusual historically and it is most likely that Cyrus was a Persian name and Darius a Median. Regnal names of this type are very common, the current Pope, Francis I was born Jorge Bergoglio. King George VI was known as 'Bertie' by his family as his first name was Albert. Ramesses II is often called Ozymandias in ancient Greek sources and Emperor Augustus was born Octavian. The list of examples goes on and on.

Different names like this are often political, used for different purposes and at different times. Cyrus most likely used the name Cyrus when he was addressing his Persian subjects and the name Darius when talking about Median affairs.

Historians generally reject this interpretation but also have nothing to replace it with, yet all the logical history makes sense. Historically it was Median troops that conquered Babylon, working closely with their Persian allies.