

## Daniel 5:1-12

**Daniel 5:5,6 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. 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.**

The first questions that surface in this chapter are questions of identity. Who was Belshazzar? And, who was the queen? Nebuchadnezzar was succeeded by his son, Amel-Marduk who was assassinated 2 years later by Neriglissar who reigned from 560 - 556. Neriglissar was succeeded by his son, Labashi-Marduk, who after a few months was executed by Nabonidus who ruled from 555 - 539 when Cyrus defeated Babylon. Belshazzar was Nabonidus son and was a coregent with his father and the sole authority in Babylon during the 10 years that his father was absent. Nabonidus was defeated in a battle with Cyrus just 50 miles from Babylon 2 days before Babylon fell to the Medes and the Persians. He survived and fled but he did not return to Babylon so that Belshazzar was king and seated on the throne on the night that Babylon fell.

As for the queen, the presumption is that she was the queen mother as opposed to a wife of Belshazzar. A possibility is that she was either Belshazzar's mother or she might have been Nitocris, the wife of Nebuchadnezzar. In any case she had status, respect and a knowledge of the history of the court.

The historical record shows that the war between Persia and Babylon was proceeding at the time this banquet was held. These are facts that Belshazzar knew well. It must also have been clear that his side was losing or else why was the battle being fought so near-by rather than in Persia?

The great feast for a thousand lords was an overt denial of a present crisis. After considerable drinking, Belshazzar brought out the vessels that had been in the temple in Jerusalem. This was an act of bravado. Belshazzar was doing what the great Nebuchadnezzar had been afraid to do. They all drank from the temple cups of gold and silver while praising the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone. But the hilarity ceased when the hand of a man (unattached to any body) started writing on the wall. Immediately, Belshazzar went into a panic. "His hips

were loosened and his knees knocked against each other. Belshazzar's act had been a challenge to the God of the Hebrews and now God was answering. The people present could not tell what had been written and so the wise men were summoned. When they were also stumped by the writing, the queen entered and directed Belshazzar to call Daniel in since he had served Nebuchadnezzar successfully in similar situations.

Our Scripture is a lesson to skeptics who scorned this story as fantasy before the historical record of Belshazzar was discovered. This actually mirrors the lesson of the story which demonstrates the folly of making negative assumptions about God. Belshazzar assumed that he could use the temple vessels to raise his status in a time of crisis. He was depending on the God of Israel being no different than any of the other gods but he found out otherwise. His bravado was turned into terror.

While a war raged, Belshazzar threw a party. It was an act of avoidance. He felt safe when far from it. Escapism is one of the primary habits of our culture. You may temporarily feel better but seeking an escape changes nothing, eventually, even the exercise will fail.