

God's Design in the Hebrew Scriptures: Daniel

Chapter 5 — A Lesson In Superiority and Sovereignty

I. Gentile power flaunts invincibility and blasphemy before the face of God, vv 1-4

Nabonidus (Belshazzar's father) was a worshiper of the moon god Sin, but the majority in Babylon worshiped Marduk. To avoid possible conflict or, as E. Yamauchi suggests, because he felt Babylon had been cursed by Sin (*The Stones and the Scriptures* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981], 89), the king may have deemed it better to reside in Tema, where worship of the moon god was prominent.

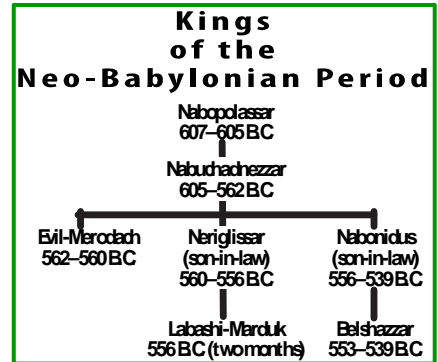
Stephen R. Miller, vol. 18, Daniel, electronic ed., Logos Library System: The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001, c1994).

The term "son" in Semitic languages has a wide range of meanings. Wilson has listed seven ways in which the term "father" was used in the time of Nebuchadnezzar and twelve possible meanings for "son." "Father" may refer to one's immediate father, grandfather, ancestor, or as in the case of kings, a predecessor. Likewise "son" may mean one's immediate offspring, grandson, descendant, or successor. Jesus was called the "son of David" (e.g., Matt 1:1; 9:27; 12:23; 20:30-31; 21:9; etc.), although David was not Christ's immediate parent but an ancestor. Israelites called themselves "sons of Jacob" (Mal 3:6) and proudly proclaimed Abraham to be their "father" (John 8:53). Of course, the Jews meant that they were descendants of Jacob and that Abraham was their ancestor.

Stephen R. Miller, vol. 18, Daniel, electronic ed., Logos Library System: The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001, c1994), 149.

Daniel received the revelation in chapter 7 in the first year of Belshazzar (553 B.C., 7:1) and the revelation in chapter 8 in Belshazzar's third year (551 B.C., 8:1). Thus chapter 5 follows chapters 7 and 8 chronologically by 14 and 12 years respectively.

Tom Constable, Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003).



II. God mocks Gentile invincibility and blasphemy with a divine sign, vv5-9

Jeremiah 17:5-7. ⁵ Thus says the LORD, "Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind And makes flesh his strength, And whose heart turns away from the LORD. ⁶ "For he will be like a bush in the desert And will not see when prosperity comes, But will live in stony wastes in the wilderness, A land of salt without inhabitant. ⁷ "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD And whose trust is the LORD. Cf. Ps 118:8-9.

III. God's wisdom is the only wisdom, vv10-28

E.J. Young (E.J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel*, (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI, 1949, p.123) suggests that Belshazzar used the name Daniel rather than the Babylonian Belteshazzar in addressing the prophet because the latter name was so similar to his own.

IV. God's wisdom (and God's people) rises while Gentile arrogance is defeated, vv29-31

Daniel furnished little information about the actual fall of Babylon, but a number of historical sources supplement the biblical account. The Greek historians, Herodotus (fifth century B.C.) and Xenophon (ca. 434–355 B.C.), supply exceptionally helpful details in this regard. The walls surrounding the city of Babylon were formidable. In the previous chapter was the explanation that there were two sets of double walls extending for miles (the outermost system being seventeen miles in length). The outer walls were approximately twenty-five feet in width and rose to a height of at least forty feet. These fortifications were too difficult to challenge, and so according to Herodotus and Xenophon, the Medo-Persian army diverted water from the Euphrates River (which ran under the walls of Babylon) into a marsh. With the level of the water lowered, the soldiers were able to wade the river under the walls and enter the city.

Xenophon added that the city was invaded while the Babylonians were feasting in a time of drunken revelry, and Herodotus also related that a festival was in progress. As a matter of fact, Xenophon cited the festival as the reason the Persians chose to attack Babylon on that particular night. He further mentioned that Gobryas, commander under Cyrus, led his soldiers into the palace, where they found the king holding a dagger, evidently with which to take his own life. According to Xenophon, the king and his attendants were overpowered, and the invaders "avenged themselves upon the wicked king," which obviously means that they executed him.

Two cuneiform documents provide additional information about the fall of Babylon—the Nabonidus Chronicle and the Cyrus Cylinder. The Nabonidus Chronicle tells of Cyrus's invasion of Babylonia and the subsequent flight of Nabonidus after Sippar was taken on the fourteenth of Tishri (Oct. 10, 539 B.C.). On the sixteenth day of Tishri (Oct. 12, 539 B.C.), Cyrus's commander (Gobryas, also known as Ugbaru) and the Medo-Persian army entered Babylon without a battle. Cyrus was welcomed by the city's inhabitants when he arrived on the third day of the month Arahshamnu (Oct. 29, 539 B.C.). The Cyrus Cylinder also records that Babylon was captured without a battle and that the citizens received Cyrus warmly.

According to both the Nabonidus Chronicle and the Cyrus Cylinder, Nabonidus had been unfaithful to the gods of Babylon. He had stopped a rebellion in bloody fashion just a few years before Babylon's fall, and his evil son Belshazzar probably was never very popular. Moreover, all the peoples who had been taken into captivity by the Babylonians received Cyrus with joy because he allowed them to return to their homelands (cf. Cyrus Cylinder and Ezra 1:1–4). Under these circumstances the peaceful transition to Persian rule indicated in the Book of Daniel is quite reasonable.

Finally, Berosus (a third-century B.C. Babylonian priest and historian) reported details of Cyrus's attack on Babylonia and of his battle with Nabonidus, who was defeated and fled to Borsippa where he later surrendered. According to Berosus, Nabonidus was not executed but deported to Carmania by Cyrus.

Stephen R. Miller, vol. 18, Daniel, Includes Indexes., electronic ed., Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001, c1994), 167.

Who was Darius the Mede? Ancient documents did not record a man with this name ruling Babylon immediately after its conquest by Medo-Persia. Two observations should be made concerning this problem. First, the name "Darius" probably was a title of honor rather than a personal name. Josephus, the ancient Hebrew historian, claimed that Darius had another name. The ancient Greek historian, Herodotus, and modern authorities on the old Persian language claim that "Darius" was a title rather than a proper name. "Darius" means holder of the scepter. Second, scholars have disagreed concerning the identification of Darius. Most recent research, however, favors the view that he was Gubaru (Gobryas), the man whom King Cyrus appointed to be governor of Babylon. Gubaru was born in 601 bc; thus, as Daniel indicated, he would have been "about the age of sixty-two" when Babylon fell in 539 bc. Gubaru's father was a Mede; thus, he too was a Mede. The area over which Cyrus appointed him governor was basically the same as that which comprised the former kingdom of Babylon. King Cyrus divided his enormous empire into twenty provinces and appointed a governor to rule each province. Each province formerly had been an independent kingdom with its own king. Thus, each governor replaced a former king. "As successor to a former king, ruling a truly enormous territory, he was in point of fact himself a monarch and was surrounded by a miniature court." As a result, it has been said of Gubaru that he "ruled almost as an independent monarch." In light of this, Daniel was not stretching the truth when he referred to Darius as "king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans" (9:1). Since Darius had been appointed by the head king, Cyrus, Daniel was accurate when he wrote that Darius "received the kingdom" (5:31) and "was made king" (9:1).

Renald E. Showers, *The Most High God* : Commentary on the Book of Daniel (Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc., 1982). Additional Resources for study: Leon Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973); Charles Boufflower, *In and Around the Book of Daniel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1977).

The Times of the Gentiles

God's program for the world chs. 2—7

Daniel wrote 2:4b–7:28 in the Aramaic language. This literary change gives the reader a clue that this part is a distinct section of the book. The content of this section also identifies it as special. It concerns the future history of the Gentiles during "the times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24). Aramaic was the common language of the world in which Daniel lived when he wrote. It is natural that he would have recorded what concerns the world as a whole in the language of the Gentiles.

The writer constructed this section of the book in chiasmic form.

- A** A prophecy of an image concerning four Gentile nations and their end ch. 2
- B** The supernatural persecution and deliverance of Daniel's three friends ch. 3
- C** God's revelation to the Gentile king Nebuchadnezzar ch. 4
- C'** God's revelation to the Gentile king Belshazzar ch. 5
- B'** The supernatural persecution and deliverance of Daniel ch. 6
- A'** A prophecy of animals concerning four Gentile nations and their end ch. 7

"Chapters 2 and 7 explain the succession of four Gentile empires that would exert control over Jerusalem and the Jews until God's kingdom is established. Chapters 3 and 6 warned the Jews of the persecution they would face during this period and exhorted them to remain faithful to God. Chapters 4 and 5 encouraged the Jewish remnant by reminding them that a time would come when even the Gentile rulers would acknowledge that the God of Israel rules over the nations."

Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003), Dan 1:21.