

## Belshazzar

I am Belshazzar. I was king of Babylon, the last king... well actually co-regent. I was appointed by my father, Nabonidus, who took time off to worship the moon goddess. Babylon had become great under my grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar. Regardless, I was still the last king. I was raised in luxury and privilege and had no idea what was involved in the creation of the great Babylonian Empire. I accepted its continued dominance as a given and took its security for granted.

I basically liked to party and am most remembered for my last, greatest and most disastrous party. I and my advisors took all reasonable precautions, closing and guarding the gates to the great city. Then, together with 1000 of my closest personal friends, proceeded to get seriously drunk, for days... actually weeks.

Somebody got the bright idea of drinking from the vessels taken from the Temple of the Jews when Jerusalem was conquered. It sounded like a good idea to me. And we praised our gods who allowed us to overcome...at least that's the way I understood the story. There were some additional details and life experiences that Grandfather probably told me. But I didn't pay much attention – after all, he was pretty old.

Well, we all suddenly sobered up when a disembodied human-like hand appeared and wrote a message. Everybody saw it and stopped what they were doing. There was at least a minute of stunned silence. Then began a growing murmur, broken by occasional pleas for someone to explain the handwriting on the wall. It was clearly not an ordinary alcohol-induced hallucination, for we all saw the same thing. So I called the court astrologers and magicians, but despite offers of rewards, none could help. Then my wife, who had paid attention to the stories of the past reminded me of Daniel – another old man – who had shown inexplicable knowledge and wisdom when called on by my grandfather.

I made a royal speech before the crowd – that was a subject I had mastered – attempting to take partial credit for whatever good Daniel was able to perform. I then offered Daniel third place in the kingdom, under me (I was second). He took the occasion to spurn my rewards and lecture me on the history of Babylon as well as the personal history of my grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar. Most important of all was the fact that my illustrious grandfather had humbled himself before the Most High God after being disciplined with seven years of insanity. Only then had he sincerely acknowledged his subordinate position. Finally, Daniel read and interpreted the words, “Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin.” My days were numbered, I had been weighed in the balance and found wanting. My kingdom was divided and given to the Medes and the Persians.

I made a note to assemble all my advisors first thing in the morning. It never happened. That night, Darius, the Mede, who had quietly dug an alternative channel for the Euphrates River, suddenly opened it up while blocking the main channel. The place where the river passes

under the wall of the city was then exposed and allowed his special forces to enter, open the gates allowing his massed armies to take the city with barely a fight. Thus, ignominiously, ended my kingdom and my life.

The abuse of the gold Temple Vessels for our drunken orgy and the blasphemous praising of the gods who are not gods, was the last straw. But the process had begun long before, with the forgetting of the past, especially the forgetting of those lessons painfully learned by the truly great king Nebuchadnezzar, who came to acknowledge the Most High God, Creator of all, as the giver of all his abilities and opportunities.

Now I know that it is too late for me. I not only lost the kingdom, I lost my soul. But you still have a chance.

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