

CHAPTER 5

INTRODUCTION TO DANIEL 5

This chapter gives an account of a feast made by King Belshazzar, attended with drunkenness, idolatry, and profanation of the vessels taken out of the temple at Jerusalem, (⁽²¹⁸⁾Daniel 5:1-4), and of the displeasure of God, signified by a handwriting on the wall, which terrified the king, and caused him to send in haste for the astrologers, etc. to read and interpret it, but they could not, (⁽²¹⁸⁾Daniel 5:5-8), in this distress, which appeared in the countenances of him and his nobles, the queen mother advises him to send for Daniel, of whom she gives a great encomium, (⁽²¹⁸⁾Daniel 5:9-12), upon which he was brought in to the king, and promised a great reward to read and interpret the writing; the reward he slighted, but promised to read and interpret the writing, (⁽²¹⁸⁾Daniel 5:13-17) and after putting him in mind of what had befallen his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar, and charging him with pride, idolatry, and profanation of the vessels of the Lord, (⁽²¹⁸⁾Daniel 5:18-23) reads and interprets the writing to him (⁽²¹⁸⁾Daniel 5:24-28), when he had honour done him, and was preferred in the government, (⁽²¹⁸⁾Daniel 5:29) and the chapter is concluded with an account of the immediate accomplishment of ancient prophecies, and of this handwriting, in the slaying of the king of Babylon, in the dissolution of the Babylonish monarchy, and the possession of it by Darius the Mede, (⁽²¹⁸⁾Daniel 5:30,31).

Ver. 1. *Belshazzar the king made a great feast,* etc.] This king was not the immediate successor of Nebuchadnezzar, but Evilmerodach, (⁽²⁶²⁾Jeremiah 52:31), who, according to Ptolemy's canon, reigned two years; then followed Neriglissar, his sister's husband, by whom he was slain, and who usurped the throne, and reigned four years; he died in the beginning of his fourth year, and left a son called Laborosoarchod, who reigned but nine months, which are placed by Ptolemy to his father's reign, and therefore he himself is not mentioned in the canon; and then followed this king, who by Ptolemy is called Nabonadius; by Berosus, Nabonnedus^{f187} by Abydenus^{f188}, Nabannidochus; by Herodotus^{f189}, Labynitus; and by Josephus^{f190}, Naboandelus, who, according to him, is the same with

Belshazzar; whom some confound with the son of Neriglissar; others take him to be the same with Evilmerodach, because he here immediately follows Nebuchadnezzar, and is called his son, (²⁷⁶¹Daniel 5:11,13,18), and others that he was a younger brother, so Jarchi and Theodoret; but the truth is, that he was the son of Evilmerodach, and grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, which agrees with the prophecy in (²⁷⁰⁷Jeremiah 27:7), for though Nebuchadnezzar is called his father, and he his son, (²⁷⁶²Daniel 5:2,11,13,18,22) this is said after the manner of the eastern nations, who used to call ancestors fathers, and their more remote posterity sons. He had his name Belshazzar from the idol Bel, and may be rendered, “Bel’s treasurer”: though, according to Saadiah, the word signifies “a searcher of treasures”, of his ancestors, or of the house of God. Hillerus translates it, “Bel hath hidden”. This king

made a great feast; or “bread”^{f191}, which is put for all provisions; it was great, both on account of plenty of food, variety of dishes, and number of guests, and those of the highest rank and quality. On what account this feast was made is not easy to say; whether out of contempt of Cyrus and his army, by whom he was now besieged, and to show that he thought himself quite safe and secure in a city so well walled and fortified, and having in it such vast quantities of provision; or whether it was on account of a victory he had obtained that morning over the Medes and Persians, as Josephus Ben Gorion^{f192} relates; and therefore in the evening treated his thousand lords, who had been engaged in battle with him, and behaved well: though it seems to have been an anniversary feast; since, according to Xenophon and Herodotus, Cyrus knew of it before hand; either on account of the king’s birthday, or in honour to his gods, particularly Shach, which was called the Sachaenan feast; (see Gill on “²⁷²⁵Jeremiah 25:26”) (see Gill on “²⁷⁴⁴Jeremiah 51:41”) which seems most likely, since these were praised at this time, and the vessels of the temple of God at Jerusalem profaned, (²⁷⁶³Daniel 5:2-4), this feast was prophesied of by Isaiah, (²⁷⁰⁵Isaiah 21:5) and by Jeremiah, (²⁷³⁹Jeremiah 51:39), it had its name from Shach, one of their deities, of which (see Gill on “²⁷⁰⁴Daniel 1:4”) (see Gill on “²⁷⁰⁷Daniel 1:7”) the same with Belus or the sun. The feasts kept in honour of it were much like the Saturnalia of the Romans, or the Purim of the Jews; and were kept eleven days together, in which everyone did as he pleased, no order and decorum being observed; and, for five of those days especially, there was no difference between master and servant, yea, the latter had the government of the former; and they spent day and night in dancing and

drinking, and in all excess of riot and revelling^{f193}; and in such like manner the Babylonians were indulging themselves, when their city was taken by Cyrus, as the above writers assert^{f194}; and from the knowledge Cyrus had of it, it appears to be a stated feast, and very probably on the above account. According to Strabo^{f195}, there was a feast of this name among the Persians, which was celebrated in honour of the goddess Anais, Diana, or the moon; and at whose altar they placed together Amanus and Anandratus, Persian demons; and appointed a solemn convention once a year, called Sacae. Some say the occasion of it was this; that Cyrus making an expedition against the Sacse, a people in Scythia, pretended a flight, and left his tents full of all provisions, and especially wine, which they finding, filled themselves with it; when he returning upon them, finding some overcome with wine and stupefied, others overwhelmed with sleep, and others dancing and behaving in a bacchanalian way, they fell into his hands, and almost all of them perished; and taking this victory to be from the gods, he consecrated that day to the god of his country, and called it Sacaea; and wherever there was a temple of this deity, there was appointed a bacchanalian feast, in which men, and women appeared night and day in a Scythian habit, drinking together, and behaving to one another in a jocose and lascivious manner; but this could not be the feast now observed at Babylon, though it is very probable it was something of the like nature, and observed in much the same manner. And was made “to a thousand of his lords”; his nobles, the peers of his realm, governors of provinces, etc.; such a number of guests Ptolemy king of Egypt feasted at one time of Pompey’s army, as Pliny from Varro relates^{f196}; but Alexander far exceeded, who at a wedding had nine (some say ten) thousand at his tables, and gave to everyone a cup of gold, to offer wine in honour of the gods^{f197}; and Pliny reports^{f198} of one Pythius Bythinus, who entertained the whole army of Xerxes with a feast, even seven hundred and eighty eight thousand men.

And drank wine before the thousand; not that he strove with them who should drink most, or drank to everyone of them separately, and so a thousand cups, as Jacchiades suggests; but he drank in the presence of them, to show his condescension and familiarity; this being, as Aben Ezra observes, contrary to the custom of kings, especially of the eastern nations, who were seldom seen in public. This feast was kept in a large house or hall, as Josephus^{f199} says, afterwards called the banqueting house, (⁻²⁷⁵⁰Daniel 5:10).

Ver. 2. *Belshazzar, while he tasted the wine*, etc.] As he was drinking his cups, and delighted with the taste of the wine, and got merry with it: or, “by the advice of the wine”^{f200}, as Aben Ezra and Jarchi interpret it, by a personification; as if that dictated to him, and put him upon doing what follows; and which often puts both foolish and wicked things into the heads of men, and upon doing them: then he

commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels, which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem; what these vessels were, and the number of them, we learn from the delivery of them afterwards to the prince of Judah by Cyrus, (^{<1500>}Ezra 1:9-11), these were put into the temple of Bel by Nebuchadnezzar, (^{<2000>}Daniel 1:2) and from thence they were now ordered to be brought to the king’s palace, and to the apartment where he and his nobles were drinking:

that the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, might drink therein; Saadiah says, this day the seventy years’ captivity ended; and so, in contempt of the promise and prophecy of it, he ordered the vessels to be brought out and drank in, to show that in vain the Jews expected redemption from it.

Ver. 3. *Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God which was at Jerusalem*, etc.] That is, the servants to whom the orders were given fetched them from the temple of Bel, and brought them to the king’s house; and though only mention is made of golden vessels, yet no doubt the silver ones were also brought, according to the king’s command:

and the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, drank in them; by which they were profaned, being dedicated to holy uses, but now put to common use, and that by such impious persons; and who did it, not on account of the value and antiquity of these vessels, and in admiration of them, and to the honour of their festival; but in contempt of them, and in a profane and scurrilous way, as follows:

Ver. 4. *They drunk wine*, etc.] That is, out of the vessels of the temple at Jerusalem, and perhaps till they were drunk:

and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone; for they had gods of all these materials; (see Gill on “^{<2000>}Daniel 1:2”), and these they praised by offering sacrifices unto them; or rather by singing songs, and drinking healths, and by ascribing all their victories over

the nations of the world to them; as that by their means they had got such large dominions, and such great wealth and treasures, and particularly these vessels of gold and silver; and so insulted and triumphed over the God of Israel, and defied the prophecies and promises of the deliverance of them that went under his name.

Ver. 5. *In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand*, etc. From heaven, as Jarchi; or they came forth as if they came out of the wall: this was done by the power of God, though it might be by the intervention or means of an angel; so Josephus Ben Gorion^{f201} says, that an angel came and wrote what follows; and Saadiah says it was Gabriel, called a man, (^{<2712>}Daniel 11:21), but this is conjecture; however, at the very time the king and his nobles were feasting and revelling, praising their idols, and reproaching the God of Israel, this wonderful phenomenon appeared:

and wrote over against the candlestick, upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace; this candlestick was either upon the table, as Saadiah; or affixed to the wall, or hung as a chandelier in the midst of the hall; or, be it where it will, right over against it this hand appeared, and wrote, that, by the light of it, it might be clearly and distinctly seen: though Gussetius^{f202} thinks, not a candlestick, but a "buffet", is meant; where stood the drinking cups and vessels, and which he takes to be more agreeable to the signification of the word; and moreover observes, that it is not likely this feast should be made in the night, or at least it is not certain it was, or that it was yet night when this affair happened: however, this writing was upon the plaster of the wall, made of lime, and was white; and if the writing was with red colour, as Ben Gorion says, it was the more visible:

and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote; the back part of the hand; had he only seen a writing, but no hand writing it, he might have thought it was done by some present; but seeing a hand, and only part of one, or however not any other members of the body of a man, nor a man himself, it struck him with surprise, and he concluded at once there was something extraordinary in it; whether any other saw the hand besides himself is not certain; however, he saw it for whom it was particularly designed.

Ver. 6. *Then the kings countenance changed*, etc.] Or, "his brightness"^{f203}; his ruddy countenance, his florid looks, his gay airs; all his jollity and mirth, that appeared in his face, were changed into paleness, sadness, and confusion:

and his thoughts troubled him; what should be the meaning of this; perhaps he might immediately fear it presaged ruin and destruction to him; the sins of his former life might at once come into his thoughts, and those particularly he had now been guilty of; his luxury and intemperance, his idolatry and profanation of the vessels of the sanctuary, which his conscience might accuse him of, and give him great distress and trouble:

so that the joints of his loins were loosed; or, “the girdles of his loins”^{f204}; which were loosed or broke, through the agitation he was in; or he was all over in a sweat, so that he was obliged to loose his girdle; or, as persons in great fear and consternation, he was seized with a pain in his back; it opened as it were; nor could he hold his urine; as Grotius and others; (see ²³⁵¹Isaiah 45:1), where this seems to be prophesied of:

and his knees smote one against another; as is the case of persons in a great tremor, or under a panic. “Et subito genua intremuere timore”.-- Ovid.

Ver. 7. *The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers*, etc.] Or, “with strength”^{f205}; with a strong voice, as loud as he could; which is expressive of the fright he was in, and of his eagerness and impatience of information; laying aside all decency, and forgetting his royal majesty, like a man out of his senses, quite distracted, as it were: of the “astrologers”, etc. (see Gill on “²⁰⁰¹Daniel 1:20”), (see Gill on “²⁰⁰²Daniel 2:2”), this was the usual course the kings of Babylon took, when they had matters of difficulty upon them, as appears from (²⁰⁰³Daniel 2:2 4:6,7) and though they found it oftentimes fruitless and vain, yet still they pursued it; so besotted and addicted were they to this kind of superstition:

and the king spake and said to the wise men of Babylon; who were presently brought in from the several parts of the city where they dwelt, and probably many of them might be at court at that time; and being introduced into the hall where the king and his nobles were, he addressed them in the following manner;

whosoever shall read this writing, and show me the interpretation thereof: pointing to the writing upon the wall, which continued; and which neither the king nor any about him could read or interpret, and therefore both are required to be done:

he shall be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about his neck; or “with purple”^{f206}; the colour wore by persons of rank and figure; and the chain of gold was an emblem of honour and dignity, and more to be regarded for that than for the value of the gold of which it was made:

and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom; not rule over the third part of the kingdom, as Aben Ezra; but be the third man in the kingdom; next to the king and the queen mother, or to the king and the heir apparent; or one of the third principal rulers; or one of the three presidents of the kingdom, as Daniel afterwards was.

Ver. 8. *Then came in all the king’s wise men,* etc.] The whole college of them, the persons before described; over whom, in Nebuchadnezzar’s time, Daniel was the chief of the governors, (²⁰⁸Daniel 2:48), these came in readily, in hope of getting both riches and honour:

but they could not read the writing, nor make known to the king the interpretation thereof; for if they could not do the former, it must be impossible to do the latter; of the reason of which, various are the conjectures^{f207}: as that, though these words were written in Chaldee, yet in characters, as the Samaritan or Phoenician, they did not understand; or were written without points, and so they knew not which were the proper ones to put to them; or they were written according to the position of the letters of the alphabet, called “athbash”, of which (see Gill on “²⁵⁵Jeremiah 25:26”), or the words were placed so as to be read backward, or else downward, and not straightforward; or they were all in one word; or only the initial letters of words; but the true reason was, that it was so ordained by the Lord, that they should not be able to read and interpret them; this being reserved for another man, Daniel, that he might have the honour, and God the glory.

Ver. 9. *Then was King Belshazzar greatly troubled,* etc.] A second time, and perhaps more than before; since he had conceived some hope that his wise men would have informed him what this writing was, and the meaning of it; but finding that they were nonplussed by it, it gave him still greater uneasiness:

and his countenance was changed in him; again; very likely, upon the coming in of the wise men, he had a little recovered himself, and became more composed and serene; which appeared in his countenance; but, upon

this disappointment, his countenance changed again, and he turned pale, and looked ghastly:

and his lords were astonished; were in the utmost consternation and confusion, when they understood that the writing could neither be read nor interpreted; neither the dignity of their station, nor their numbers, nor their liquor, could keep up their spirits; so that the king had not one with him, to speak a comfortable word to him, or give him any advice in this his time of distress; they were all in the same condition with himself.

Ver. 10. *Now the queen, by reason of the words of the king and his lords, came into the banquet house*, etc.] Not the wife of Belshazzar, as Porphyry would have it; but rather the queen mother, as Jacchiades, the widow of Evilmerodach his father, whose name was Nitocris; and is spoken of, by Herodotus^{f208}, as a very prudent woman; and as this seems to be by her words and conduct: though Josephus^{f209} says it was his grandmother, she who had been the wife of Nebuchadnezzar; and of this opinion were some mentioned by Aben Ezra; whose name was Amyitis; and it appears, by what she says afterwards, that she was well acquainted with affairs in his time; and, being an ancient woman, might be the reason why she was not among the ladies at the feast in the banqueting house; but came into it, without being sent for, on hearing the consternation and distress the king and his lords were in, and the moanful despairing words they expressed on this occasion:

and the queen spake and said, O king, live for ever; the usual salutation given to the kings of Babylon, and other eastern monarchs; (see ~~2000~~ Daniel 2:4 6:21):

let not thy thoughts trouble thee, nor let thy countenance be changed; at this affair, as if it could never be understood, and the true meaning of it be given; but be of good cheer, and put on a good countenance; there is hope yet that it may be cleared up to satisfaction.

Ver. 11. *There is a man in thy kingdom*, etc.] She does not say in his court; very probably, after the death of Nebuchadnezzar, perhaps in one of the former reigns, he was removed from his offices; for, had he been in one, very likely the queen would have described him by it; and this seems to receive confirmation by the question Belshazzar put to him upon his coming into his presence,

art thou that Daniel, etc.; and only says that he had heard of him, (²⁰¹³Daniel 5:13,14):

in whom is the spirit of the holy gods; something divine, something more than human; she uses the very words of Nebuchadnezzar; which seems to confirm that opinion, that she was his widow, (²⁰⁰⁸Daniel 4:8):

and in the days of thy father light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, was found in him; “light” in the knowledge of things obscure; understanding in the interpretation of dreams; and “wisdom” in things both human and divine, like that of an angel of God, as Jacchiades interprets “Elohim”: of this instances were given in the days of his grandfather, for so Nebuchadnezzar was; nor is it unusual for a grandfather to be called a father, and even a more remote ancestor; which instances were, telling him his dream when he had forgot it, as well as the interpretation of it; and explaining his dream or vision of the tree cut down to its stump; of which see Daniel chapters two and four:

whom the king Nebuchadnezzar thy father, the king, I say, thy father, made master of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers, (²⁰¹⁸Daniel 2:48) she seems tacitly to upbraid him with his neglect of such a man, or with turning him out of his office, when so great a prince as his grandfather was took so much notice of him, and so highly advanced him.

Ver. 12. *Forasmuch as an excellent spirit*, etc.] A superior spirit to all the wise men in Babylon for natural knowledge and political wisdom; and he had yet a more excellent spirit which she knew nothing of, and was no judge of; a spirit of real grace, and true piety and devotion:

and knowledge, and understanding, interpreting of dreams; of which interpreting two of Nebuchadnezzar’s was a proof:

and showing hard sentences: or explaining enigmas and riddles, or proverbial, parabolical, and figurative phrases and expressions:

and dissolving of doubts: or untying knots, solving problems, and answering knotty, intricate, and difficult questions:

were found in the same Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar; the prince of his eunuchs gave him that name, perhaps by the king’s order; however, it was confirmed by him; he called him by it, and says it was according to the name of his god; (see ²⁰⁰³Daniel 1:7 4:8):

now let Daniel be called, and he will show the interpretation; this she was confident of, from the knowledge she had of the above facts.

Ver. 13. *Then was Daniel brought in before the king,* etc.] Proper officers being sent to seek and find him; and having fetched him from his house or apartment where he lived, which seems to have been in the city of Babylon, though not very probably at court as formerly, he was introduced in form into the king's presence;

and the king spake and said unto Daniel, art thou that Daniel, which art of the children of the captivity of Judah, whom the king my father brought out of Jewry? by which it appears he did not know him, at least had forgot him; not having admitted him to any familiarity with him, as his grandfather had done; and though the queen had given such great commendations of him, yet the king does not treat him with that respect as might have been expected, and as Nebuchadnezzar did, (^(274B)Daniel 4:9), but seems to reproach him with his servile condition, being a captive whom his grandfather had brought out of Judea, as it were triumphing over him and his people; which shows the haughtiness of his heart, and that it was not brought down by this consternation and fright he was thrown into.

Ver. 14. *I have even heard of thee,* etc.] Very probably he had heard often of him, though he did not think fit to honour him, and use him with that familiarity his grandfather had; or however he had now just heard of him by the queen, whose encomiums of him he recites in her own words:

that the spirit of the gods is in thee, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom is found in thee; which are the express words of his mother, (^(275B)Daniel 5:11,12).

Ver. 15. *And now the wise men; the astrologers, have been brought in before me,* etc.] For it seems they came not of themselves, or upon hearing his loud cry; but were sent for by him, and came by his orders, and were introduced into his presence by the proper officers:

that they should read this writing, and make known unto me the interpretation thereof; pointing to the writing upon the wall:

but they could not show the interpretation of the thing; nor even read it; though it may be some of them might attempt to read it, and did read it in their way, as well as they could, or at least pretended to read; yet could

make no manner of sense of it, which was the thing the king was intent upon.

Ver. 16. *And I have heard of thee*, etc.] That is, by the queen, which he repeats for the sake of observing what she had said of him, and which gave him encouragement to send for him:

that thou canst make interpretations; of dreams, and of things hard to be understood:

and dissolve doubts; untie knots, solve difficulties, and answer hard and intricate questions:

now if thou canst read the writing, and make known to me the interpretation thereof; that which is upon the wall before thee, and which the wise men of Babylon could not:

thou shalt be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about thy neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom; the same reward he had proposed to the astrologers and soothsayers, (²¹⁰Daniel 5:7) but what was no temptation or motive to Daniel, as appears by what follows:

Ver. 17. *Then Daniel answered and said before the king*, etc.] With great freedom, boldness, and intrepidity:

let thy gifts be to thyself; remain with thee; I neither want them, nor desire them; nor will I receive them on condition of reading and interpreting the writing:

and give thy rewards to another; which he had promised to those that could read and interpret the handwriting on the wall; even to be clothed with scarlet, have a golden chain, and be the third ruler in the kingdom. It may be rendered, “or give thy rewards to another”^{f210}; either keep them thyself, or give them to whomsoever thou pleasest: should it be asked, why Daniel refused gifts now, when he received them from Nebuchadnezzar? it may be answered, he was then young, and wanted them, and could make use of them for the benefit of his countrymen, but now was old, and needed them not; besides, he knew then that the captivity would continue long, but that it was now just at an end, and the monarchy coming into other hands, when these gifts and rewards would be of little use; as also this king was a very wicked one, worse than his grandfather, and he did not choose to receive from him; and especially since the interpretation of the

writing would be bad news to him; as well as to let him know that he did not do these things for fee and reward, but for the glory of God; and that as he had freely received such knowledge, he freely communicated it: and therefore adds,

yet I will read the writing to the king, and make known to him the interpretation; in reverence of him as a king, and in subjection to him, and to satisfy him in this matter; for he refused his gifts, not from pride and vanity, and a supercilious contempt of the king and his affairs; nor as being doubtful of success in reading and interpreting the writing; which he well knew he was able to do, and therefore promises it.

Ver. 18. *O thou king,* etc.] “Hear”^{f211}, O king; so Aben Ezra supplies it; what he was about to say first, in order to prepare him for the meaning of the handwriting, and the cause of it; or, “thou knowest”, as Saadiah supplies it; namely, what follows:

the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom: a very large one, which reached to the ends of the earth: this was not to be ascribed to his predecessor that left it to him; or to his victorious arms, which increased it; or to his idol gods, to whom he attributed it; but to the most high God, from whom promotion alone cometh; and who, being above all gods and kings, sets up, and pulls down, as he pleases; he gave him his large dominions:

and majesty, and glory, and honour; greatness among men; glory and honour from them, on account of the majesty of his person and kingdom; the victories he obtained, and the great things he did to make him famous while he lived, and to perpetuate his memory after death.

Ver. 19. *And for the majesty that he gave him,* etc.] The greatness of his power, the largeness of his dominions, and the vast armies he had at his command:

all people, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him; not only those that were subject to him, but those that had only heard of him: who dreaded his approach unto them, and their falling into his victorious hands, and being made vassals to him:

whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; he ruled in an arbitrary and despotic manner, and kept the power of life and death in his own hands; whom he would he put to death, though ever so innocent; and

whom he would he preserved from death, though ever so deserving of it; he had no regard to justice, but acted according to his own will and pleasure. Jacchiades renders the last clause, “whom he would he smote”: but both the punctuation of the word, and the antithesis in the text, require the sense our version gives, and which is confirmed by Aben Ezra and Saadiah:

and whom he would he set up: and whom he would he put down; according to his pleasure, he raised persons from a low estate to great dignity, and put them into high posts of honour and profit, as he did Daniel: and others he as much debased, turned them out of their places, and reduced them to the lowest degree of disgrace and poverty; and all according to his absolute and irresistible will, without giving any reason for what he did.

Ver. 20. *But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened it pride*, etc.] When his heart was elated with his successes and victories, with the enlargement of his dominions, and with his grandeur and glory he had arrived unto; and his pride increased yet more, till he was strengthened and hardened in it: or, “to deal proudly”^{f212}; and behave haughtily to God and man: or, “to do wickedly”, as Jarchi interprets it; for pride and haughtiness of mind puts men, especially great men, kings and monarchs, on doing things extremely vile and wicked:

he was deposed from his kingly throne; not by his nobles and subjects, but by the hand of God, which struck him with madness, and made him unfit for government; obliged him to quit the throne, and to range among the beasts of the field, as is afterwards observed:

and they took his glory from him; the watchers, the angels, or the divine Persons that ordered the tree to be cut down to the roots, (~~2014~~ Daniel 4:14,17,23), or it may be rendered impersonally, “and his glory was taken from him”^{f213}; his glory as a man, being deprived of his reason, and acting like a brute beast; and his glory as a king, which departed from him for a season, while he was driven from men, from his royal palace and court, and lived among beasts, and fed as they did, as follows:

Ver. 21. *And he was driven from the sons of men*, etc.] From their company, and from conversation with them; his madness was of that kind, that he chose rather to be with beasts than men; it drove him from men, and made him more desirous of being with beasts; or it was so intolerable, that his family, friends, and courtiers, were obliged to remove him from

them, from his palace and court, and from all conversation with men, which he was incapable of through his frenzy and madness:

and his heart was made like the beasts; to have the same affections and desires as they have; to crave the same things they did, and like what they liked, and live as they lived: or, “he put his heart with the beasts”^{f214}; either Nebuchadnezzar himself chose to be with them, and delighted in a beastly life; or God did it; he put such a heart into him, or so disposed it, that it became brutish; though to read the words impersonally, as before, seems best:

and his dwelling was with the wild asses; in a wilderness or field; or rather in some enclosed place, in one of his parks, where such creatures were kept for hunting; among these he dwelt, as being like them, having lost the use of his reason, and so was become stupid and sottish as they:

and they fed him with grass like oxen; as they are fed, and which he chose above any other food:

and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; being without clothes, and lying naked in some open place all night:

till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will: till he came to his senses, and was brought to see and own the sovereign dominion of the one, true, and living God, over all the kingdoms of the earth, and that they are at his dispose; (²⁰⁶²Daniel 4:32).

Ver. 22. *And thou his son, O Belshazzar*, etc.] His grandson; (see Gill on ²¹⁶¹Daniel 5:1”):

hast not humbled thine heart; so as to acknowledge the most high God, and his dependence on him; to own him as his Sovereign, by whom he held his crown and kingdom, and to whom he was accountable; but, on the contrary, lifted up his heart in pride and haughtiness against him:

though thou knewest all this; either by the relation of others, his father and mother, and others; or being an eyewitness of it himself; wherefore his sin was the more aggravated, since he had had an example before him of pride being humbled in a very awful manner, and yet took no warning by it.

Ver. 23. *But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven*, etc.] Who made it, and dwells in it; from whence he beholds all the actions of the

children of men, and will bring them to an account for them; and yet, though so high and great, such was the insolence of this king, that he dared to lift up himself against him, as if he was above him, and greater than he; and indeed so it may be rendered, “above the Lord of heaven”^{f215}; which showed his great pride and vanity, his want of knowledge, both of himself, and of the true God. This name of God is the same with Beelsamen^{f216}; by which the Phoenicians used to call him:

and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee; that is, his servants by his orders had brought the vessels of the temple at Jerusalem, which Nebuchadnezzar had took from thence, and set them upon his table for him and his company to drink out of; which is an instance of the pride of his heart, and of his daring boldness and impiety; (see ^{<216>}Daniel 5:2,3):

and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drank wine in them; even that very day or night: this Daniel had knowledge of by some means or another; and his intelligence was so good that he could with great certainty affirm it:

and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone; (see ^{<216>}Daniel 5:4):

which see not, nor hear, nor know; no more, than the various metals and materials of which they are made; and therefore it must be great madness and folly to praise such as gods that are below men, and even brutes; have neither the sense of animals, nor the knowledge of men; see (^{<216>}Psalms 115:4-7):

and the God in whose hand thy breath is; who gave it to him at first, and as yet continued it in him, and could take it away when he pleased: and whose are all thy ways; counsels and designs, works and actions; under whose direction and control they all are; the events, issue, and success of which all depend upon him; (see ^{<216>}Jeremiah 10:23):

him hast thou not glorified; by owning him as the only true God; ascribing all he was and had unto him, and giving due worship, adoration, and honour to him; but, on the contrary, setting up his idol gods above him, and treating him, and everything belonging to him, with ignominy and contempt.

Ver. 24. *Then was the part of the hand sent from him*, etc.] That is, from God: being thus reproached and blasphemed, at that very instant, and for

that reason, because the vessels of his sanctuary were profaned, and idol gods were praised, and he despised; he caused part of a hand, the writing fingers of it, to appear on the wall of the king's palace:

and this writing was written; which was then upon the wall, and he points to it.

Ver. 25. *And this is the writing that was written*, etc.] They are such and such letters, and so to be read, as follows:

MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN; which are Chaldee words, and may be literally rendered, “he hath numbered, he hath numbered”; that is, God hath certainly, perfectly, and exactly numbered; “he hath weighed”, God hath weighed thee, Belshazzar; “and they divide the kingdom”; that is, the Medes and Persians, as appears from the following interpretation:

Ver. 26. *This is the interpretation of the thing*, etc.] Or, “word”^{f217}; for they might all seem as one word; or this is the sense of the whole:

MENE; as for this word, it signifies,

God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it; God had fixed the number of years, how long that monarchy should last, which he was now at the head of, and which was foretold, (²⁵⁰¹Jeremiah 25:1, 11, 12 27:7), and also the number of years that he should reign over it; and both these numbers were now completed; for that very night Belshazzar was slain, and the kingdom translated to another people: and a dreadful thing it is to be numbered to the sword, famine, and pestilence, or any sore judgment of God for sin, as sometimes men are; so more especially to be appointed to everlasting wrath, and to be numbered among transgressors, among the devils and damned in hell.

Ver. 27. *TEKEL*, etc.] As for the meaning of this word, and what it points at, it is this:

thou art weighed in the balances: of justice and truth, in the holy righteous law of God; as gold, and jewels, and precious stones, are weighed in the scales by the goldsmith and jeweller with great exactness, to know the worth of them:

and art found wanting; found to be adulterated gold, reprobate silver, bad coin, a false stone; found to be a worthless man, a wicked prince, wanting the necessary qualifications of wisdom, goodness, mercy, truth, and justice.

The Scriptures of truth, the word of God, contained in the books of the Old and New Testament, are the balances of the sanctuary, in which persons, principles, and practices, are to be weighed; and sad it is where they are found light and wanting: men, both of high and low degree, when put here, are lighter than vanity. The Pharisee, or self-righteous person, when weighed in the balance of God's law, which is holy, just, and good, will be found wanting of that holiness and righteousness he pretends to, and appear to be an unholy and an unrighteous man; his righteousness, neither for the matter of it, nor manner of performing it, being agreeable to that law, and so no righteousness in the sense of it, (^{<OR25>}Deuteronomy 6:25), it being imperfect, and so leaves him to the curse of it, (^{<810>}Galatians 3:10), and not being performed in a pure and spiritual manner that it requires, is rejected by it; and miserable will be the case of such a man at the day of judgment, when his works will be found wanting, and not answerable to the demands of a righteous law, and he without the wedding garment of Christ's righteousness, and so naked and speechless. The hypocrite, and formal professor, when weighed in the balance of the Scripture, will be found wanting the true grace of God; his faith will appear to be feigned, and his hope groundless, and his love to be in word and in tongue only, and not at all to answer to the description of true grace given in the word of God; and bad will it be with such persons at last, when at the bridegroom's coming they will be destitute of the oil of true and real grace; only have that which is counterfeit, and the mere lamp of an outward profession, which will then stand them in no stead, or be of any avail unto them: in the same balances are the doctrines and principles of men to be weighed; and, such as are according to them are solid and weighty, and are comparable to gold, silver, and precious stones; but such as are not are light, and like wood, hay, and stubble, which the fire of the word will reveal, try, and burn up, not being able to stand against it; and if these are weighed in the balances, they will be found wanting of real truth and goodness, and be but as chaff to wheat; and what is the one to the other? there is no comparison between them; and dreadful will be the case of false teachers, that make and teach an abomination and a lie; and of those that are given up to believe them, these will not be able to stand the trying hour of temptation, and much less the last and final judgment. Sad for preachers of the word to be found wanting in their ministry, and hearers to be wanting in their duty; not taking care neither what they hear, nor how they hear, or whether they put in practice the good they do hear.

Ver. 28. *PERES*, etc.] The singular of “Pharsin”, (²¹⁸Daniel 5:25). The sense of this word is,

thy kingdom is divided: which, though it consisted of various provinces, united under Belshazzar, now should be broken and separated from him:

and given to the Medes and Persians; to Darius the Mede, and to Cyrus the Persian, who was a partner for a while with his uncle Darius in the government of the empire: there is an elegant play on words in the words “Peres” and “Persians”; and a grievous thing it is to sinners, not only to have body and soul divided at death, but to be divided and separated from God to all eternity; and to hear that sentence, “depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels”.

Ver. 29. *Then commanded Belshazzar*, etc.] As soon as he had heard the writing read and interpreted; instead of being full of wrath, as might have been expected, he orders the reward promised to be given, to show he had a regard to his word and honour, as a king; and to secure his credit with his nobles and people; and perhaps he might not understand, by Daniel’s interpretation, that the destruction of him and his kingdom was so near at hand as it was; or he might put this evil day far from him, and hope it might be prevented:

and they clothed Daniel with scarlet; the king’s servants by his orders: or,

that they should clothe Daniel with scarlet^{f218}; these were his orders; but whether executed is not certain; probably not, since the king was slain the same night; and so the rest of the clauses may be read,

and should put a chain of gold about his neck, and should make proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom; all which was the reward promised to him that should read and interpret the writing, (²¹⁹Daniel 5:7,16), but that this was done, the king’s death being so sudden, does not appear; and therefore it is needless to inquire the reasons of Daniel’s acceptance after his refusal.

Ver. 30. *In that night was Belshazzar, the king of the Chaldeans, slain.*] Not by a servant of his own, as Jacchiades; or by an eunuch, one of his guards, as Saadiah and Joseph ben Gorion^{f219}; but by Gadales and Gobryas, who led Cyrus’s army up the river Euphrates into the city of Babylon, its course being turned; the inhabitants of which being revelling and rioting, and the gates open, these men went up to the king’s palace; the doors of

which being opened by the king's orders to know what was the matter, they rushed in, and finding him standing up with his sword drawn in his own defence, they fell upon him, and slew him, and all about him, as Xenophon^{f220} relates; and this was the same night the feast was, and the handwriting was seen, read, and interpreted. This was after a reign of seventeen years; for so Josephus says^{f221}, that Baltasar or Belshazzar, in whose reign Babylon was taken, reigned seventeen years; and so many years are assigned to him in Ptolemy's canon; though the Jewish chronicle^{f222} allows him but three years, very wrongly, no more of his reign being mentioned in Scripture: (see ²⁰⁰⁰Daniel 7:1). His death, according to Bishop Usher^{f223}, Mr. Whiston^{f224}, and Mr. Bedford^{f225}, was in the year of the world 3466 A.M., and 538 B.C. Dean Prideaux^{f226} places it in 539 B.C.

Ver. 31. *And Darius the Median took the kingdom*, etc.] This was Cyaxares the son of Astyages, and uncle of Cyrus; he is called the Median, to distinguish him from another Darius the Persian, that came after, (¹⁵⁰⁰Ezra 4:5), the same took the kingdom of Babylon from Cyrus who conquered it; he took it with his consent, being the senior prince and his uncle. Darius reigned not long, but two years; and not alone, but Cyrus with him, though he is only mentioned. Xenophon^{f227} says, that Cyrus, after he took Babylon, set out for Persia, and took Media on his way; and, saluting Cyaxares or Darius, said that there was a choice house and court for him in Babylon, where he might go and live as in his own:

being about threescore and two years old; and so was born in the eighth year of Nebuchadnezzar, the year in which Jechoniah was carried captive, (¹²⁴²2 Kings 24:12), thus God in his counsels and providence took care that a deliverer of his people should be raised up and provided against the appointed time. Darius was older than Cyrus, as appears by several passages in Xenophon; in one place^{f228} Cyaxares or Darius says,

“since I am present, and am “elder” than Cyrus, it is fit that I should speak first;”

and in another place^{f229}, Cyrus, writing to him, says,

“I give thee counsel, though I am the younger”

and by comparing this account of the age of Darius with a passage in Cicero, which gives the age of Cyrus, we learn how much older than he Darius was; for, out of the books of Dionysius the Persian, he relates^{f230}, that Cyrus dreaming he saw the sun at his feet, which he three times

endeavoured to catch and lay hold upon, but in vain, it sliding from him; this, the Magi said, portended that he should reign thirty years, and so he did; for he lived to be seventy years of age, and began to reign when he was forty; which, if reckoned from his reigning with his uncle, then he must be twenty two years younger; or if from the time of his being sole monarch, then the difference of age between them must be twenty four years; though it should be observed that those that make him to reign thirty years begin his reign from the time of his being appointed commander-in-chief of the Medes and Persians by Cyaxares^{f231}, which was twenty three years before he reigned alone, which was but seven years^{f232}; and this account makes but very little difference in their age; and indeed some^{f233} have taken them to be one and the same, their descent, age, and succession in the Babylonian empire, agreeing.