

• LESSON 5 (February 4) •

## The God in Whose Hand is Your Breath

### BACKGROUND:

- Between the end of Daniel 4 and the beginning of Daniel 5, we flash forward more than twenty years. Nebuchadnezzar died in 562 B.C. and Babylon fell to Cyrus in 539 B.C. A lot transpired in those two decades.
  - Nebuchadnezzar's son, Amel-Marduk, ascended the throne and reigned for about two years. He was assassinated in August 560 by Neriglissar, whose brief reign of four years was very tumultuous.
  - Neriglissar was succeeded by his son, Labashi-Marduk, who held on to the throne for nine months before being assassinated in a coup. Nabonidus became king in 556 B.C. Belshazzar (who is highlighted in Daniel 5) was the oldest son of Nabonidus. The bottom line: things unraveled for Babylon after Nebuchadnezzar's death.
- On the eve of Babylon's collapse, Belshazzar held a feast (Isa 21:5; Jer 51:39). The Babylonians knew they were about to be attacked by Cyrus' army, but they were confident! Herodotus (*Histories* 1.190) and Xenophon (*Cyropaedia* 7.5.13) claim Babylon could have endured a siege of twenty years with their massive stockpile of provisions. This feast took place on the night of October 12, 539. Days earlier, the Babylonian army had fallen to Cyrus at Opis. Belshazzar had gathered the "Who's Who" of the city to invoke the protection of the gods.
- Nearly a century and a half prior, Isaiah had prophesied the fall of Babylon (Isa 13, 21, 47), specifically at the hands of a divinely-appointed king named Cyrus (Isa 45). Jeremiah had prophesied that Babylon would sink like a rock to the bottom of history's river "to rise no more" (Jer 51:64).

### QUESTIONS WORTH THINKING ABOUT:

1. Do your best to describe why the actions described in Daniel 5:2-4 were so serious.
2. What does Daniel 5:17 tell us about Daniel?
3. What would it have meant for Belshazzar to have "humbled [his] heart"?
4. Daniel references the Babylonian idols in Daniel 5:23. Isaiah exposed the foolishness of devotion to these idols in Isaiah 46. How would you summarize his critique?
5. Daniel draws Belshazzar's attention to "the God in whose hand is your breath." What does this phrase mean? (Dan 5:23; Job 12:10; Psa 104:29; Acts 17:28)
6. What should we learn from this man and his kingdom who had been "weighed in the balances and found wanting"?

**CLOSING THOUGHT:** "Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, 'There is peace and security,' then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape" (1 Thes 5:1-3).