

NABONIDUS, BELSHAZZAR, AND THE BOOK OF DANIEL: AN UPDATE

WILLIAM H. SHEA
Andrews University

More than half a century has now passed since R. P. Dougherty's significant monograph was published in 1929, summarizing what was known up to then about Nabonidus and Belshazzar.¹ Certain further pieces of information about these two historical figures have surfaced in the meantime, and the present seems like an appropriate juncture at which to review the evidence and examine the relationship of Nabonidus and Belshazzar to the biblical record. Of Nabonidus we can only speak indirectly in this latter connection, since he is not mentioned by name in the Bible. Belshazzar, however, figures prominently in the fifth chapter of Daniel, which refers to events taking place on the night Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians.

Aside from references in works dependent upon Daniel, such as Baruch and Josephus, Belshazzar, was unknown until his identity was recovered from cuneiform sources in the last half of the nineteenth century. Before that, interpreters of Daniel generally identified him with one or another of the previously known Neo-Babylonian kings.² Belshazzar's name was first found in Neo-Babylonian texts deciphered in the 1860s. A major advance in information about him came with publication by T. G. Pinches of the Nabonidus Chronicle. This document records that the crown prince, i.e., Belshazzar, remained in Babylonia with the army while Nabonidus was away in Tema for a number of years.³ Additional texts referring to Belshazzar appeared thereafter, a most significant one being the so-called Verse Account of Nabonidus, published in

¹R. P. Dougherty, *Nabonidus and Belshazzar* (New Haven, Conn., 1929).

²H. H. Rowley, *Darius the Mede and the Four World Empires* (Cardiff, 1935), p. 10.

³See *ANET*, p. 306.

1924 by Sidney Smith.⁴ This text refers specifically to the fact that Nabonidus "entrusted the kingship" of Babylon to the crown prince when he left for Tema.

Before examining the fifth chapter of Daniel, I shall deal with two other passages in Daniel that mention Belshazzar: the datelines of 7:1 and 8:1, referring to Belshazzar's first and third years, respectively. Then several specific matters relating to the fifth chapter itself will be considered.

1. *The Datelines of Dan 7:1 and 8:1*

In Dan 7:1 Belshazzar is referred to as "king of Babylon," and in 8:1 he is simply called "king." Historically, these designations and the dates of "first year" and "third year" can only apply to the time when Belshazzar managed matters in Babylonia while his father was in Tema, and they clearly imply an awareness of this arrangement in the Neo-Babylonian kingdom. Stemming from such a situation, these dates are obviously relative; they must somehow be correlated with Nabonidus' regnal years, since it was by Nabonidus' regnal years that the economic documents in Babylonia continued to be dated through his entire reign.

It is now known from C. J. Gadd's publication of Nabonidus' Harran Inscriptions that Nabonidus remained in Tema for a period of ten consecutive years during which he did not visit Babylon.⁵ The Nabonidus Chronicle indicates that he had taken up residence in Tema by no later than the 6th year of his reign (550/549 B.C.), and that he had returned to Babylon by the end of his 16th year (540/539).⁶ Unfortunately, breaks in the text of his Chronicle prevent us from delimiting the dates for this ten-year period any more precisely from this text. The Verse Account of Nabonidus and his Dream Cylinder from Sippar have been interpreted as indicating that he may originally have left for Tema as

⁴Sidney Smith, *Babylonian Historical Texts, Relating to the Capture and Downfall of Babylon* (London, 1924), pp. 83-91.

⁵C. J. Gadd, "The Harran Inscriptions of Nabonidus," *Anatolian Studies* 8 (1958): 58-59.

⁶*ANET*, p. 306.

early as his 3d or 4th year.⁷ Sources currently available do not provide a definitive date for that event, so that presently we must be content with locating his departure sometime during his 3d year (553/552) and his 6th year (550/549). Belshazzar's 1st year (Dan 7:1) should be connected with whatever year is selected for Nabonidus' first year in Tema, and his 3d year (Dan 8:1) would follow two years later.⁸

More important than determining the dates for Belshazzar's 1st and 3d years is the question of why he was identified as king in these two datelines when no cuneiform texts are known which refer to him as king. It is commonly suggested that Belshazzar was coregent with Nabonidus at this time. As senior coregent, it is natural that the economic documents written in Babylonia would have continued to be dated by Nabonidus' regnal years. There is no specific evidence, however, to indicate that Belshazzar was installed as king at this time. Entrusting the kingship to Belshazzar, as mentioned in the Verse Account, is not the same as making him king. The Verse Account refers to Belshazzar as the king's eldest son when the kingship was "entrusted" to him, and the Nabonidus Chronicle refers to him as the "crown prince" through the years that Nabonidus spent in Tema. Moreover, the New Year's festival was not celebrated during the years of Nabonidus' absence because the king was not in Babylon. This would suggest that the crown prince, who was caretaker of the kingship at this time, was not considered an adequate substitute for the king in those ceremonies. Oaths were taken in Belshazzar's name and jointly in his name and his father's name, which fact indicates Belshazzar's importance, but this is not the equivalent of calling him king.

There is no doubt about Belshazzar's importance while he governed Babylonia during his father's absence, but the question remains—did he govern the country as its king? So far, we have no explicit contemporary textual evidence to indicate that either

⁷Smith, p. 77; Dougherty, p. 107; J. Lewy, "The Late Assyro-Babylonian Cult of the Moon and Its Culmination at the Time of Nabonidus," *HUCA* 19 (1946):428; H. Tadmor, "The Inscriptions of Nabonid: Historical Arrangement," *Anatolian Studies* 16 (1965): 356.

⁸This subject has been discussed most recently in G. F. Hasel's study, "The First and Third Years of Belshazzar (Dan 7:1; 8:1)," *AUSS* 15 (1977): 153-168.

Nabonidus or the Babylonians appointed Belshazzar as king at this time.

If there is no direct evidence that Belshazzar was king at this time, why do these biblical datelines refer to him as such? When viewed in terms of the historical relationships noted above, there are two possible explanations for this phenomenon. The first is that Belshazzar did become king officially at a later date, after Nabonidus returned from Tema, and that Belshazzar's status in these date formulae was interpreted proleptically at the time of their recording. Thus, they simply referred to him at that earlier time by the title he later acquired.

Another explanation for these unusual date formulae (and a more likely one, in my opinion) can be developed from a consideration of the political context out of which the exiles from Judah, like Daniel, had come. This was an environment in which, as opposed to the realm where they were exiled, coregency was practiced. When the unusual situation occurred in which Nabonidus was away from Babylon for ten years and entrusted its government to the crown prince, Daniel evaluated this situation in terms with which he was familiar from the political economy of Judah. This suggestion offers an explanation why these biblical dates employ regnal years of Belshazzar even though the native Babylonian scribes continued to date by Nabonidus who was in Tema.

Such a proposal requires comment on the practice of coregency in the ancient Near East, and such comment is given in an excursus at the end of this article. However, it may be noted here that there are other examples of parallel practices in the Bible. Nebuchadnezzar's regnal years given in the Bible are consistently numbered one year higher than the numbers assigned to those years by the Babylonian sources, and the most direct explanation of this phenomenon is that the Israelite scribes employed their own fall calendar to number Nebuchadnezzar's regnal years rather than employing Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian calendar, which began in the spring.⁹ Daniel's contemporary Ezekiel continued to date by the Judahite calendar and years of kingship/exile, rather than by the

⁹S. H. Horn, "The Babylonian Chronicle and the Ancient Calendar of the Kingdom of Judah," *AUSS* 5 (1967): 12-27.

Babylonian system in use where he lived. The same system survived into the fifth century, according to Nehemiah's dates for Artaxerxes. Thus there are several contemporary parallels for evaluating the foreign practice of kingship in native Judahite terms, which is what I would suggest that Daniel did in this case.

2. *The Details of Dan 5*

As we turn to the fifth chapter of Daniel, it is evident that we are dealing with a different type of situation than that referred to obliquely in the datelines of Dan 7:1 and 8:1. Here we have a narrative which describes a series of events that occurred on the night Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians. As noted earlier, several elements in this narrative will be examined: (1) identity of the queen present at the banquet, (2) Daniel as "third ruler" in the Babylonian kingdom, (3) Belshazzar's kingship, and (4) events surrounding the fall of Babylon.

Identity of the Queen Present at the Banquet

Dan 5:10-12 mentions "the queen," who counseled Belshazzar to call upon Daniel, esteemed for his wisdom in the time of Nebuchadnezzar, to interpret the handwriting on the wall. The commentaries have long suggested that the queen mentioned here was not Belshazzar's wife, but rather the queen mother. This interpretation appears to be reasonable.

This queen could not have been Nabonidus' mother, who died in his 9th regnal year, according to the Nabonidus Chronicle.¹⁰ It may be assumed that the queen referred to in the fifth chapter of Daniel should at least have belonged to the next generation of royal Babylonian women. In view of her knowledge about the days of Nebuchadnezzar and her prominence in this narrative of chap. 5, it seems more likely that she was the queen mother rather than Belshazzar's wife.

Herodotus tells us that Nitocris was the last great queen of the Neo-Babylonian empire (*Histories*, I:185-188), but his description of her includes so much legendary material that it is difficult to tell whether he was referring to Nabonidus' wife or mother in this case.

¹⁰ANET, p. 306.

Neither Herodotus' Nitocris, nor the wife of Nabonidus, nor Belshazzar's mother, nor Belshazzar's wife have as yet been identified in cuneiform sources.¹¹ Tentatively, the queen referred to here may be identified with Nitocris, and be considered as the queen mother to Belshazzar.

Daniel as "Third Ruler" in the Babylonian Kingdom

In the narrative of Dan 5, there is reference three times (vss. 7, 20, 29) to what has been commonly translated "third ruler"—a post to be given the person who could interpret for Belshazzar the mysterious handwriting on the wall. J. A. Montgomery has challenged this translation, suggesting that *taltî* in 5:7, *taltā*² in 5:16, and *taltā*² in 5:29 should be translated as "*šalšu*-officer" rather than as the "third ruler" in the kingdom.¹² Although some authorities have resisted this interpretation, it has been taken up rather commonly by the commentaries, and therefore deserves special attention here.

Montgomery holds that the occurrences of this word in Dan 5 are not in the emphatic state but in the absolute, and that they should therefore be interpreted as "one of three," "a thirdling," i.e., "a triumvir." From that definition, he goes on to propose further that this word was cognate with the *šalšu* or the "third" officer who is referred to as a governmental functionary in some Akkadian texts.

Several objections can be raised against Montgomery's interpretation: In the first place, while the ordinal numeral "third" does occur in the absolute state in the first instance, it is difficult to read the ending as anything else than that of the emphatic state in the second and third occurrences. Second, the Akkadian references to the *šalšu*-officers which Montgomery cites indicate that they were attached to the important administrators of the kingdom, i.e., the *šalšu* of the king or the *šalšu* of the crown prince. In this case, however, Daniel was to rule (verb) as third *in the kingdom*, not as a

¹¹Gadd, p. 46. For other royal female relations of this period, see now D. B. Weisberg, "Royal Women in the Neo-Babylonian Period," *Le palais et la royauté*, XIX Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, ed. F. Thureau-Dangin (Paris, 1971), pp. 447-454.

¹²J. A. Montgomery, *The Book of Daniel*, ICC 17:256.

thirdling in the service of the king or crown prince. In the service of the king in the west, *šališ* originally referred to the third man in the military chariot who carried the weapons and shield, and by extension this term came to refer to the squire or aide-de-camp of the king.¹³ These positions, however, were distinctly military in nature, and it is unlikely that Belshazzar was offering Daniel a military post. If, on the other hand, the *šalšu* in Babylonia was political rather than military, then as a "third-class" office it seems likely that it would have been of less importance than that of the *mašennim* or "second-class" officers listed, for example, on the Istanbul Prism.¹⁴ To offer Daniel, or any of the wise men referred to in this chapter, a position on a lower level of this sort does not make good sense in the context of the story. It appears more likely that Belshazzar offered to make Daniel one of the great persons in the kingdom in return for his wisdom in this matter.

A third objection to Montgomery's interpretation is based on linguistic grounds. In order to get from *ṭaltī* to *šalšu*, one has to postulate a phonetic shift which ordinarily would not be expected, since Daniel should have used the Akkadian loan word for "*šalšu*-officer" instead of the Aramaic word for "third."

For the foregoing reasons, Montgomery's proposal to translate this term as "*šalšu*-officer" instead of as the "third ruler" in the kingdom is, in my opinion, not successful, and the latter interpretation should be retained. In this case, the question remains: If Daniel was to be the third ruler in the kingdom, who were the other two rulers?

Since Belshazzar was the ruler who offered this position to Daniel, he must have been one of these two. That leaves Belshazzar's father, Nabonidus, as the other, since he was the first and foremost ruler of Babylon at this time, according to the cuneiform evidence. Thus this designation in Dan 5 for the position offered to Daniel provides additional indirect—but nevertheless strong—evidence concerning the political relationship between Nabonidus and Belshazzar in Babylon at this time.

¹³Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, trans. J. McHugh (New York, 1961), p. 122.

¹⁴*ANET*, p. 307.

Belshazzar's Kingship

Another question now naturally follows: In light of our discussion above on Belshazzar's position during his father's absence, what was the specific nature of the relationship at the time of Babylon's fall, and if different from the earlier relationship, when and how did the change take place?

The evidence for Belshazzar's kingship at the time of the events recorded in the fifth chapter of Daniel differs in nature from the references to him in the datelines of Dan 7:1 and 8:1. The references to Belshazzar as king in those datelines can be readily interpreted in either of the ways discussed earlier, but the references to him in chap. 5 are very direct and explicit. Aside from the fact that he is referred to as king seventeen times in this chapter, the most important consideration of all is that he was addressed with the title of king in direct discourse by both the queen and Daniel. The evidence of this chapter is, therefore, that by the time the events recorded in this chapter occurred, Belshazzar was king of Babylon in fact.

Since we have held above that he was not appointed as official king by his father when he left for Tema, something must have happened to Belshazzar's status between his father's return to Babylon and the night of Babylon's conquest. Belshazzar must have become a full and official king sometime during that interval, according to the evidence from chap. 5. The question is: How and precisely when did this occur?

There are two possible answers, and the first and more direct of them is that Nabonidus installed Belshazzar as king before the former set out with the army to meet Cyrus' forces at the Tigris. This would have been a reasonable occasion for the installation. Nabonidus may well have had a premonition of his defeat when he left the capital to fight against the invaders. In fact, Nabonidus had already complained to Marduk about the might of the Medes and the Persians in his dream recorded on the cylinder from Sippar,¹⁵ and since then, their strength had become even more evident by their conquests in various parts of the Near East. As precaution

¹⁵A. L. Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East* (Chicago, 1956), p. 250.

against the possibility that he might not return, Nabonidus could have installed Belshazzar as full king and coregent with him before he led his troops into the field. However, the fact that coregency was not an established practice in Babylonia and that Nabonidus had not named Belshazzar as full king and coregent with him when departing for Tema raises doubts as to whether he would have appointed him coregent on this occasion.

The other possible explanation for Belshazzar's kingship at this time, and perhaps the more likely one, requires a more detailed discussion since some chronological factors are involved. According to the Nabonidus Chronicle, "in the month of Tashritu, Cyrus attacked the army of Akkad in Opis on the Tigris."¹⁶ The day in Tishri (in 539 B.C.) on which this battle was fought is not stated in the text, but it is obvious that Cyrus' forces were victorious and that the Babylonians under Nabonidus' command were in retreat. The next encounter occurred at Sippar, located about fifty miles north of Babylon. Sippar fell to Cyrus on the 14th day of Tishri without a battle, but Nabonidus was able to escape. Two days later Babylon itself was taken by another division of Cyrus' army, again without a battle. The short-lived Neo-Babylonian empire had come to an end.

It is of interest to note that both Sippar and Babylon fell to the invaders without a battle. It has long been suspected that internal treachery and treason were at work in Babylonia at this time, a reasonable assumption according to these occurrences. Nabonidus may have given the populace of Babylonia ample motivation for such disloyalty. He was a strange and apparently unpopular king who was a special devotee of a god other than the god of Babylon. He spent ten years away from the capital, and the New Year's festival was suspended there during those years. With the impending approach of the Persians, he stripped the cities of Babylonia of their gods and brought them to Babylon, which they were to protect. Finally, when the Persians attacked at Opis on the Tigris, the Chronicle records that the inhabitants of Akkad revolted. In order to suppress the revolt, Nabonidus massacred a number of his own subjects. No wonder the Babylonians welcomed Cyrus as a deliverer! It probably is no accident that after the

¹⁶ANET, p. 306.

massacre of the rebels, the next two cities attacked by the Persians—Sippar and Babylon—fell to them without a battle.

The date of Sippar's surrender and its location in relation to Babylon are of some importance for understanding the events described in the fifth chapter of Daniel. Sippar fell on the 14th of Tishri, and Babylon on the 16th of Tishri; i.e., two days elapsed between the fall of these cities. Since Sippar lay about fifty miles north of Babylon, the news of its fall could well have reached Babylon by messenger within two days. Upon reaching Babylon, a courier probably could have gained access to the city without great difficulty, since the Persians could not have completely surrounded so large a city. Thus, the news that Sippar had fallen and that Nabonidus had fled may well have reached Babylon before the night of the 16th of Tishri. In addition, and perhaps more important, the news of Cyrus' victory over Nabonidus at Opis before his conquest of Sippar had surely reached Babylon before the capital itself fell.

What was Belshazzar's reaction to such news? The defence of the heartland of Babylonia was now his responsibility. In order to insure the greatest cooperation possible from his troops and the population of Babylon in general, it was incumbent upon Belshazzar to command them from as great a position of strength and authority as possible. With his father's meeting defeat and fleeing before the enemy, the most direct course of action open to him to insure his acquisition of such power and authority was to occupy the throne of Babylon himself. In view of the turn of political and military events, it would have been logical for Belshazzar to have proclaimed himself king at this moment.

The palace banquet described in Dan 5 adds to the evidence for this particular timing. Was Belshazzar so carefree, confident, and boastful that he thought it was fitting and enjoyable to entertain his nobles while the Medo-Persian army was in sight and the city under siege? Hardly so. Rather, if Belshazzar had just proclaimed himself king, as suggested above, his accession would have provided an appropriate opportunity on which to hold such a function. A thousand of the nobles of Babylon were in attendance—a befitting audience at a feast celebrating the accession of the new king, but not for an ordinary social occasion in the palace.

The vessels from the temple of Yahweh used at the celebration (Dan 5:3) were probably not the only vessels from foreign temples

being used there that night. In drinking from these vessels, the king and his courtiers could have been attempting to demonstrate that their god and his new king were superior to, and suzerain over, all the gods and kings of the vassal states that were represented by such vessels. On this occasion, the vessels may have been used in this way to express the Babylonian view of the politics of the cosmos.

It may be of interest to note here another paralleling exceptional case of coregency in much earlier Babylonian history. In a letter from the eighteenth century B.C., Samsuiluna indicates that he ascended the throne before the death of his father Hammurabi, who was ill: "The king, my father, is s[ick] and I sat myself on the throne in order to [. . .] the country."¹⁷ In like manner Belshazzar may have said on this occasion, "The king, my father, has been defeated and is in flight and I sat myself on the throne in order to govern and defend the country." A move in this direction would have strengthened Belshazzar's hand to rule his beleaguered capital.

Thus, there are two possible explanations of how Belshazzar became king by the time of the events described in the fifth chapter of Daniel if Nabonidus had not installed him as official king and coregent when leaving for Tema. Either Nabonidus installed Belshazzar as king before he went out to battle with Cyrus, or Belshazzar installed himself as king after he received the news of his father's defeat and flight. While the former explanation might seem more likely on general grounds, the latter fits the Nabonidus-Chronicle dates and the distances involved, and it also provides an explanation for the special banquet on the very night of Babylon's fall.

Events Surrounding the Fall of Babylon

There are three main extrabiblical sources that refer in some detail to events surrounding the fall of Babylon. The Nabonidus Chronicle is the principal cuneiform witness to these events, and as such it must be judged as the most accurate of the three. The Greek classical writers Herodotus and Xenophon wrote rather lengthy descriptions of these same events. The question is: How well do these sources fit together with each other and with Daniel?

¹⁷A. L. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization* (Chicago, 1964), p. 157.

The classical sources place considerable stress upon the diversion of the Euphrates River as the means whereby the Persians gained access to the city of Babylon. The amount of effort expended on that project (according to those descriptions) and the corresponding length of time necessary to bring it to completion do not fit well, however, with the information in the Chronicle, whose dates reveal that Babylon fell soon after the Persians' arrival in its vicinity. While the extent to which the Euphrates was diverted may be exaggerated in these classical sources, the Chronicle nevertheless does lend some support to the idea that the Persians gained access to the city by way of the river, since they attacked Babylon in Tishri (October), when the river was at its lowest level.

Daniel, Herodotus, and Xenophon agree that there was a banquet in Babylon the night the city fell, though the Chronicle, being more concerned with political and military matters, does not mention it. Herodotus lists this feast as one of two main reasons why the city fell to the Persians so easily, the other being the great extent of the city and the poor communication between its parts (*Histories* 1.191). Xenophon, on the other hand, cites the banquet as the reason why the Persians chose to attack Babylon the night they did (*Cyropaedia* 7.5.15). The gathering of the nobles at the banquet described in Daniel might have provided some disaffected person or persons the opportunity to open the river-gates so as to give the Persians access to the city. The concentration of nobles in the palace would also have facilitated the conquest of the city, once the Persians were inside it.

Most important for our consideration here are the indications of where Babylon's rulers were the night it fell. Daniel indicates that Belshazzar was in the palace and was slain that night. Xenophon reports that a king was killed in the palace of Babylon the night the city was taken, but he does not name that king (*Cyropaedia* 7.5.29-30). The Nabonidus Chronicle is a useful source with which to check this point, since it clearly indicates that Nabonidus was not in Babylon during the fateful night. Two days before, he had fled from Sippar, and he returned to Babylon only after its fall. Upon his arrival he was arrested.

If the fifth chapter of Daniel had been written quite some time after these events, in the Hellenistic period for example, would it not have been logical for the writer to place Nabonidus, the last

known king of Babylon, rather than the then-forgotten Belshazzar, in the Babylonian palace on that night?¹⁸ However, Daniel did not locate Nabonidus in Babylon the night it fell, but instead identified Belshazzar as the leading figure in the palace at that time. Yet, Daniel was aware of Nabonidus' existence, as is evident from the references made to "third ruler" in the kingdom. The eyewitness accuracy in this reporting is of first-rate importance.

3. *Summary and Conclusion*

In summary, the references to Belshazzar in the book of Daniel revolve around two historical poles. The first of these is indicated in the datelines attached to the prophecies in chaps. 7 and 8, relating to the time when he governed Babylon in his father's absence. These datelines clearly imply the knowledge of such an arrangement—a knowledge which did not survive, as Dougherty has pointed out so effectively, in any other source handed down from the ancient world beyond the contemporary cuneiform texts.¹⁹ We now know that Nabonidus was away in Tema for ten of his seventeen regnal years and those ten years can be reckoned within narrowly defined, but not yet precise, limits. The question is: What was Belshazzar's status in Babylon while his father was in Tema? I have suggested that "entrusting the kingship" to Belshazzar was not the equivalent of appointing him as the official king who was to serve as coregent with his father. If this interpretation is correct, some other explanation should be sought for the references to Belshazzar's first and third years in Dan 7:1 and 8:1. Although the custom of coregency was not generally practiced in Babylonia, Daniel, who employed these dates to express that relationship, came from the kingdom of Judah where this custom was practiced. It is suggested, therefore, that Daniel did what Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Nehemiah, and the writer of 2 Kings did: He evaluated this specific situation in Babylonia in terms of his own political heritage.

¹⁸Nabonidus was known at Qumran, as is evident from a piece found there, entitled "The Prayer of Nabonidus." See J. T. Milik, "Prière de Nabonide," *RB* 63 (1956): 407-415.

¹⁹Dougherty, pp. 199-200.

The other historical pole around which the references to Belshazzar in Daniel revolve is the night that Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians, the 16th of Tishri—i.e., October 12, 539 B.C., according to Parker and Dubberstein's tables.²⁰ That was the night upon which the events described in Dan 5 occurred. According to his title used in direct address in that chapter, Belshazzar was king of Babylon by the time of that occasion. If his father had not appointed him king officially when leaving for Tema, then Belshazzar must have become king sometime after his father's return. In that case, Nabonidus could have appointed him king before he went out to battle with Cyrus. However, I personally prefer the explanation that Belshazzar advanced himself to full kingship when he received the news of his father's defeat and flight in regions to the north. This turn of events could also explain why Belshazzar held a feast at such a seemingly inopportune time, why such a large number of nobles were assembled, and why the vessels from the temple in Jerusalem (and probably from other temples) were used—namely, to celebrate Belshazzar's accession to the throne.

The classical sources available concur that such a feast was held in Babylon on the night of its fall. Regardless of whether or not the banquet was held to celebrate Belshazzar's accession, the fifth chapter of Daniel reveals a very precise knowledge of which ruler was present and which ruler was not present in the palace that night. Daniel locates Belshazzar there and implies that Nabonidus was absent from the palace or city at that time, by not mentioning him. The Nabonidus Chronicle confirms this implication by noting that Nabonidus had fled from Sippar just two days earlier and had not yet returned to Babylon by the time it fell to the Persians. However, the record in Dan 5 also recognizes by its reference to "third ruler" that Nabonidus was still alive, even though not present in Babylon. Thus, this chapter in Daniel reveals a very precise knowledge of the circumstances in Babylon on the night of October 12, 539 B.C., and I would conclude that such precise knowledge is best explained by recognizing the account in Dan 5 as an eyewitness account.

²⁰R. A. Parker and W. H. Dubberstein, *Babylonian Chronology 626 B.C. - A.D. 75* (Providence, R.I., 1956), p. 29.

EXCURSUS ON COREGENCY IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

As further explication of a proposal made on pp. 136-137, above, it is necessary to look briefly into the matter of coregency as an established practice in Judah in contrast to Babylon.

Coregency apparently originated in Egypt, where it was a well-established practice by the time of the 12th Dynasty at the beginning of the second millennium B.C., as a series of double-dated inscriptions from that dynasty demonstrates. This practice is attested again during the 18th and 19th Dynasties of the New-Kingdom period, and it persisted in Egypt as late as Ptolemaic times.

When the Israelite monarchy arose at the beginning of the first millennium B.C., its court practices were modeled, to some extent, after those of the Egyptian court. It is not surprising, therefore, to see that the problem of the succession in David's time was solved according to Egyptian practice when David installed Solomon as king and coregent with him, instead of just signifying Solomon as the preferred crown prince and the designated heir to the throne (1 Kgs 1). This and the succeeding coregencies between kings who reigned in Jerusalem can be seen in the tabulation below.

<i>Coregents</i>	<i>Biblical Reference</i>	<i>Political Circumstance</i>
1. David and Solomon	1 Kgs 1	Succession struggle
2. Asa and Jehoshaphat	1 Kgs 22:41-42	Physical incapacity?
3. Jehoshaphat and Jehoram	2 Kgs 1:17; 3:1; 8:16	Military threat?
4. Amaziah and Azariah	2 Kgs 14:13	Military captivity
5. Azariah and Jotham	2 Kgs 15:5	Physical incapacity
6. Jotham and Ahaz	2 Kgs 15:30; 17:1	Assyrian threat?
7. Ahaz and Hezekiah	2 Kgs 18:9, 13	Assyrian threat?
8. Hezekiah and Manasseh	2 Kgs 18:2, 13; 21:1; 22:1	Assyrian threat?
9. Jehoiachin and Zedekiah	2 Kgs 24:12, 17	Military captivity

In addition to the texts cited above, see also: Siegfried H. Horn, "Did Sennacherib Campaign Once or Twice Against Hezekiah?," *AUSS* 4 (1966): 1-28; Edwin R. Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1965), pp. 81-87, 157-161.

Western Asia in general, however, did not practice coregencies, and this probably included the Northern Kingdom of Israel after the disruption at the time of Rehoboam and Jeroboam I. It is true that one coregency has been proposed for the Northern Kingdom—between Jehoash and Jeroboam II (see E. R. Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, 2d ed. [Grand Rapids, Mich., 1965], p. 81). New chronological data from Assyria concerning contacts of the Assyrian kings with kings of Israel would lower the date of Menahem's death to 739 and raise the accession date of Jehoash to 805. With the adjustments in the chronology of Israel required by these new synchronisms for the period following and preceding the reign of Jeroboam II, the coregency proposed for his reign disappears. (For details regarding these chronological adjustments, see my two articles "Menahem and Tiglath-Pileser III," *JNES* 36 [1978]: 43-49, and "Adad-Nirari III and Jehoash of Israel," *JCS* 30 [1978]: 101-113.)

If no coregency existed between Jehoash and Jeroboam II, the pattern of the Northern Kingdom is consistent with that in western Asia in general, where coregency was not practiced, while on the other hand Judah followed the Egyptian custom in this matter. (The only exceptional case I have discovered from the pre-Hellenistic period is that of Samsuiluna of Babylon in the eighteenth century B.C., mentioned earlier in this article. As already noted, however, Samsuiluna says in his letter that he seated himself on the throne, not that his father Hammurabi installed him.)

My proposal, then, is simply that although Belshazzar was not king in the official and technical sense to the Babylonians, the datelines in Dan 7:1 and 8:1 refer to him as king because the political relations involved in this specific situation were evaluated in terms of the Judahite view of such matters. There are, of course, other examples of parallel practices in the Bible, as I have noted in the main text of the present article.

In concluding this excursus, mention of some bibliography will be in order: On the coregencies of the 12th Dynasty of Egypt, see W. K. Simpson, "The Single-dated Monuments of Sesostri I: An Aspect of the Institution of Coregency in the Twelfth Dynasty," *JNES* 15 (1956): 214-219. For selected studies on some of the later coregencies in Egyptian history, see A. H. Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs* (Oxford, 1961), p. 183; D. B. Redford, *Seven Studies in*

the History and Chronology of the Eighteenth Dynasty of Egypt (Toronto, 1967), p. 182; idem, "The Coregency of Thutmosis III and Amenhotep II," *JEA* 51 (1965): 119-123; and W. J. Murnane, "The Earlier Reign of Ramesses II and His Coregency with Sety I," *JNES* 34 (1975): 153-190. Murnane has also provided us with the most comprehensive survey of the Egyptian institution of coregency with the publication of his doctoral dissertation, *Ancient Egyptian Coregencies*, SAOC, vol. 40 (Chicago, 1977).

On the earliest Israelite coregency, involving David and Solomon, a recent discussion is by E. Ball, "The Co-regency of David and Solomon (1 Kings 1)," *VT* 27 (1977): 268-279. The subject of the early Israelite court's patterning after Egyptian models has attracted considerable discussion. For one example, see R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, trans. J. McHugh (New York, 1961), pp. 122-132.