

A Study of the book of Daniel

"Handwriting on the Wall"

Chapter 5

Background: Chapter 5 took place in 539 BC when Daniel was about 80 years old. Nebuchadnezzar, one of Daniel's first converts in the Babylonian court, had died. His grandson Belshazzar was now in power. Daniel chapter 5 points out that Belshazzar rejected the claims of the true God and turned his back on the witness and legacy of his grandfather. Belshazzar boldly led Babylon in rebellion against the true God. Chapter 5 reveals the overthrow and ultimate fall of Babylon by the army of the Medo-Persian Empire.

Daniel 5:1-4.

"Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand. Belshazzar, while he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem; that the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, might drink therein. Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God which was at Jerusalem; and the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, drank in them. They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone."

Key Point:

Belshazzar and the kingdom of Babylon were immoral, selfish, and pleasure-seeking. Their lifestyle could be summed up in the following words: "If it feels good, do it. Who cares what God thinks? If it tastes good, eat it. If it excites the senses, let go and feel it." During Belshazzar's wild orgy, irreverence and blasphemy raised their ugly heads to defy the living God and defile His holy vessels with the lustful love of the world. Belshazzar defiantly profaned the golden cups of God's sanctuary, using them in his pagan party.

Wine:

- Lev. 10:9 – Intoxicating wine was forbidden in the sanctuary service.
- Prov. 20:1 – Wine brings deception.
- Rev. 14:8 – End-time Babylon makes all the nations drink of her fornication.
- Rev. 17:2-5 – End-time Babylon drinks the wine and corrupts the nations.
- Rev. 18:2-3 – The fall of end-time Babylon is linked to wine drinking.

The spirit of self-gratification displayed in Babylon is directly opposed to the spirit of self-denial demonstrated and taught by Jesus.

Luke 9:23

"And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."

Daniel 1:8.

"But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself."

Notice the contrast between Belshazzar's behavior and the stance of Daniel as a young man. Unlike Belshazzar, Daniel refused to defile himself.

Daniel 5:5-6.

“In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaister of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another.”

Key Point:

Belshazzar's arrogant boasting and mockery of God and His holy things ended abruptly. More than 150 years before this fateful night, Isaiah had prophesied the fall of Babylon:

Isaiah 21:4

“My heart panted, fearfulness affrighted me: the night of my pleasure hath he turned into fear unto me.”

Belshazzar's intended “night of pleasure” turned into a night of terror and judgment.

Daniel 5:7-9.

“The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. And the king spake, and said to the wise men of Babylon, Whosoever shall read this writing, and shew me the interpretation thereof, shall be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about his neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom. **Then came in all the king's wise men: but they could not read the writing, nor make known to the king the interpretation thereof.** Then was king Belshazzar greatly troubled, and his countenance was changed in him, and his lords were astonished.”

Key Point:

Like his grandfather before him, Belshazzar looked to human wisdom, but once again the wise men of Babylon failed to help.

Daniel 5:10-12.

“Now **the queen, by reason of the words of the king and his lords, came into the banquet house:** and the queen spake and said, O king, live for ever: let not thy thoughts trouble thee, nor let thy countenance be changed: **There is a man in thy kingdom, in whom is the spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of thy father** light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, was found in him; whom **the king Nebuchadnezzar thy father,** the king, I say, thy father, made master of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers; Forasmuch as an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, interpreting of dreams, and shewing of hard sentences, and dissolving of doubts, were found in the same **Daniel,** whom the king named Belteshazzar: **now let Daniel be called, and he will shew the interpretation.”**

Who is this Queen? She may have been the Queen mother of Belshazzar, Nabonidus's wife. Nabonidus was co-regent with his eldest son Belshazzar and was out fighting during the time of Belshazzar's party. King Nabonidus, was Nebuchadnezzar's son. This would make Belshazzar, Nebuchadnezzar's grandson, not father. The word father in the Old Testament, simply means ancestor. For example, many times throughout the Bible when someone would die, it would say, “He slept with his fathers.” It is obvious from her high recommendation of Daniel and his reputation that she was influenced by Nebuchadnezzar after his conversion and his godly prime minister Daniel. Most likely she did not take part in the wild party's revelry, as the Bible says, “by reason of the words of the king and his lords, came into the banquet house.” She must have heard

that the king was troubled and came to tell Belshazzar to call Daniel, “one in whom was the spirit of the holy gods” (Dan. 5:12).

Verse 12: Daniel is a prototype of God’s last-day people who understand and explain the prophecies given by God. See Daniel 12:9-10.

Daniel 5:13-16.

*“Then was Daniel brought in before the king. 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? **I have even heard of thee, that the spirit of the gods is in thee, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom is found in thee.** And now the wise men, the astrologers, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing, and make known unto me the interpretation thereof: but they could not shew the interpretation of the thing: And I have heard of thee, that thou canst make interpretations, and dissolve doubts: now if thou canst read the writing, and make known to me the interpretation thereof, thou shalt be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about thy neck, and **shalt be the third ruler in the kingdom.**”*

Key Point:

Belshazzar had heard of Daniel. After all, how could Belshazzar have grown up in the royal court of Babylon where Daniel had been for nearly 65 years, and yet not know Daniel? How could he ignore the life of this man of God? Reminding Daniel of his captive status, Belshazzar offered Daniel gold, honor and a position as third ruler in the kingdom, in exchange for interpreting the handwriting on the wall. He offered Daniel to be third ruler because, he was already co-regents with his father, Nabonidus.

Daniel 5:17-24.

*“Then Daniel answered and said before the king, **Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation.** O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour: And for the majesty that he gave him, all people, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him: whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down. But **when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him: And he was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses: they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will. And thou his son, **O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this;** But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified: Then was the part of the hand sent from him; and this writing was written.”***

Fearlessly Daniel rebuked and chided Belshazzar and his blasphemous acts: “You knew” how God humbled your grandfather in his pride. Once again, the text uses the word “father.” The language of the Hebrews and Chaldeans had no word for grandfather; the word “father” is often used to mean “ancestor.” Just as Jesus was called the “son” of David, we know that David was his

“father” or ancestor.

Belshazzar’s problem wasn’t a lack of knowledge; it was the condition of his heart. Although he was well acquainted with the workings of God in his grandfather’s life, Belshazzar rejected the light that God sent him. He chose to ignore God and follow a life of self-indulgence. **He knew what was right, but he rejected it.** And after a time of mercy, God rejected him.

Verse 20: Pride and exaltation of self are end-time issues. Belshazzar’s behavior reminds us of the Little Horn Power. See Daniel 7:8-11 and 8:11.

Verse 23: God’s house and His holy vessels are to be treated with reverence and respect.

Daniel 5:25-28.

*“And this is the writing that was written, **MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.** This is the interpretation of the thing: **MENE**; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. **TEKEL**; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. **PERES**; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.”*

Daniel interpreted the words written by the bloodless hand upon the wall. The interpretation revealed the fall of Babylon.

- a. Mene means “*Numbered.*” The kingdom of Babylon has been numbered.
- b. Tekel means “*Weighed.*” The kingdom of Babylon has been weighed in the balance and found wanting.
- c. Upharsin means “*Divided.*” Babylon would be divided and given to the Medes and Persians. (*the Hebrew word is the same for Upharsin and Peres*)

In that last night of mad folly, Belshazzar, and his kingdom had filled up the measure of their guilt. No longer could God's restraining hand ward off the impending evil. The Lord had attempted in many ways to teach the Babylonians of His love and mercy. He had sought to teach them reverence for His law and would have loved to heal them.

Jeremiah 51:8-9.

*“**Babylon is suddenly fallen and destroyed**; howl for her; take balm for her pain, if so be she may be healed. **We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed**; forsake her, and let us go every one into his own country: for her judgment reacheth unto heaven, and is lifted up even to the skies.”*

Key Point:

God wanted to heal Babylon, but their hearts rebelled. Thus, God declared, “*But she is not healed.*” Because of the strange perversity of the human heart, God had at last found it necessary to pass the irrevocable sentence: Belshazzar would be slain, and his kingdom would fall into other hands.

Daniel 5:29.

“Then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.”

Key Point:

Belshazzar rewarded Daniel and made him the third ruler over his failing empire. History and archeology have revealed that Belshazzar’s father, Nabonidus, was alive at that time, but was more interested in natural history than ruling Babylon. He was in Tema of Arabia

worshipping the moon god named Sin. That's why Nabonidus allowed Belshazzar to rule in his place, making Belshazzar the second ruler of Babylon. Although Belshazzar made Daniel the third ruler after himself, Daniel wasn't interested in ruling over Babylon for he knew its fall was imminent. At that time, while in the banquet hall, the king received the news: "*his city is taken*" (Jer. 51:31).

Daniel 5:30-31.

"In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain. And Darius the Median took the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old."

Key Point:

The prophecy was fulfilled that very night. History tells us that the combined armies of the Medes and Persians, led by Cyrus, attacked Babylon and overthrew it. The very night of the wild party, the head of gold falls in a blood bath **as the silver empire takes its place.** The prophet Isaiah foretold of this event.

Isaiah 45:1-2

*"Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to **Cyrus**, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron."*

Summary:

In Daniel chapter 4, we saw Nebuchadnezzar, who surrendered to the God of heaven and earth, and in Daniel chapter 5, Belshazzar, who didn't. Nebuchadnezzar took 35 years, but he finally surrendered to God, accepted the light He gave him, and acknowledged the kingship of the Lord in his life. Nebuchadnezzar found peace and purpose. In contrast, his grandson Belshazzar, despite many God-given opportunities, refused to accept the light and truth mercifully revealed to him. Belshazzar lived his life for his own pleasure and blasphemed God. When he crossed the point of no return, God rejected Belshazzar.

Key Thought:

Notice how God uses the story of Belshazzar in Daniel chapter 5 to compare the experience of Spiritual Babylon at the end of time:

Comparison No. 1

Belshazzar made his subjects drunk – Daniel 5:1.

End-time Babylon makes the kings of the earth drunk – **Revelation 17:2.**

Comparison No. 2

Belshazzar induced his nobles and subjects to commit immorality – **Daniel 5:2, 23.**

End-time Babylon induces the kings of the earth to commit spiritual fornication – **Revelation 17:2.**

Comparison No. 3

Belshazzar and his guests drank from golden goblets – **Daniel 5:3.**

Mystery Babylon in Revelation 17 drinks from the golden cup – **Revelation 17:4.**

Comparison No. 4

Judgment was pronounced upon ancient Babylon – *Daniel 5:26-28*.
Judgment will be pronounced upon end-time Babylon – *Revelation 17:1*.

Comparison No. 5

Belshazzar dishonored God by the worship of false gods – *Dan. 5:4, 2.3*
End-time Babylon blasphemes God and challenges His authority – *Revelation 17:3*.

Comparison No. 6

Ancient Babylon persecuted God's people – *Daniel 1:1-4*.
End-time Babylon will persecute God's people – *Revelation 17:5, 6*.

Comparison No. 7

Ancient Babylon was defeated by the kings of the East, Darius and Cyrus – *Isa. 45:1-5, Dan. 5:30; 6:28*.
End-time Babylon will be defeated by the heavenly King of the East – *Revelation 16:12, Matt. 24:2.7*

Comparison No. 8

Ancient Babylon attacked God's sanctuary and people – *Daniel 1:2*.
End-time Babylon will attack God's sanctuary and people – *Revelation 13:6, 17:6*.

Comparison No. 9

Ancient Babylon ruled the kings of the earth – *Daniel 2:37-38; 4:22*.
End-time Babylon will also control the kings of the earth – *Revelation 17:5, 18*.

Comparison No. 10

God's judgments finally fell upon ancient Babylon – *Isaiah 18:17-20, Jeremiah 51:6*.
God's final judgments will fall on end-time Babylon – *Revelation 17 and 18*.

2 Corinthians 5:10.

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.”

The Apostle Paul tells us that *“We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.”* Therefore, he gives this wise counsel, *“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God”* (1 Cor. 10:31).

1 John 1:6-7.

“If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

Today, Jesus says, *“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”* We can either live for the pleasures of this world or live for Jesus and look forward to eternal life with Him. Jesus longs to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Remember the contrast presented in Daniel 4 and 5 between Nebuchadnezzar's conversion testimony and the untimely death of his rebellious grandson Belshazzar. The choice is yours. Where do you want to spend eternity?