

# The Book Of Daniel

*And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom. (Daniel 1:20 ESV)*

*but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. (Daniel 2:28 ESV)*

*And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. (Daniel 12:2–3 ESV)*

## The Writing on the Wall

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Daniel 5

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### Introduction:

Good morning! Please turn with me in your Bibles to Daniel 5.

Between chapters 4 and 5, a vast amount of time has elapsed. Nebuchadnezzar has died, ending his 43-year reign. We pick up in verse 5 during the joint reign of King Nabonidus and his son Belshazzar. At this point, Daniel who was brought into Babylon as a teenage boy is a seasoned, 80-plus-year-old prophet.

The story we're going to read about in today's text provides behind the scenes information for one of the most significant historical events in the ancient world. The mighty kingdom of Babylon FELL OVERNIGHT! Ancient historians wrote about this! Babylon took on a symbolic significance and the fall of Babylon became an example of unforeseen destruction.

We see this language picked up in the Book of Revelation. The Apostle John says:

Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! (Revelation 18:2 ESV)

her plagues will come **in a single day**, death and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her. (Revelation 18:8 ESV)

Today's story allows us to see BEHIND THE SCENES for this remarkable moment in history.

As we are once again dealing with a large and important text, we're going to break this into smaller portions to make sure that we're seeing all that we ought to see. Look with me now at Daniel, chapter 5. Hear now God's holy, inspired, living and active word to us today:

## A Pompous King

King Belshazzar made a great feast for a thousand of his lords and drank wine in front of the thousand.

<sup>2</sup> Belshazzar, when he tasted the wine, commanded that the vessels of gold and of silver that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple in Jerusalem be brought, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. <sup>3</sup> Then they brought in the golden vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. <sup>4</sup> They drank wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone. (Daniel 5:1-4 ESV)

Let's stop right here.

This is a different king than the man we have been reading about in the first four chapters but, man, they sure do sound alike, don't they? This is the same prideful, pompous, self-exalting sin that we saw in Nebuchadnezzar's life.

Think about this: The armies of the Medo-Persian empire stood outside the walls of Babylon, but here we find the king throwing a party! He thought his kingdom to be impenetrable!

In what was probably meant to be a display of power, the king orders that the gold and silver vessels from the temple be brought to him. These were the vessels that were used for worship in the Jerusalem temple – the vessels that Nebuchadnezzar had stolen in chapter 1. In the midst of Belshazzar's drunken, idol-worshipping get-together, he decided that he also wanted to thumb his nose at the God of Israel.

He thought he was invincible. He had no fear of the Persians. He had no fear of God. He was a pompous fool.

<sup>5</sup> Immediately the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, opposite the lampstand. And the king saw the hand as it wrote. <sup>6</sup> Then the king's color changed, and his thoughts alarmed him; his limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together. <sup>7</sup> The king called loudly to bring in the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers. The king declared to the wise men of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing, and shows me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around his neck and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom." <sup>8</sup> Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or make known to the king the interpretation. <sup>9</sup> Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, and his color changed, and his lords were perplexed. (Daniel 5:5-9 ESV)

The fearless fool was left trembling. His knees were literally knocking together. His face went pale. He knew that he needed to get to the bottom of this message, but he didn't know where to start. But his mom had a pretty good idea. Look with me now at verse 10 where we find a familiar and faithful prophet:

### **A Familiar and Faithful Prophet**

<sup>10</sup> The queen, because of the words of the king and his lords, came into the banqueting hall, and the queen declared, "O king, live forever! Let not your thoughts alarm you or your color change. <sup>11</sup> There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the spirit of the holy gods. In the days of your father, light and understanding and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods were found in him, and King Nebuchadnezzar, your father—your father the king—made him chief of the magicians, enchanters, Chaldeans, and astrologers, <sup>12</sup> because an excellent spirit, knowledge, and understanding to interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar. Now let Daniel be called, and he will show the interpretation."

<sup>13</sup> Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king answered and said to Daniel, "You are that Daniel, one of the exiles of Judah, whom my father brought from Judah. <sup>14</sup> I have heard of you that the spirit of the gods is in you, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you. <sup>15</sup> Now the wise men, the enchanters, have been brought in before me to read this

writing and make known to me its interpretation, but they could not show the interpretation of the matter. <sup>16</sup> But I have heard that you can give interpretations and solve problems. Now if you can read the writing and make known to me its interpretation, you shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around your neck and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.” (Daniel 5:10-16 ESV)

Let’s stop right there.

80-plus-years-old, living through what is likely his fourth Babylonian king, Daniel enters onto the scene once again. There appears to be a hint of arrogance in the king’s tone as he addresses this senior prophet:

You are that Daniel, one of the exiles of Judah, whom the king my father brought from Judah. (Daniel 5:13b ESV)

“Am I remembering correctly, Daniel? You were one of the boys we stole from Judah when we marched through Jerusalem, right?”

Yes. He is *that* Daniel. He’s the same Daniel who told King Nebuchadnezzar 60-some-odd years ago that his kingdom would be overthrown. He is the man who faithfully brings the message of the God of Israel for the kings of Babylon. He was the tangible reminder for the Israelites, for the Babylonians, for the Persians, and for all of us who continue to read this story today, that there is a King who reigns over every earthly king. One commentator notes here:

As in these cases, it is through a prophetic figure that God exercise his kingship, manifesting before the human king that actually God is king.<sup>1</sup>

Like an ambassador representing his king in a foreign land, Daniel spoke on behalf of God to the nation of Babylon.

Let’s continue reading. Look with me at verse 17 where we find:

## A Judgement Decreed

<sup>17</sup> Then Daniel answered and said before the king, “Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another. Nevertheless, I will read the writing to the king and make known to him the interpretation. <sup>18</sup> O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father kingship and greatness and glory and majesty. <sup>19</sup> And because of the greatness that he gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whom he would, he killed, and whom he would, he kept alive; whom he would, he raised up, and whom he would, he humbled.<sup>20</sup> But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit was hardened so that he dealt proudly, he was brought down from his kingly throne, and his glory was taken from him. <sup>21</sup> He was driven from among the children of mankind, and his mind was made like that of a beast, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. He was fed grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, until he knew that the Most High God rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he will.<sup>22</sup> And you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this, <sup>23</sup> but you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven. And the vessels of his house have been brought in before you, and you and your lords, your wives, and your concubines have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see or hear or

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<sup>1</sup> John E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, WBC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 115.

know, but the God in whose hand is your breath, and whose are all your ways, you have not honored.

<sup>24</sup> “Then from his presence the hand was sent, and this writing was inscribed.<sup>25</sup> And this is the writing that was inscribed: Mene, Mene, Tekel, and Parsin. <sup>26</sup> This is the interpretation of the matter: Mene, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; <sup>27</sup> Tekel, you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting; <sup>28</sup> Peres, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.”

<sup>29</sup> Then Belshazzar gave the command, and Daniel was clothed with purple, a chain of gold was put around his neck, and a proclamation was made about him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

<sup>30</sup> That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed. <sup>31</sup> And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old. (Daniel 5:17-31 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God!

Mene, tekem and parsin are Aramaic terms for units of measurement that translate respectively to a mina, a shekel, and half a shekel. All of the wisdom of the world could not explain to the king what the message meant. Yet, the floating hand that wrote them on the wall led him to believe that, whatever they meant, the message was important!

Once again, filled with the wisdom that only God could give, Daniel explained the message to the king.

In English, you notice that we have nouns that function as verbs. For example, the word “number” can be used as a noun. We might say: “This is the *number* four.” However, it can also be used as a verb. “Don’t forget to *number* your pages.”

That’s what Daniel sees in this message. The words on the wall were meant to be understood as verbs: Numbered, numbered, weighed and divided. The king, in his arrogance, had insulted the God of heaven so his days are now numbered. The king has been weighed in the balances and found wanting. His kingdom will now be handed over and divided by the Medes and the Persians.

God spoke into Belshazzar’s drunken, charade of a party and reminded him of the sobering truth that will not be ignored. One commentator notes:

Though human days are numbered (verse 10), few number them for themselves and ‘get a heart of wisdom’ (verse 12). Belshazzar in this chapter presents a vivid picture of the fool, the practising atheist, who at the end can only brazen it out with the help of alcohol which blots out the stark reality.<sup>2</sup>

Our days are all numbered, but so few of us live as if that were true. Belshazzar thought he could drown out the noise of reality with his drunken revelry, but it wasn’t enough.

He responded to Daniel with gratitude for explaining the message, but he never responded to God’s message with repentance. That very night, the patience of God ran out. Belshazzar assumed that the walls of Babylon would keep him safe, but the Persians entered via a different route. They rerouted the Euphrates river which ran into the city and were able to walk right in through knee-deep water. The drunken king and his

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<sup>2</sup> Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Madison, WI: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 125.

unprepared forces offered little resistance and thus, the mighty kingdom of Babylon was overthrown in an evening.

her plagues will come **in a single day**, death and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her. (Revelation 18:8 ESV)

That's the story of Daniel 5. It's the story of God's sovereign rule over men who exalt themselves as immortals. It's the story of a God who reveals Himself to the nations; a God who judges the proud; and a God who is large and in charge.

With the time that we have left, I'd like to put forward some obvious lessons from this text that we would be fools to ignore:

### Three Lessons:

First, this text reminds us that:

#### 1. **We are ambassadors for the King**

That's the example that we learn from Daniel in this story, isn't it? Joyce Baldwin's quote was so helpful that I'm going to read it again to make sure that you hear it:

As in these cases, it is through a prophetic figure that God exercise his kingship, manifesting before the human king that actually God is king.<sup>3</sup>

Daniel understood his job as a prophet. His job was to speak God's message, even if the kings of Babylon didn't want to hear it. He was used by God to say some hard things to some powerful people, wasn't he? But Daniel never sugar coated the message! Whether or not the world will like the message is not a factor for Daniel. Only one thing matters to him: What would God have me say?

Our task is the same as Daniel's and I can only pray that we will be found as faithful. The Apostle Paul framed it this way:

Therefore, we are **ambassadors** for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5:20 ESV)

We can often fall into the trap of assuming that this task is reserved for the pastors, the elders and the missionaries. But that is not the case at all. Every single believer – young and old, rich and poor, male and female – every follower of Jesus Christ is called to be his ambassador!

You've likely heard me use this analogy before, but I think it's worth repeating. An ambassador has one purpose: To represent the one who sent him. Therefore, in everything that the ambassador does and in everything he says, he should resemble and point people to the one who sent him. If you were in India and you walked into the Canadian embassy, you would likely be a little confused if the woman at the counter was wearing an "I heart Donald Trump" t-shirt. If you came to the desk and she barely acknowledged you, responding to your questions with irritated grunts and angry hand gestures you'd probably wonder if you were in the right place. A Canadian ambassador should represent Canada. She should be over-bearingly

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<sup>3</sup> John E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, WBC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 115.

polite. She should offer you a Tim Hortons. She should apologize all the time and for things that she has no business apologizing for. Because her job is to represent the ones who sent her!

Christian, you are the King's ambassador in this world. Your life should look like Jesus. Your speech should sound like Jesus. Your message should point to Jesus. You should be bringing God's life-giving truth into all of the places where God has placed you. Is that what you're known for?

Time after time, the Babylonians would find themselves in a predicament where they needed to hear from the God of Israel. And time after time, someone would chime in and say: "If you want to hear from *that* God, then you need to talk to Daniel."

Does anybody say that about you? Listen: Some of us have lost sight of how powerfully God can use an obedient, faithful ambassador. You are the voice of the King in your workplace. You are the representative of the Living God in your unbelieving family. You are the ambassador for Jesus Christ in the city of Orillia. You are the light of the world! You are the salt of the earth!

Live in such a way that, when the people around you are confronted with a God-sized problem they say: "We need to find her, because she can tell us what God would say."

Second, we learn in this text that:

## **2. To whom much is given, much is required**

Why is it that, in chapter 4, Nebuchadnezzar was given a chance to repent while in chapter 5, Belshazzar was destroyed overnight? The answer, if you've been paying attention, is that Belshazzar had the benefit of Nebuchadnezzar's example to learn from. He wasn't starting from scratch in his understanding of who God is and how God works. He had already WITNESSED this in the life of the great king before him.

Did you notice that Belshazzar often referred to himself as the son of Nebuchadnezzar in this story? That's an interesting detail because, actually, Belshazzar's father was Nabonidus. He was not a descendant of Nebuchadnezzar. He was using the term "father" in a different sense.

He was the "son" of Nebuchadnezzar in the same way that Jesus was the Son of David. Belshazzar was trying to position himself as the true heir of the greatest hero in Babylonian history - that's why he sent for the cups and the chalices from the temple. He wanted to identify with that great king.

However, he failed to learn the great king's greatest lesson. Perhaps you could forgive Belshazzar if he had never heard the story of how God humbled Nebuchadnezzar, but Daniel says plainly that he HAS heard the story. He says to the king:

And you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, **though you knew all this** (Daniel 5:22 ESV)

"YOU KNOW THIS STORY, Belshazzar! We've been down this road. You know that this kingdom was given to you by the God of heaven and that He can just as easily take it away. You know that He opposes the proud. You know that He does not share His glory. And yet, look at you! Getting drunk out of the vessels from God's temple? Pretending that you are invincible while an army sits on your doorstep?"

Perhaps Belshazzar assumed that he would have more time. Perhaps he expected that the God who was so patient with Nebuchadnezzar would show him the same patience. Perhaps. But he was wrong.

Friends, if you are using your knowledge of the patience, the grace and the mercy of God to justify ongoing sin in your life then you need to wake up! The Apostle Paul warns us:

Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? <sup>4</sup> Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness

and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? <sup>5</sup> But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. (Romans 2:3-5 ESV)

Belshazzar failed to learn this lesson. He lost his life that very night. He found himself standing before the Judge of all things hungover with a golden chalice from God's temple in his hand. He was a fool, and we would be fools to follow in his steps. To whom much is given, much is required.

Finally, we learn in this text that:

### 3. **We will all give a reckoning**

Numbered, numbered, weighed, divided.

Your days are **numbered**. Do you know that? It's important that you do. In fact, Solomon tells us that we can't be wise if we don't recognize this truth:

So teach us to number our days  
that we may get a heart of wisdom. (Psalm 90:12 ESV)

You are not immortal. You will not live forever. You may not even survive the drive home. Therefore, you need to think very carefully about the judgement that is coming on that reckoning day. On that day, you will be **weighed**.

You will stand before the King of kings and you will give an account for the life that you have lived. The God who knows your hidden thoughts and who sees all of the deeds that you thought you did in secret will bring all of your thoughts and deeds into the light for judgement. Heed this warning from 1 Samuel 2:3:

Talk no more so very proudly,  
let not arrogance come from your mouth;  
for the Lord is a God of knowledge,  
and by him actions are weighed. (1 Samuel 2:3 ESV)

Are you ready for that reckoning? Because, at the end of your life, the only thing that will matter will be the result of that hearing. You won't bring any of these earthly treasures with you. Just like Belshazzar, your earthly kingdom will be **divided**.

Some of your wealth will go to your loved ones. Some of it will go to strangers. The accomplishments of your life might be remembered for a few short years, but then, you will be forgotten like everyone that lived before you.

You'll notice that there aren't many coffee mugs inscribed with: "mene, mene, tekel, parsin"

This is not a reminder that we appreciate. Numbered. Weighed. Divided.

And yet, it is the reminder that we need. It is a message of mercy – a message that Belshazzar ignored – and I would plead with you to respond to it now before it is too late. If there is still breath in your lungs then you have an opportunity to get yourself prepared for that reckoning day.

The Apostle Peter preached a message of repentance on the day of Pentecost to a crowd of 3,000 people. We should learn from their response:

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" <sup>38</sup> And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:37-38 ESV)

Would you be saved today? Do you want to prepare yourself for that judgement?

Repent. Confess to God that you are a sinner. Turn away from that life of rebellion and surrender to live your life God's way. Today.

Believe. Confess your faith in Christ through baptism. Baptism is an outward expression of faith. It is a courageous proclamation to the world that you identify with Jesus Christ. Baptism communicates that you believe that Jesus died for your sins; it communicates that you believe that just as Jesus rose from the grave, so too will you; it communicates that you believe that Jesus is your Saviour and Lord and that through him your sins are washed away!

The writing is on the wall.

The reckoning day is coming.

Take this time to look closely at your life. Who's kingdom are you living for? Who receives the glory in your story? Your days are numbered. Your earthly treasures will be divided. Your life will be weighed. There is only one who will be found worthy of eternal life – there is only one name by which man can be saved – and that is Jesus Christ! Have you identified with him? Have you placed your trust in him?

I pray that you will.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.