

Daniel 5
December 6, 2015

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Rhetorical: Have you ever met a Christian man or woman who just oozes with humility and oozes the spirit of God in them? When you talk with him or her, you just hear the tenderness of heart they have for the Lord? When you meet someone like that, don't you just say to yourself, "I hope when I spiritually grow up that I will have this kind of impact on others?"

Q: Does that person still exist in your life? If yes, do you ever call upon him or her to give you spiritual guidance?

[Share my experience of knowing Herb Stange]

Q: How do you think special people like that get to that place in life? [They read the Word of God, apply it in their lives, they pray fervently, they serve and love others]

These are people who didn't come to church once a week to get their spiritual inoculation to sustain them for the next six days. These are Christians who not only made a decision for Christ, but they chose to cultivate their love relationship with Jesus on a daily basis. They hunger and thirst for the Word of God. They value prayer as a way to hear God's voice and share their hearts with Him. They love to serve others every chance they get. They are "all in" because they have such a strong relationship with Jesus. That's what separates the men from the boys and the women from the girls. These are the people who help us grow. We are drawn to people who have developed their faith in such a way that it is deeply attractive – so much so that we are inspired to grow ourselves.

Transition: But obviously this is a process. Daniel seems to be this kind of man. We have watched him grow up since age 16 when he was first deported to Babylon. He was a man of faith who was not willing to swerve from it when challenged. God used him to help King N with a dream and interpretation. At that time, it was **obvious** that Daniel had the "spirit of the holy gods" in him. So Daniel's reputation for being a man of God filled by the Holy Spirit was established while he was young. Daniel was 50 yrs old when he was called upon by King N to interpret the vision of the tree that touched the sky. Now we're in Chapter 5, and the consensus among theologians is that 20 yrs have gone by before the events we'll read shortly, which puts Daniel at approximately 70 years old. As a man of God, Daniel has been a spiritual guide to the Babylonians, a lost nation, a pagan nation for about 50+ years!

Proposition: He's going to be called upon again in this chapter. I want us to consider that *all of us CAN spiritually guide lost people BY following the **EXAMPLES** Daniel sets for us as he interacts with Belshazzar*. Pretend you are an understudy of Daniel and see what lessons you can learn, or **EXAMPLES** you can follow. Let's begin with today's new storyline – Act 1!

BOOK (NIV 1984): [Read Daniel 5:1-12]

V.1:

- King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them.

V.2:

- While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them.

V.3:

- So they brought in the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them.

V.4:

- As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.

V.5:

- Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote.

V.6:

- His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way.

V.7:

- The king called out for the enchanters, astrologers and diviners to be brought and said to these wise men of Babylon, “Whoever reads this writing and tells me what it means will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around his neck, and he will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom.”

V.8:

- Then all the king’s wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or tell the king what it meant.

V.9:

- So King Belshazzar became even more terrified and his face grew more pale. His nobles were baffled.

V.10:

- The queen, hearing the voices of the king and his nobles, came into the banquet hall. “O king, live forever!” she said. “Don’t be alarmed! Don’t look so pale!”

V.11:

- There is a man in your kingdom who has the spirit of the holy gods in him. In the time of your father he was found to have insight and intelligence and wisdom like that of the gods. King Nebuchadnezzar your father—your father the king, I say—appointed him chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners.

V.12:

- This man Daniel, whom the king called Beltshazzar, was found to have a keen mind and knowledge and understanding, and also the ability to interpret dreams, explain riddles and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means.”

Process Observations/Questions:

Q v.1: How many are attending this great banquet? [1,000 nobles and their wives, concubines of King B]

Q v.2: How is King Belshazzar related to King Nebuchadnezzar? [He is the son of King N]

Q v.4: What did you notice about the stemware? [They were gold and silver goblets taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem]

Q v.4: Where did King Belshazzar and his nobles wrong? [When they started drinking wine out of these goblets, they started praising the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.]

Q v.5: While they are praising gods that don't exist, what catches the attention of King Belshazzar? [He sees fingers of a human hand begin writing on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand.]

Q v.6: How did this impact King B? [His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way.]

Q v.6: Does Scripture tell us that this is God's fingers at this point? [No – All King B knows is there are fingers of a human hand writing on a wall, and he is freaked out!!]

Q v.7: Who does King B summon to help him understand the handwriting on the wall? [The enchanters, astrologers and diviners – that seems to be the pattern in Babylon]

Q v.8: How well did the enchanters do? [Poorly! They couldn't read the writing or tell the king what it meant.]

Q v.9: When they failed to interpret the handwriting, what then happened to King B? [He became even more terrified and his face grew more pale.]

Q v.10: There's apparently a raucous going on such that the queen feels compelled to see what's going on in the banquet hall. She discerns what's happening, so what does she tell her son? ["Don't be alarmed! Don't look so pale!"]

Q v.11-12: What does she tell King B to comfort him? [She tells him about Daniel, who has the "spirit of the holy gods" in him. He is full of insight and intelligent and wise. Then she basically shares the resume of Daniel and what he did for King N and advises him to call for Daniel to figure out what the writing means.]

Transition: So here is King Belshazzar, a pagan, who seriously miss stepped by committing idolatry while defiling the goblets that were taken from the temple of God. As was the norm in this culture, he turned first to the enchanters, the astrologers, diviners who were considered "wise" to get their help. But as usual, they didn't have the ability to help King Belshazzar.

Q: Why couldn't they? [They did not have the spirit of God in them. X-Ref I Cor 2:14 – “The man without the spirit... It's like the blind leading the blind.]

So King Belshazzar is desperate for a spiritual guide. He needs someone who is connected to God who can help him, so he calls upon Daniel. As we finish the reading, I want you to study Daniel's EXAMPLES of how he spiritually guided the king. Let's finish reading the text.

[Read Daniel 5:13-31]

V.13:

- So Daniel was brought before the king, and the king said to him, “Are you Daniel, one of the exiles my father the king brought from Judah?”

V.14:

- I have heard that the spirit of the gods is in you and that you have insight, intelligence and outstanding wisdom.

V.15:

- The wise men and enchanters were brought before me to read this writing and tell me what it means, but they could not explain it.

V.16:

- Now I have heard that you are able to give interpretations and to solve difficult problems. If you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around your neck, and you will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom.”

V.17:

- Then Daniel answered the king, “You may keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else. Nevertheless, I will read the writing for the king and tell him what it means.

V.18:

- “O king, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendor.

V.19:

- Because of the high position he gave him, all the peoples and nations and men of every language dreaded and feared him. Those the king wanted to put to death, he put to death; those he wanted to spare, he spared; those he wanted to promote, he promoted; and those he wanted to humble, he humbled.

V.20:

- But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory.

V.21:

- He was driven away from people and given the mind of an animal; he lived with the wild donkeys and ate grass like cattle; and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and sets over them anyone he wishes.

V.22:

- “But you his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this.

V.23:

- Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. You had the goblets from his temple brought to you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines drank wine from them. You praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways.

V.24:

- Therefore he sent the hand that wrote the inscription.

V.25:

- “This is the inscription that was written: mene, mene, tekel, parsin

V.26:

- “This is what these words mean: Mene: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end.

V.27:

- *Tekel*: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting.

V.28:

- *Peres*: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.”

V.29:

- Then at Belshazzar’s command, Daniel was clothed in purple, a gold chain was placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom.

V.30:

- That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain,

V.31:

- and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, at the age of sixty-two.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q v.18-21: Daniel gives King Belshazzar some background about his father, King N, before he tells the king what the handwriting on the wall meant. What was it? [Summarize v.18-21]

Q v.22: After giving King Belshazzar a quick history lesson about his father, Daniel basically gives him the bottom line. What was it? [King B knew all this, but didn’t humble himself before God!]

Q v.23: Notice Daniel’s message to King B in v.23. When he doesn’t humble himself before God, what in essence has he done? [Set himself up against the Lord of heaven!]

Q v.23: What does God hold in His hands for each of us? [our life and all of our ways]

Q v.26-28: What does Mene, Tekel and Parsin mean? [See v.26-28]

I suggested at the beginning of our lesson that *all of us can spiritually guide lost people BY following the **EXAMPLES** Daniel sets for us as he interacts with Belshazzar.*

Let’s process the EXAMPLES or marks of a strong spiritual guide. What did you notice?

- He was available and accessible when called upon. (v.13)
- He didn’t provide spiritual guidance for any reward or payment. He did it because he genuinely wanted to help.

- He acknowledged the Most High God who dispenses sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendor – even to an unbeliever!
- He wasn't afraid to tell King Belshazzar the truth, even though it was unpleasant:
 - He told King B that he hadn't humbled himself before the Lord.
 - He told King B that he committed idolatry by praising gods that can't see, hear or understand.
 - He told King B that he did not honor the very God who holds his life in His hands.
 - He didn't sugar coat the meanings of the words inscribed on the wall.
- He knew God well enough to know that humility is an important attribute for all of creation to have in order to have a healthy relationship with God.

LOOK:

For today's lesson, I steered away from the word "mentor" because too many of us start to disqualify ourselves in our heads and discount our ability to pour the love of God into others and help them find their way through prayer, bible study, worship and fellowship. However, all of us can be a spiritual guide by pointing people in the right direction. We can all spiritually guide people to help them move closer to Christ.

Challenge: Let's not discount our impact on the lives around us, especially to those who are spiritually lost. I want us to pray that the Lord increase our spiritual awareness and sensitivity to recognize the opportunities He's given us. Let's be available and accessible. Let's trust the work of the Holy Spirit to give us the words we need to share. God has placed them in our circles of influence to point them to Christ, so let's do that and give God the praise and glory for the supernatural work He will do through us. Are you up for that?!!

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (Da 5)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Some twenty years pass between chapters 4 and 5. Nebuchadnezzar moved off the scene, succeeded by a son who reigned just a few years and then was assassinated by his own brother-in-law. He in turn ruled four years but was killed while in battle. The next two rulers occupied the throne a very brief time; the second of these was Nabonidus. He was actually a son-in-law to Nebuchadnezzar and was married to the widow of one of the previous kings. At this time, Nabonidus was king of the Babylonian empire and his son Belshazzar was king of the *city* of Babylon. This explains why Daniel was named third ruler (vv. 7, 29). While the events in chapter 5 are taking place, King Nabonidus has been a captive of the Medes and Persians for four months. Note the experiences of Belshazzar.

I. Enjoying His Feast (5:1–4)

This feast was in honor of one of the great Babylonian gods, and it took place in the autumn of 539 B.C. Archaeologists have unearthed palaces at Babylon containing great halls large enough to entertain a thousand guests. They have also discovered that the walls were covered with a white chalklike substance, which explains the matter of the handwriting on the wall. The main idea in these verses is drinking wine. Wine has always been associated with Babylon and the Babylonian “system” of this world (Jer. 51:7; Rev. 14:8; 17:1–5; 18:3, 13). The king was not content to drink wine to his gods (v. 4, and see Rev. 9:20); he wanted to blaspheme the God of the Jews as well. So he had the sacred temple vessels brought in to be used at this idolatrous, blasphemous feast (see Dan. 1:2). The word “father” in 5:2 indicates “grandfather”; see also the use in vv. 11 and 13. Please keep in mind that the Medes and Persians were already outside the gates of the city when this feast was in progress. So confident was the king that his fortress city was impregnable that he laughed at the invading armies. What a picture of our world today: judgment is about to fall, yet people are making merry and worshiping their false gods. “When they say, ‘Peace and safety!’ then sudden destruction comes upon them” (1 Thes. 5:3, NKJV). Babylon was a strong city with walls 350 feet high and eighty-seven feet thick. The Euphrates River ran diagonally through the city, and great brass gates controlled the city entrances. How could any invading army capture such a city?

II. Revealing His Fear (5:5–9)

The guests apparently did not immediately see the mysterious hand appear, but the king looked over their heads and saw it on the opposite wall. Imagine how shocked the guests were when they saw their king trembling, his knees knocking together. Wine could not give him courage now; he was face-to-face with a message from God. You can read v. 7, “And the king *shrieked*.” He had to know the meaning of the hand and the handwriting. In fact, he offered the man who would explain it the position as third ruler of the land. (In a few hours Belshazzar would not even be alive and ruling himself.) As usual, none of the king’s “experts” could explain the writing on the wall, and this made the king even more concerned. How strange that he did not know Daniel, the man who had counseled his grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar. But Belshazzar was a careless

youth (he was about thirty-five years old at this time) who was more interested in power and pleasure than in spiritual matters. No wonder his city fell.

III. Discovering His Future (5:10–29)

The Queen Mother solved the problem. It is possible that this wise woman was the widow of Nebuchadnezzar whom Belshazzar's father, Nabonidus, married in order to solidify his power in the kingdom. At any rate, she heard of the consternation in the banquet hall and came to advise the king. "O king, live forever," she said (v. 10)—and he was going to be dead before the night was over. Then she told him about Daniel and how he had advised Belshazzar's grandfather. Daniel was an old man now, and had been "retired" from public service. As an honored member of the official family, Daniel was probably invited to the feast as a guest, but he would not defile himself or compromise his testimony. Because of his separated position, Daniel was honored of God (2 Cor. 6:14–18).

The king tried to impress Daniel (vv. 13–16), but Daniel would not be impressed. He knew that the king's gifts meant nothing in comparison to the blessing of God; for that matter, Belshazzar would not be king much longer. Before explaining the handwriting, Daniel preached a sermon to the king, using the king's grandfather as his illustration. He warned the king about his pride and sin and reminded him that God judged Nebuchadnezzar severely. "And you knew all this," Daniel exclaimed, "yet you persist in living such a wicked life. Now God has sent you a message of judgment and it is too late." God gave Nebuchadnezzar a year to repent (4:28–33), but there was no year for Belshazzar to repent. He was doomed.

Now for the explanation. The words were in Chaldean. In Babylon a mina and a tekela were different weights; and the word *peres* simply means "to divide." When the Babylonian magicians saw these words on the wall, they could not understand what they meant. But God gave Daniel the interpretation: "Numbered—weighed—divided." Belshazzar's days had been numbered and time was up; he had been weighed in God's scales and found wanting; now his kingdom would be taken from him and divided by the Medes and Persians. And keep in mind that Darius was at the gates at that very hour. Did Belshazzar believe the message from God, even after all his fear and shaking? No. We find no evidence of repentance or concern. He kept his promise and made Daniel third ruler just as though his kingdom were to continue forever. The king's pride, lust, indifference, and self-satisfaction led to his downfall.

IV. Meeting His Fate (5:30–31)

Had Belshazzar studied the Prophet Isaiah, he would have known just how the city of Babylon would be taken, and by whom it would be taken. Cyrus the Persian conqueror would defeat the Medes and then come down upon Babylon (Isa. 41:25; 45:1–4). He would dig a canal that would reroute the Euphrates River and then smuggle his army into the city *under* the gates. The Babylonians had seen the enemy digging, but they thought they were going to build a mound against the city. Actually, they were diverting the river. Why was the city taken unawares? Because most of the people were drunk. It was a great religious feast day, and the people were too involved in pleasure to think about defense. The enemy came right into the banquet hall, and the king was slain. What a warning to any nation! We have such a pleasure-mad world today that it will be easy for some enemy to take us unawares, and history will repeat itself.

Who was Darius the Mede? Isaiah had said that Cyrus would capture Babylon and set the Jews free (Isa. 44:28–45:13); see also Dan. 1:21 and 10:1. Darius is mentioned as "king" in Dan.

6:1, 6, 9, 25, 28; 9:1; 11:1. The solution is found in the word “took” in 5:31; it should be translated “received.” Darius (Cyrus’ military leader) received the kingdom from Cyrus, king of Persia, and ruled Babylon for him. In 6:28 we see that it was a dual kingship; Cyrus was the king of the empire, while Darius ruled Babylon and the area connected with it. Cyrus entered Babylon a mighty conqueror and proceeded to deal wisely with the people, including the exiled Jews. It was Cyrus who issued the decrees that permitted the Jews to return to their land and rebuild their temple (Ezra 1:1–4; see Isa. 44:28). So, even the rise and fall of empires is all a part of God’s plan for His people.

The fall of Babylon in 539 B.C. is a picture of the future fall of Babylon (the devil’s world system) as given in Rev. 17–18. And Bible-believing Christians can already see “the handwriting on the wall.” But blind world rulers continue in their pride and pleasure, little realizing that the Lord is coming.

Pentecost, J. D. (1985). Daniel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 1, pp. 1344–1347). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

D. The feast of Belshazzar (chap. 5)

1. THE REVELRY OF THE KING (5:1–4)

The events recorded in Daniel 1–4 pertained to the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, who expanded and united the Babylonian Empire. Nebuchadnezzar died in 562 B.C. after ruling 43 years. The ensuing years of Babylonian history till its overthrow by Cyrus in 539 B.C. were marked by progressive deterioration, intrigue, and murder. Nebuchadnezzar was succeeded by his son Evil-Merodach who ruled for two years (562–560 B.C., 2 Kings 25:27–30; Jer. 52:31–34). Evil-Merodach was murdered in August 560 by Neriglissar, Nebuchadnezzar’s son-in-law and Evil-Merodach’s own brother-in-law. Neriglissar then ruled four years (560–556 B.C.). He is the Nergal-Sharezer mentioned in Jeremiah 39:3, 13. At his death, he was succeeded by his young son Labashi-Marduk, who ruled only two months (May and June 556) before he was assassinated and succeeded by Nabonidus, who reigned 17 years (556–539 B.C.). See the chart “Kings of the Neo-Babylonian Empire,” in the *Introduction*.

Nabonidus did much to restore the glory that had belonged to Babylon under the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. Nabonidus’ mother was the highpriestess of the moon god at Haran. Perhaps because of her influence, he had great interest in restoring and expanding the Babylonian religion and did much to restore abandoned temples. He was absent from Babylon for 10 of his 17 years, from 554 through 545. In Haran he restored the temple of the moon god Sin, and then he attacked Edom and conquered parts of Arabia where he then lived for some time.

Belshazzar was Nabonidus’ eldest son and was appointed by his father as his coregent. (Nebuchadnezzar is referred to as Belshazzar’s father [Dan. 5:2, 11, 13, 18; cf. v. 22] in the sense that he was his ancestor or predecessor.) This coregency explains why Belshazzar was called king (v. 1) and why he exercised kingly authority even though Nabonidus actually held the throne.

5:1. Babylon was being besieged by the Persian army, led by Ugbaru, governor of Gutium, while **Belshazzar**, inside the city, was giving a **great banquet for 1,000 of his nobles**. Belshazzar’s name means “Bel (another name for the god Marduk) has protected the king.” Perhaps the banquet was given to show Belshazzar’s contempt for the Persians and to allay his

people's fears. Archeologists have excavated a large hall in Babylon 55 feet wide and 165 feet long that had plastered walls. Such a room would have been sufficient to house a gathering of this size. Belshazzar considered his city secure from assault because of its massive walls. Within the city were supplies that would sustain it for 20 years. Therefore the **king** felt he had little cause for concern.

5:2–4. The banquet itself showed Belshazzar's contempt for the power of men. Then, to show his contempt for the power of the true **God**, he ordered that **the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar ... had taken from the temple in Jerusalem** (cf. 1:1–2) be brought to the banquet hall so the assembled revelers **might drink from them**. In drinking, the people honored **the gods** of Babylon-idols made of **gold ... silver ... bronze, iron, wood, and stone**. Nabonidus, Belshazzar's father, had attempted to strengthen the Babylonian religion. In keeping with that, this act by his son may have been an attempt to undo the influence of Nebuchadnezzar's honoring the God of Israel (4:34–35). The polygamous king's **wives and concubines** were there too.

2. THE REVELATION TO THE KING (5:5–12)

5:5–7. **Suddenly** the hilarity of the revelry gave way to hushed fear. **Near** one of the lampstands that illuminated the banquet hall, **fingers of a human hand** were seen writing **on the plastered wall**. **The** terrified **king** (cf. 4:5) **watched** as **the hand ... wrote** a message. The king had evidently arisen from the chair in which he had been seated to lead the festivities and stood to watch. **He** became **so frightened that ... his legs gave way** and he fell to the floor. As was the custom (cf. 2:2; 4:6–7) Belshazzar summoned **the** wise men, **enchanters, astrologers, and diviners** (cf. comments on 1:17) and promised to reward **whoever** would interpret the meaning of this strange phenomenon.

The reward was great. The interpreter would **be clothed in purple** (cf. Mordecai's purple robe, Es. 8:15), that is, he would be given royal authority. Also he would receive **a gold chain** (cf. Gen. 41:42), which no doubt had great monetary value. And he would be **made the third highest ruler in the kingdom**. Since Nabonidus was king and Belshazzar his coregent, the highest office to be conferred was that of the third highest ruler. The king's offer shows the extremity of his fear.

5:8–12. The **wise men** were unable to **read** or interpret **the writing** on the wall. This fact produced even greater fear in **the king**. Their inability to interpret the message made it even more ominous.

Then all the guests who like the king had seen the writing on the wall were thrown into utter confusion (**his nobles were baffled**). The sound of confusion in the banquet hall came to the ears of **the queen**. Evidently she was not a wife of Belshazzar for his wives were with him in the hall (vv. 2–3). She was the king's mother, or perhaps even his grandmother. Her familiarity with both **Nebuchadnezzar** and **Daniel** seems to suggest that she was the king's grandmother. She evidently had previous contact with Daniel, **a man ... who**, she said, **has the spirit of the holy gods** (cf. 4:8–9, 18; 5:14). She knew of his **insight ... intelligence ... wisdom** (v. 11), **knowledge ... understanding and ... ability to interpret dreams** (v. 12). (On Daniel's position as "chief of the magicians" and others, see comments on 4:9.) So she counseled Belshazzar to summon **Daniel** and let him interpret **the writing** on the plaster.

3. THE REQUEST OF THE KING (5:13–16)

5:13–16. Following the queen’s suggestion, Belshazzar had **Daniel ... brought in before** him. **The king** seemingly belittled Daniel, referring to him as **one of the exiles ... from Judah**. He was from the same land whose God Belshazzar was holding in contempt! (vv. 2–3) The king then relayed to Daniel what he had **heard** from the queen (vv. 11–12) about Daniel’s ability to do what **the wise men and enchanters** were unable to do. He promised Daniel the same rich rewards he had promised the wise men (v. 16; cf. v. 7) if Daniel could **read the writing** on the wall and interpret its meaning. Though written in Aramaic, it was difficult to read, perhaps because it was in an unusual script.

4. THE REPLY BY DANIEL (5:17–28)

a. *The humbling of Belshazzar (5:17–21)*

5:17–19. In his reply **Daniel** summarized God’s dealing with Belshazzar’s predecessor Nebuchadnezzar. He related lessons that Nebuchadnezzar had learned from God’s dealings with him. God is sovereign and rules over nations and appoints kings according to His own will; Nebuchadnezzar was brought to his position of power in the Babylonian Empire by divine appointment. (**The Most High God**; cf. comments on 3:26, **gave ... Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty**.) His authority was widely recognized (by **peoples and nations and men of every language**; cf. 3:4, 7; 4:1; 6:25; 7:14), and his decrees were unchangeable (5:19).

5:20–21. When Nebuchadnezzar failed to recognize that the power was God’s and not his own, he **became arrogant** and proud (cf. 4:30). God then humbled him and **stripped** him of **his ... throne** while he lived like **an animal ... with the wild donkeys**. Through this discipline Nebuchadnezzar came to recognize the greatness of God’s authority (4:34–35). Though the facts of Nebuchadnezzar’s seven-year insanity may have been hidden from the populace, they were known by the royal family (cf. 5:22).

b. *The pride of Belshazzar (5:22–25)*

5:22–24. **Belshazzar ... knew** what his predecessor had experienced, and should have learned from it. However, Belshazzar had not done so; in fact he had openly challenged **the Lord of heaven** (cf. “the King of heaven,” 4:37) by drinking from **the goblets** taken **from the temple** in Jerusalem (5:2–3) and by praising man-made **gods** (v. 4). They have no life, but by contrast the true **God** not only *has life*, but held *Belshazzar’s life in His hand*. Perhaps Daniel intended an interesting wordplay by adding that God, who held Belshazzar’s life in His *hand*, **sent a hand** to write him a message. Belshazzar, knowing about God, failed to **honor** Him.

c. *The judgment by God (5:25–28)*

5:25. As God had judged Nebuchadnezzar’s pride by removing him from the throne, so He would judge Belshazzar’s pride by taking the kingdom from him and giving it to another people. **This judgment was written** in the words that appeared on the plaster. First Daniel read **the inscription** which the wise men were unable to read. It was brief, containing only three words with the first word repeated. **MENE** (*menē’*) is an Aramaic noun referring to a weight of 50 shekels (a mina, equal to 1 1/4 pounds). It is from the verb *menâh*, “to number, to reckon.” **TEKEL** (*teqēl*) is a noun referring to a shekel (2/5 of an ounce). It is from the verb *teqāl*, “to weigh.” **PARSIN** (*parsîn*) is a noun meaning a half-mina (25 shekels, or about 2/3 of a pound). It

is from the verb *peras*, “to break in two, to divide.” The word on the wall was actually *Ūparsîn*, which means “and Parsin” (NIV marg.).

Even if the wise men could have read the words (which they couldn’t), they could not have interpreted them for they had no point of reference as to what had been numbered, weighed, and divided.

5:26–27. Then Daniel proceeded to interpret the meaning of **these words**. He explained that **MENE** meant that **God** had **numbered** (*menâh*) the duration of **the days of** Belshazzar’s kingdom and was about to bring **it to an end**. **TEKEL** meant that Belshazzar had **been** evaluated by God, **weighed** (*teqîltâh*, from *teqâl*) in a balance and had been **found wanting**, that is, he was too light. A balance was the normal device used in weighing payments. A payment was to meet a certain standard so if it did not meet that standard, it was rejected as unacceptable. Belshazzar’s moral and spiritual character did not measure up to the standard of God’s righteousness so he was rejected. “By Him [God] deeds are weighed (1 Sam. 2:3).

5:28. In interpreting the third word Daniel changed the plural *parsîn* (v. 25) to the singular **PERES** (*perēs*). Belshazzar’s **kingdom** was to be broken up (**divided**, *perîsat*) and **given to the Medes and Persians**. Apparently Daniel intended a play on words for a change in the vowels in *perēs* gives the word “Persian” (*Pāras*). Thus the message was that because of the moral and spiritual degradation of the king and his kingdom, God would terminate the Babylonian Empire and give it to the Medes and Persians.

5. THE REVELATION FULFILLED (5:29–31)

5:29–31. One might have expected **Belshazzar’s** wrath to fall on **Daniel** because of the message he brought. But instead the king, faithful to his word (cf. v. 16), rewarded Daniel. However, Daniel’s enjoyment of those honors and the position to which he had been promoted was short-lived for **that very night Belshazzar was killed and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom**. (On the identity of Darius the Mede see comments on 6:1.)

The city had been under assault by Cyrus. In anticipation of a long siege the city had stored supplies to last for 20 years. The Euphrates River ran through the city from north to south, so the residents had an ample water supply. Belshazzar had a false sense of security, because the Persian army, led by Ugbaru, was outside Babylon’s city walls. Their army was divided; part was stationed where the river entered the city at the north and the other part was positioned where the river exited from the city at the south. The army diverted the water north of the city by digging a canal from the river to a nearby lake.

With the water diverted, its level receded and the soldiers were able to enter the city by going under the sluice gate. Since the walls were unguarded the Persians, once inside the city, were able to conquer it without a fight. Significantly the defeat of Babylon fulfilled not only the prophecy Daniel made earlier that same night (5:28) but also a prophecy by Isaiah (Isa. 47:1–5). The overthrow of Babylon took place the night of the 16th of Tishri (October 12, 539 B.C.).

The rule of the Medes and Persians was the second phase of the times of the Gentiles (the silver chest and arms of the image in Dan. 2). The events in chapter 5 illustrate that God is sovereign and moves according to His predetermined plans. Those events also anticipate the final overthrow of all Gentile world powers that rebel against God and are characterized by moral and spiritual corruption. Such a judgment, anticipated in Psalm 2:4–6 and Revelation 19:15–16, will be fulfilled at the Second Advent of Jesus Christ to this earth.

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (pp. 1278 – 1279). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

5:1 Until the latter half of the nineteenth century, Belshazzar’s name was unattested except for the book of Daniel and works dependent on it (Baruch, Josephus). From other sources Nabonidus was known to have been the last king of Babylon, and some critics declared Belshazzar to be fictional. However, during the past 150 years abundant evidence has come to light (at least 37 archival texts) demonstrating that Belshazzar was a real person, the son of Nabonidus and ruler of Babylon during his father’s extended absences.

5:2 “His predecessor” literally reads “his father” in the Aramaic text. Nebuchadnezzar is called Belshazzar’s predecessor six times in this chapter (vv. 2, 11, 13, 18), and the king is designated as the “successor” (literally, “son”) of Nebuchadnezzar once (v. 22). Babylonian sources record that Belshazzar was the son of Nabonidus. The apparent discrepancy may be explained by the use of the terms predecessor (or father) and successor (or son) in the Semitic languages. “Predecessor” could refer to one’s immediate father, grandfather, ancestor, or as in the case of kings, the immediate predecessor. Likewise “successor” may mean one’s immediate offspring, grandson, descendant, or the immediate successor. An example of the latter is Jehu’s designation as the “son of Omri” in the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III. It is likely that Nabonidus wed a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar, making the great king both Belshazzar’s “predecessor” and grandfather.

5:7 The fact that Belshazzar could offer only the “third highest position in the kingdom” (5:16, 29) is evidence that the author of Daniel had accurate knowledge of Nabonidus. Nabonidus was first in rank, followed by his son Belshazzar and then the decipherer of the handwriting would be third in rank.

5:30 Xenophon mentions that Babylon’s Medo-Persian invaders “avenged themselves upon the wicked king” (*Cyropaedia* 7.5.32), meaning they executed Belshazzar.

5:31 According to the *Nabonidus Chronicle*, Babylon fell to the Medo-Persians on the sixteenth of the month Tishri, in the autumn of 539 B.C. The Greek historians Herodotus and Xenophon supply fascinating details about Babylon’s fall. The *Nabonidus Chronicle* and the *Cyrus Cylinder* both agree with Daniel that Babylon was captured without a major battle and that the citizens readily accepted Persian rule