

Daniel Chapter 5

Pastor Mike Wells Study Notes

Chapter 5 Overview: Chapter 5 deals with the ‘handwriting on the wall’ event. This is almost 70 years after Daniel was taken into captivity. In the meantime, Nebuchadnezzar’s grandson Belshazzar now ruled. By the end of the chapter, the Medes and the Persians had overthrown Babylon. At Belshazzar’s feast, the handwriting on the wall is recorded in verses 1-9. Daniel is summoned to interpret the handwriting in verses 10- 17. And Daniel foretells the king’s destruction in verses 18-31.

Daniel 5 : 1 - *Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand.*

- The events of this chapter take place about 537 or 536 B.C.
- This is almost 70 years after the initial deportation of Jews from Jerusalem in about 605 B.C.
- So, Daniel had to be in his upper eighties as a man.
- Belshazzar the king held a huge drunken party for 1,000 of his lords.

Daniel 5 : 2 - *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.*

- Though Nebuchadnezzar is called the father of Belshazzar in the text here, the thought is that he was his father in the sense of a ‘forefather.’
- Most historians agree that Nebuchadnezzar was the grandfather of Belshazzar.
- Belshazzar decided to fetch the sacred temple vessels that had been taken from the Temple at Jerusalem decades earlier.
- They evidently were kept on display somewhere in Babylon.
- Now they were being used as drinking vessels for the drunken orgy.
- So, Belshazzar, his princes, his wives, and his concubines drank their alcoholic beverages from the sacred vessels from the Temple of Jehovah God.
- Not a real smart move to desecrate something sacred from God.

Daniel 5 : 3-4 – *3 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. 4 They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone.*

- Not only did they use the sacred vessels from the Temple of God to get drunk with them, but to add insult to injury, they then praised their heathen pagan gods of gold, silver, brass, iron, wood and of stone.
- Again, not a smart move to desecrate something sacred from God

Daniel 5 : 5 - *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.*

- Verse 30 indicates that the time was at night

- The worst sins usually takes place under the cover of darkness.
- There in the great royal palace of Babylon there appeared the fingers of a man's hand writing on the wall above a lamp stand.
- God wrote above the lamp so that there would be enough light for all to see.
- Belshazzar clearly saw the literal hand writing on the wall.

Daniel 5 : 6 - *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.*

- Belshazzar clearly was shaken.
- His facial expression went from party mode to terror.
- He became so frightened that "*the joints of his loins were loosed.*"
- I believe this means that he lost control of his bladder or his bowels.
- He was scared out of his wits.
- His knees actually shook against each other.
- God clearly had gotten the attention of this pagan ruler.

Daniel 5 : 7 - *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.*

- In his agitated state, Belshazzar did not discreetly whisper for an aide to summons the royal 'wise men.'
- Instead, he yelled loudly to get the fortune tellers to him ASAP.
- He also promised that whoever could read the writing and interpret it would be rewarded handsomely.
- They would become third in command behind the king and his heir apparent.
- Scarlet or purple was a color of garment reserved for royalty but they would be treated like royalty and allowed to wear it if they could interpret.

Daniel 5 : 8 - *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.*

- The royal 'wise men' were assembled to read the inscription on the wall.
- It was most likely written in Hebrew characters of which none of them were familiar.
- None of them could make heads or tails of it.

Daniel 5 : 9 - *Then was king Belshazzar greatly troubled, and his countenance was changed in him, and his lords were astonished.*

- His hope of learning the inscription seemed to be dashed.
- He became very agitated.
- His facial expression was distorted by fear and anxiety.
- His people around him were astonished at the terror in the eyes of their leader.

Daniel 5 : 10 - *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.*

- The queen mentioned here was either the mother of Belshazzar or even his grandmother
- She was not present at the drunken party, but word reached her of the consternation of her son or grandson.
- So, she entered the banquet hall and tried to encourage the king.

Daniel 5 : 11 - *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.*

- The queen mother informed Belshazzar that there was a man in his kingdom who had great understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of God during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar.
- This man had been made chief over the wise men of Babylon years earlier.
- Of course, she is talking about Daniel.

Daniel 5 : 12 - *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.*

- The queen mother described Daniel as having an excellent spirit.
- He also had the ability to understand and interpret dreams, difficult visions, and troubling events.
- Nebuchadnezzar had named him Belteshazzar (Daniel).
- So, The queen mother urged Belshazzar to call for Daniel and he would interpret the handwriting on the wall.

Daniel 5 : 13 - *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?*

- Poor Daniel evidently was located and roused out of bed in the middle of the night.
- He was then marched in before Belshazzar.
- The king asked if he were the Daniel who was one of the Jewish captives brought from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel 5 : 14 - *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.*

- Belshazzar then informed Daniel he had heard the Spirit of God was in him and that he had the ability to discern things.

Daniel 5 : 15 - *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.*

- Belshazzar also informed Daniel that his royal ‘wise- men’ could not read or interpret the handwriting on the wall.

Daniel 5 : 16 - *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.*

- Belshazzar also told Daniel that if he could read the inscription and interpret it, he would be rewarded very well with the royal awards mentioned earlier in verse 7.

Daniel 5 : 17 - *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.*

- Daniel told the king to keep his gifts and give them to someone else.
- He would read the inscription and interpret it, but he didn't need the rewards.
- The writing was most likely in Hebrew which Daniel could read, so reading it would be no problem.
- However, God would have to give him the interpretation.
- Daniel knew that God had done so before and could do so now.
- His faith in God shows in his confidence in speaking to the king.
- He had faith that God would once again give him the interpretation.

Daniel 5 : 18 - *O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour.*

- Daniel began by saying how that God had given to Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar's grandfather, the kingdom of Babylon with all its majesty, glory, and honor.

Daniel 5 : 19 - *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.*

- Because of the great power given to Nebuchadnezzar, the entire vast empire of many nationalities and people feared him.
- Nebuchadnezzar chose and sentenced men to death or allowed them to live.
- He, by his own decree, allowed subordinates to rule beneath him or he removed them.
- He was all powerful in this land and no vote was needed, he made the decisions.
- In the land of Babylon Nebuchadnezzar chose who would be put up and who would be put down.

Daniel 5 : 20 - *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.*

- Yet, in his power and glory, Nebuchadnezzar became clothed with pride and arrogance.
- That is when God gave him a reality check and showed him who is really in full control and who really sets people up and takes them down!!
- The God of heaven is the one who is really in control as Nebuchadnezzar learned in Ch 4.

Daniel 5 : 21 - *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.

- Nebuchadnezzar was driven from his throne and considered insane.
- He lived like an animal for seven years until he would recognize that God alone ruled over the realm of mankind and placed men on their thrones according to His sovereign will.
- Nebuchadnezzar groveled like a beast until he would acknowledge the power and glory of God.

Daniel 5 : 22 - *And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this.*

- Daniel tells it like it is!!
- Belshazzar had the same pride and arrogance his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar once had, even though he was aware of Nebuchadnezzar's divine chastening and why it was so accomplished.
- Knowing all of this, Belshazzar still refused to humble his own heart even though he knew that God had judged his grandfather for the same thing.

Daniel 5 : 23 - *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.*

- Now, Daniel drove home his pointed message.
- He charged Belshazzar with blaspheming the God of heaven, especially by bringing the sacred vessels from the Temple at Jerusalem and using them in his drunken orgy.
- He further had insulted the Almighty by praising the pagan gods of Babylon (gold and silver) with the sacred vessels of Jehovah.
- The God who had given him life and all he had, he had ignored and not glorified.
- Daniel was fearless in indicting the king for his godlessness and wickedness.

Daniel 5 : 24 - *Then was the part of the hand sent from him; and this writing was written.*

- Daniel then informed Belshazzar that the handwriting on the wall had been sent from God and the writing was from Him.

Daniel 5 : 25 - *MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.*

- This is the actual writing and words on the wall.
- The characters likely were in Hebrew for no one else could even read them.
- The phrase literally reads, "*Numbered, Numbered, Weighed, Divided.*"
- It essentially means, "*He hath numbered, He hath numbered. He hath (also) weighed. And they divide the kingdom.*"

Daniel 5 : 26 - *This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it.*

- Daniel then proceeded to interpret the writing to Belshazzar.

- God had numbered the days of Belshazzar kingdom and it was finished!
- Belshazzar's reign was over!!

Daniel 5 : 27 - *TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.*

- Belshazzar had been weighed in the balances of God's justice and found lacking.

Daniel 5 : 28 - *PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.*

- The kingdom of Babylon was about to be divided and given to the attacking Medes and Persians.
- Daniel informed Belshazzar that his reign was over and his kingdom was about to be divided up between the Medes and the Persians—mortal enemies of Babylon.
- In short, his gig as king was up.
- It was over for Belshazzar.
- Daniel was fearless in delivering such a blunt and jarring message to the all powerful Belshazzar.
- But it came from God so he understood he really had nothing to fear.

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.*

- To his credit, Belshazzar kept his word.
- He rewarded Daniel as he had promised.
- Perhaps, he hoped that by honoring the man of God that he would in some way mitigate the wrath of God.
- But it was too late.
- He had ignored the God of heaven and blasphemed Him.

Daniel 5 : 30 - *In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain.*

- The king of Persia had ordered his field commanders to divert the Euphrates River which flowed beneath the walls of Babylon.
- They had dug a different channel that they could divert the water to.
- On that particular night, the river was diverted and Persian and Median soldiers were able to sweep under the wall of the city whence the river previously had flowed.
- They poured into the city and quickly located the drunken banquet hall where Belshazzar was.
- That night, Belshazzar was killed by Media-Persian forces.
- Belshazzar was done.
- God wasted no time in fulfilling His prophecy.

Daniel 5 : 31 - *And Darius the Median took the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old.*

- The Babylonian Empire was divided as God had said it would be.
- Darius was given rule over Babylon while Cyrus ruled other portions of the empire.
- The Babylonian era of world history thus came to a dramatic close that night and the Persian era of world history began its ascent.