



REVEALER OF MYSTERIES

the book of Daniel



Lesson 5

Daniel 5

In the previous chapter we see God pursuing King Nebuchadnezzar until he finally gives up and acknowledges that God is the true sovereign over all kingdoms and history. In short, Nebuchadnezzar gets another chance to respond to God before his life ends. In this chapter, however, we see a king who is literally out of time, who is being notified that his reign, and his life, are over, and it is a sobering reminder of the brevity of life and the urgency of the gospel.

King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them. 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. 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. ⁴ As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.

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. ⁶ His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way.

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."

⁸ Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or tell the king what it meant. ⁹ So King Belshazzar became even more terrified and his face grew more pale. His nobles were baffled.

Given the situation described below (see box in lower right hand corner), why would a ruler throw a party?

What kind of a party is this?

- A. a private formal state dinner
- B. a relaxed meal with a few friends
- C. a huge drunken orgy

How does the party take on another aspect in verses 3-4?

How does Belshazzar react to this supernatural phenomenon?

If you were making a Hollywood movie of this, how would you cast the characters (the king, the queen, Daniel, etc)?

Once again the "usual suspects" are called in to decipher the meaning, and they are "baffled". Why do you think this pattern happens over and over in these chapters?

I fled Him, down
the nights and
down the days;
I fled Him, down
the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the
labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and
in the mist of tears
I hid from Him..."

Francis Thompson,
The Hound of Heaven

The Setting: Gobyras, general of Cyrus, was at the gates of Babylon. He had diverted the waters of the Euphrates and was marching his men up the bed of the river into the city, which straddled the riverbanks. The river gates had been left unguarded. Babylon, stocked with supplies for 20 years, was supposedly secure behind massive walls.

Dr. Robert Culver, The
Wycliffe Bible Commentary

²² "But you his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this. 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. ²⁴ Therefore he sent the hand that wrote the inscription.

²⁵ "This is the inscription that was written:

MENE, MENE, TEKEL,
PARSIN

²⁶ "This is what these words mean:

Mene: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end.

²⁷ **Tekel:** You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting.

²⁸ **Peres:** Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians."

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.

³⁰ That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, ³¹ and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, at the age of sixty-two.

In verses 10-21 The Queen comes into the room (she's actually the king's mother) and reminds Belshazzar about Daniel. How does she describe him?

When Daniel arrives he is given the same offer as the other magicians. How does he respond to it?

Daniel chooses to give a brief history lesson to the king about his grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar ("Son" can refer to a descendent, not necessarily the next generation). What is the main point of telling that story, and how is Belshazzar a contrast?

The discipline upon Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 4 was designed to open his spiritual eyes and give him a chance to repent and change. What is the writing on the wall designed to do?

How are verses 29-30 a fulfillment of the prophecy found in Daniel 2:39, 7:5, 8:3-4, and 8:20?

The three words, Mene, Tekel, and Peres are passive participles, rightly rendered counted, weighed, divided. They are also, when left without vowels, MN TKL, PRS, the name of three ancient weights that might be paralleled with our terms, a pound, an ounce, half a pound.

- *Maneh*, a weight of fifty shekels, equivalent to about two pounds, parallels "mene", which means counted.
- *Tekel*, a coin or weight, equivalent to the Hebrew shekel, suggests tekell in the sense of weigh.

- *Peres* (a half maneh) suggests Peres, divided. It also ominously suggested Persia, which appears in verse 28.



from The Wycliffe Bible Commentary

LIFE RESPONSE –

- Is there anyone you know who, like Belshazzar, is partying through life but secretly hiding their fears? Do you ever have opportunities to warn them about the very real spiritual danger they are in?