

# Daniel 5 • Refusing to Learn the Right Lesson

## Introduction

There's a period of about 20 years between chapters 4 and 5 in which a succession of Nebuchadnezzar's sons have lived and died as kings after him. Belshazzar was ruler in tandem with Nabonidus, who at the time of this event had been a captive of the attacking Medo-Persians for about 4 months. The Medo-Persians have been noted doing what is believed to be construction work to build a siege mound against the main fortress of the city of Babylon in which Belshazzar is here feasting, a staggeringly large and strong fortress with 350 foot high and 87 foot thick walls behind which Belshazzar and company believe are impenetrable. Building a siege mound is deemed so laughable impossible, they're having a feast. The Euphrates River runs through the city diagonally and great, brass gates control the entrances. They truly believe no one can capture the city.

<sup>1</sup>Belshazzar the king held a great feast for a thousand of his nobles, and he was drinking wine in the presence of the thousand. <sup>2</sup>When Belshazzar tasted the wine, he gave orders to bring the gold and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. <sup>3</sup>Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God which was in Jerusalem; and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. <sup>4</sup>They drank the wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.

### [Read v.1-4]

**Q: Given the historical context, why do you suppose they are holding a feast at a time such as this? What does this reveal about their spiritual condition?**

A: Most likely they are confident in what they've built and are displaying the core spiritual weakness from which nearly all sin springs: pride.

**Q: How does their pride take sin to an even deeper level?**

A: Just having the feast in the face of the invading enemy who is just on the other side of the city walls is arrogant and haughty, but they now elevate their arrogance further against God Himself in taking out and using the things dedicated for use in His temple.

**Q: What is the biblical term for what they're doing to God by desecrating His things in this manner?**

A: Blasphemy. This is the worst kind of spiritual assault that a human can attempt against the One True God.

**Q: What is often associated with wine and drunkenness in Scripture?**

A: Babylon

*Babylon has been a golden cup in the hand of the Lord,  
Intoxicating all the earth.  
The nations have drunk of her wine;  
Therefore the nations are going mad.  
Jeremiah 51:7*

*And another angel, a second one, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality."  
Revelation 14:8*

*"For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality."  
Revelation 18:3*

*Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed acts of immorality, and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her*

*immorality.” And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns. The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality, and on her forehead a name was written, a mystery, “BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.”*

*Revelation 17:1-5*

**Point:** *Babylon is the ultimate spirit of the Antichrist in not just being the worst kind of spiritual influence, but the ultimate working of spiritual deception so as to lead others to actively blaspheme and rebel against God.*

**Q: They blaspheme God, but who does Babylon worship?**

A: “...the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone”. (v.4)

**Point:** *This is EXACTLY as it will be in the Last Days. Paul states...*

*Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. **While they are saying, “Peace and safety!” then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape.***

*1 Thessalonians 5:1-3*

**[Read v.5-9]**

<sup>5</sup>Suddenly the fingers of a man’s hand emerged and began writing opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king’s palace, and the king saw the back of the hand that did the writing. <sup>6</sup>Then the king’s face grew pale and his thoughts alarmed him, and his hip joints went slack and his knees began knocking together. <sup>7</sup>The king called aloud to bring in the conjurers, the Chaldeans and the diviners. The king spoke and said to the wise men of Babylon, “Any man who can read this inscription and explain its interpretation to me shall be clothed with purple and have a necklace of gold around his neck, and have authority as third ruler in the kingdom.”

<sup>8</sup>Then all the king’s wise men came in, but they could not read the inscription or make known its interpretation to the king.

<sup>9</sup>Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, his face grew even paler, and his nobles were perplexed.

**Q: How do we know that the king immediately recognized that the handwriting on the wall corresponded to some kind of spiritual problem?**

A: Because his very first reaction was to call in spiritual experts to interpret the inscription.

**Q: Having just witnessed a supernatural sign of God, what is the one spiritual reaction of which there’s no hint? What might have been the correct, first reaction that should have been taken?**

A: There’s absolutely no hint at repentance. The king saw the hand, all those present and the spiritual advisors brought in can plainly read what the supernatural event left on the wall, but there is no thought at all of submitting to or recognizing the need for God by anyone present.

*The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; and they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts.*

*Revelation 9:20-21*

**Point:** *Signs and wonders in and of themselves do not save. When a heart is devoted to power and pleasure rather than spiritual matters, it will remain unchanged even though it witness a sign from the hand of God Himself.*

<sup>10</sup>The queen entered the banquet hall because of the words of the king and his nobles; the queen spoke and said, “O king, live forever! Do not let your thoughts alarm you or your face be pale. <sup>11</sup>There is a man in your kingdom in whom is a spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of your father, illumination, insight and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods were found in him. And King Nebuchadnezzar, your father, your father the king, appointed him chief of the magicians, conjurers, Chaldeans and diviners. <sup>12</sup>This was because an extraordinary spirit, knowledge and insight, interpretation of dreams, explanation of enigmas and solving of difficult problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar. Let Daniel now be summoned and he will declare the interpretation.”

<sup>13</sup>Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king spoke and said to Daniel, “Are you that Daniel who is one of the exiles from Judah, whom my father the king brought from Judah? <sup>14</sup>Now I have heard about you that a spirit of the gods is in you, and that illumination, insight and extraordinary wisdom have been found in you. <sup>15</sup>Just now the wise men and the conjurers were brought in before me that they might read this inscription and make its interpretation known to me, but they could not declare the interpretation of the message. <sup>16</sup>But I personally have heard about you, that you are able to give interpretations and solve difficult problems. Now if you are able to read the inscription and make its interpretation known to me, you will be clothed with purple and wear a necklace of gold around your neck, and you will have authority as the third ruler in the kingdom.”

### **[Read v.10-16]**

**Q: Previously, Nebuchadnezzar had appointed Daniel head over all these spiritual advisors who failed to interpret the message. Why wasn't Daniel there among them when the king called for them?**

A: By this time Daniel was retired from public service. Daniel may have been appointed at one time as a political authority over this group, but upon retirement he did the same thing as before he was elevated to be their leader – he separated himself from them. True prophets of God never willingly associate themselves with the false.

**Q: The queen is very complimentary in her referral of Daniel, but what is the key phrase in her description revealing she doesn't truly respect the source of Daniel's wisdom?**

A: In v.11 she states that Daniel has “wisdom like the wisdom of the gods”. The God of Daniel is simply lumped in with all other gods.

**Point:** Sometimes people will recognize that a true prophet of God has abilities and skills beyond those of the false prophets, but they never attribute the difference to God as the Source; otherwise they'd have to concede that they're worshiping the wrong and/or inferior thing. By elevating the prophet, they are actually engaging in another way of de-emphasizing the God of the prophet.

**Q: How does Belshazzar continue to display his spiritual lack of character?**

A: He acknowledges “that a spirit of the gods is in you” (v.14), but tries to appeal to Daniel's pride, the very thing that is wrong with Belshazzar. In his way, the king is saying, “Why don't you show yourself superior to all these other so-called spiritual experts by doing what they could not.” And he follows it up with the promise of earthly rewards for personal enrichment.

**Point:** The spirit of Antichrist as symbolized throughout all of Scripture is an attempt to influence men spiritually through pride to set themselves up as their own authority and to seek to make themselves rich at everyone else's expense.

**Q: Why is Daniel offered the position of “third ruler”? Why not second?**

A: As stated in the introduction, Belshazzar is co-ruler with Nabonidus, so this is actually the highest position he could offer. Secular history has confirmed this and once again even the smallest detail in Scripture is proved to be true.

**Point:** This is a continuation of the spirit of Antichrist in tempting its followers with the promise of personal power. If you remember, this is one of the temptations Satan himself tried on Christ in the wilderness.

**Point:** Just because someone desires a spiritual answer does not mean they desire spiritual change. All the indications here are that even though they're aware that they don't have all the answers, they wouldn't change their heart and ways even if they did.

<sup>17</sup>Then Daniel answered and said before the king, “Keep your gifts for yourself or give your rewards to someone else; however, I will read the inscription to the king and make the interpretation known to him.

<sup>18</sup>“O king, the Most High God granted sovereignty, grandeur, glory and majesty to Nebuchadnezzar your father. <sup>19</sup>Because of the grandeur which He bestowed on him, all the peoples, nations and men of every language feared and trembled before him; whomever he wished he killed and whomever he wished he spared alive; and whomever he wished he elevated and whomever he wished he humbled. <sup>20</sup>But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit became so proud that he behaved arrogantly, he was deposed from his royal throne and his glory was taken away from him. <sup>21</sup>He was also driven away from mankind, and his heart was made like that of beasts, and his dwelling place was with the wild donkeys. He was given grass to eat like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until he recognized that the Most High God is ruler over the realm of mankind and that He sets over it whomever He wishes.

<sup>22</sup>“Yet you, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this, <sup>23</sup>but you have exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines have been drinking wine from them; and you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which do not see, hear or understand. But the God in whose hand are your life-breath and your ways, you have not glorified. <sup>24</sup>Then the hand was sent from Him and this inscription was written out.

## [Read v.17-24]

### **Q: How do Daniel’s initial actions indicate he is a true prophet, a true Believer?**

A: He rejects outright all offerings of earthly reward and/or influence. They may not acknowledge his God as the source of his wisdom, but Daniel certainly acknowledges Satan as the source of theirs and will not partake of it in any form.

### **Q: Why doesn’t Daniel immediately interpret the handwriting on the wall?**

A: The most important role of a true prophet is preaching repentance, of encouraging a return to God. They spend far more time preaching repentance than predicting the future. Daniel does first what a true prophet of God would do first: warning about sin and pride so they can do the right thing with the revelation behind the sign they’re about to receive.

### **Q: Why is Nebuchadnezzar the main object of Daniel’s sermon?**

A: Belshazzar – and everyone else present, for that matter – would have known about Nebuchadnezzar and how his great pride led to God dealing with him in such a public manner. It was a visible lesson from which they should have learned.

**Point:** *God doesn’t immediately rain down fire and brimstone on those engaged in homosexual activities; having done so on Sodom and Gomorrah is enough of an example so as to get the message across of what will ultimately happen to those who engage in that behavior. Likewise, God did not do to every king suffering from pride what He did to Nebuchadnezzar, but let it be an example of what would ultimately happen to those who did not heed and submit to God.*

### **Q: How does Daniel summarize Belshazzar’s situation?**

1. “...you...have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this” (v.22)
2. “...you have exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven” (v.23)
3. “...you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone” (v.23)
4. “...God...you have not glorified” (v.23)

**Point:** *Pride led to elevation of self to the point of not just rebellion against God, but embracing others in His place.*

<sup>25</sup>“Now this is the inscription that was written out: ‘MENĒ, MENĒ, TEKĒL, UPHARSIN.’ <sup>26</sup>This is the interpretation of the message:

“‘MENĒ’—God has numbered your kingdom and put an end to it.

<sup>27</sup>“‘TEKĒL’—you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient.

<sup>28</sup>“‘PERĒS’—your kingdom has been divided and given over to the Medes and Persians.”

<sup>29</sup>Then Belshazzar gave orders, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a necklace of gold around his neck, and issued a proclamation concerning him that he now had authority as the third ruler in the kingdom.

<sup>30</sup>That same night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain. <sup>31</sup>So Darius the Mede received the kingdom at about the age of sixty-two.

### [Read v.25-28]

**Q: Were these “secret” words in an unknown language?**

A: No, the words themselves were plainly understood.

- “Mene” was a mina worth 50 shekels, the word derived from the verb “to number”.
- “Tekel” was a shekel, the word derived from the verb “to weigh”.
- “Upharsin” were half-shekels, derived from the verb “to divide”.

The message could be seen and read, but its underlying spiritual meaning could not.

**Point:** *If a spiritual return to God is not accompanied with a desire to understand the signs of God, the greater spiritual message can never be understood. This is why it’s not enough to know about the End Times, but to know Christ.*

### [Read v.29-31]

**Q: What is the final evidence that Belshazzar never learned the right spiritual lesson either from Nebuchadnezzar before him nor from this great sign from the very hand of God Himself?**

A: He never submits his heart to God. Although he follows through with his promise to reward whoever explained the sign, he never allowed the sign to change him spiritually.

**Point:** *It’s not about information, but salvation.*

## Epilogue

*What Belshazzar and the city’s celebrants thought was a siege mound that would be impossible for the Medo-Persians to complete was actually their digging to divert the Euphrates River so as to march into the city under its gates where the massive river had once flowed. Why were they taken down? Because they were drunk, spiritually deceived and seeking their own pleasure and desires just like the days of Noah, just like the Last Days, just like it is right now.*

*There are a couple of important points of application:*

- *God holds all people accountable to be obedient to what He has already revealed. When He reveals messages with signs and wonders, they’re tools of judgment for their **NOT** having been obedient to what He’s already spoken. There is no “new”, last minute revelation which will miraculously save, only the opening of eyes to His judgment when it’s too late to do anything about it.*
- *What Daniel did is exactly what Christ instructed us to do in the Olivet Discourse on the End Times: don’t worry about the signs, only worry about preaching repentance to everyone possible.*