

# Unveiling the Sovereignty of God:

## *The Writing on the Wall*

Okay, take your Bibles and turn with me to Daniel chapter five as we continue our study on Daniel. We're hitting principles and issues that are very relevant to our time. Sometimes, when you do an Old Testament book, people say, 'What's that got to do with me today where I'm living?' But God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. So, eternal things are true no matter when.

## Historical Background

We'll look at the whole chapter, but let me start by giving you a little history. Seventy years have passed from chapter one to the events here in chapter five. Daniel is now in his mid-80s.

Nebuchadnezzar had reigned 47 years. Now he's dead. His son became king, and two years later, he was assassinated. His son reigned for four years; then he kicked the bucket. His son ascended to the throne while he was still a kid. Nine months later, he's pushing up daisies because he's been assassinated.

Nabonidus will reign for the next 17 years with his son Belshazzar at his side. While things are taking place in Babylon, new events are emerging east of Babylon in Persia, modern-day Iran. Cyrus the Second came to power. After ten years, Cyrus marched his army north, conquering Media and unifying Persia and Media into a dominant global power--the Medo-Persian Empire.

In the 17th year of Nabonidus's reign, Cyrus aimed his army toward Babylon. City after city fell before him, and nothing could stop him. Nabonidus marched out to confront him, resulting in total disaster.

## Belshazzar's Feast

Meanwhile, his son Belshazzar decided the best thing to do when you're under pressure is to throw a party. In verse one of chapter five, it says,

*Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in the presence of the thousand.*

This feast may have been in defiance of the enemy, or perhaps he wanted to build the morale of those within. Maybe it was just a vain attempt to drown out the approaching nightmare. The armies of the Medes and the Persians are moving in his direction.

Belshazzar was confident in his mighty walls around the city, which were 350 feet tall and 350 feet wide. However, as you will see before the end of the story, he had false security.

How do you cope when you face an overwhelming problem? Well, I guess you could be like Belshazzar and go out and get drunk. I don't suggest you do that. That is an option people lean on today like a crutch. They even have falsely labeled it as happy hour.

As you look at verse two of chapter five,

*While he tasted the wine, Belshazzar gave the command to bring the gold and silver vessels which his [ancestor] Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple which had been in Jerusalem, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them.*

Nebuchadnezzar had marched into Jerusalem, conquered the city, and taken sacred vessels and the best of Jerusalem's youth. But once he had an experience with God, he stored those vessels away. Now, all of a sudden, Belshazzar decides to break those things out and use them.

Babylonian culture lacked restraint. It was an overindulgent society, and boundaries did not exist.

What we have here is the ultimate party, a drunken orgy with no boundaries, no restrictions, no restraints. They would sing and offer praise to their pagan deities as they drank wine out of the sacred vessels stolen from God's temple. Look at verse four in chapter five:

*They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone.*

This feast was an act of defiance against the enemy and Almighty God. But God will not be mocked. Judgment will come. It might not always be immediate, but people who mock the Lord will not get away with it.

## An Unexpected Visitor

With the party in full swing, an unexpected uninvited guest arrives. It was God himself. He had come down to deliver a special message to this king and his nobles. Verse five says,

*In the same hour the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote.*

Finding a plain plastered wall in Babylon was a miracle in and of itself. Almost every wall in the palace contained paintings of Nebuchadnezzar's conquests and the history of the Babylonian Empire. But God knew where he could find a blank, well-lit wall that he could write on. God had a message for this king.

Look at how Belshazzar responds to the writing on the wall. Verse six says,

*Then the king's countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other.*

Belshazzar sobers up long enough to see the hand as it was writing, but they couldn't read the message. In verses seven and eight, the king calls together his wise men again. This is the third time that wise men have been called for in the book. He tells them in verse 7:

*"Whoever reads this writing, and tells me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around his neck; and he shall be the third ruler in the kingdom."*

Wow! Purple clothes, a sign of royalty, a gold chain, and the number three position in the kingdom? The reward sounds incredible. That is, until you remember that the armies of Babylon are scattered. The Medes and Persians had crushed all the cities of the Babylonian empire.

History tells us that a portion of the Persian army was inside the inner city before the guards on the wall detected anything. They got in through a canal that ran under the wall. Those walls of security meant nothing to them.

So, being third in charge in this kingdom would be like being made captain of the Titanic after it sank to the bottom—not a very glorious title at all.

In verses eight and nine, the king is desperate. His wise men once again have proven to be useless. Three times he's called them, and every time, they don't know, and they can't discern. But listen, hope is not lost.

## Daniel's Interpretation

In verse ten, the Queen, probably Belshazzar's mother, came to the banquet hall and said to him, there is a man in your kingdom in whom is the spirit of the Holy God."

Wouldn't you like to have a reputation like that as a believer? When people talk about you, they say, "The spirit of the living God dwells in them." I love that.

The Spirit of God is upon him, and he can answer Belshazzar's problem. His response in verse 12 is, "Now let Daniel be called." Then Daniel was brought in before the king. And what a moment that must have been. We've already established that Daniel, probably in his mid-80s, maybe even a bit older, has been called to the banquet hall.

Now, remember this. This party's been going on for a while. They're pretty sloshed in there. It's almost unrealistic what Daniel sees as he steps into this banquet hall: people who seem frozen in time. They're all staring in the same direction at the plastered wall. Holy vessels from the house of God are just scattered everywhere.

The king stands before Daniel, shaking from head to toe. Daniel sees the words written by the hand of the Lord. As he looks, God speaks to his heart slowly. Maybe he bends down to pick up a gold goblet, a sacred vessel God set apart, making it holy unto the Lord. Gently, respectfully, I can see him placing it back onto the table. His spirit is grieved. His heart is broken. Sacred vessels don't belong at pagan parties.

Standing before Belshazzar, Daniel begins with a brief history lesson based on his grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar. In verses 18 to 21, he tells this young king how his grandfather had been filled with pride and arrogance. God intervened in his life and took him down more than a few notches.

Nebuchadnezzar went insane for a lengthy period until he acknowledged the sovereignty of God. When he did, God restored him, his kingdom, and his mind and ability to reason.

In verse 22, Daniel accuses Belshazzar of the same arrogance and pride and further condemns him because he knows what God has done for his grandfather. His family has a history. His grandfather had an encounter with a holy God, and it changed his life. Belshazzar knew all this, but he had not humbled his heart.

What is pride? Daniel is about to define it for us by using the example here of Belshazzar. Verse 23 says

*And you have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven.*

He had boasted all about himself, elevated himself, and lifted himself up against God Almighty. His arrogance had manifested itself against God in three ways, and the prophet will lay it all out for him.

First of all, you've made light of sacred things. Just look around the room, look on the floor. Next, you've praised other gods. You've sung, worshipped, and danced before these false idols. Thirdly, you did not honor the true God who introduced himself to your grandfather, a God that had caused Nebuchadnezzar to bow a knee before him.

## Three Strange Words

Then Daniel interprets these strange words on the plastered wall. Wow, this is a moment. I've seen many pictures of Daniel, and he's always in the lion's den. But this is more of a profound picture than even the lion's den. He is standing, looking up at this wall, and these words "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. Those three words mean numbered, weighed, divided.

The underlying message is that God is sovereign over the world's kingdoms. He has the timetable and has everything just where He wants it. You see, there's another king kingdom coming, and He is setting the stage right now.

The Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and God is sovereign.

He's about to tell him three ways how. First, God's sovereignty is seen in the length of our days. In Job 14:5, it says

*Since his days are determined,*

*The number of his months is with You;*

*You have appointed his limits, so that he cannot pass.*

Who determines the lifespan? Is it not God? No man can exceed the number of days allotted to him by God. So the prophet tells him the interpretation of MENE, MENE, God has numbered your days, and your kingdom is ending.

The second way you see God's sovereignty is in the quality of our days, not just the number. God evaluates our days. First of all, he weighs our deeds. In 1 Samuel 2:3, Hannah prayed this prayer.

*Talk no more so very proudly;*

*Let no arrogance come from your mouth,*

*For the Lord is the God of knowledge;*

*And by Him actions are weighed.*

God knows everything about us. He takes all of our actions and places them on his scale. He doesn't remove us from accountability for what we do. The God who created is the God who weighs my deeds. God knows we're accountable. We're accountable.

TEKEL. You have been weighed in the balance. You've been found wanting. Ouch! Belshazzar, your kingdom is finished.

The third way we see God's sovereignty is in the judgment of our days. We might be able to escape man's judgment, but we cannot escape God's judgment. UPHARSIN meant his kingdom had been divided and given to the Medes and the Persians.

That's what the writing on the wall says: O mighty King, numbered, weighed, divided. Belshazzar is about to learn all three lessons in a single night. Verse 30. That very night. Not the next day, not the next morning. That very night, Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain, and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom. Judgment was at the door the same day as this mega party, and they couldn't even comprehend it. Isaiah had prophesied the fall of Babylon in Isaiah chapter 21, and in a future day, another Babylon will fall by the hand of God.

In Revelation chapter 18, kingdoms will fall, and a mighty Antichrist will arise. He will seek world domination and global influence. He will build an empire, but

not even the devil is more powerful than our God. God is mighty, strong, in command, and in charge. He raises up kings, and He knocks them down.

## Three Lessons

What do we take away from today's lessons in Daniel chapter five?

First of all, God is the supreme sovereign of the earth. Number two, not only are individuals accountable to Christ for their conduct, but so are earthly kings, dynasties, and empires. We need to deal with pride and refuse to serve other gods. What does your life revolve around? Whatever it is, technically, that is your God. Lastly, don't take sacred things lightly or take them for granted. Sacred vessels don't belong at pagan parties. Should you have unsaved friends? Yes, so you can be a witness, but set yourself apart for the Lord in your actions.

Numbered, weighed, divided. Remember the dream that Nebuchadnezzar had in chapter 4? It had a head of gold representing Nebuchadnezzar himself. And he liked that. It puffed him up even more than he was until God humbled him. Next were the two arms of silver representing the Medes and the Persians, who were, at this moment, taking over Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom.

As you read the Book of Daniel, you work your way right down that statue. I'm glad God gives us a handle on the future. I think that's a neat thing that God does. He wrote on the wall just to let everybody know what was coming.

God loves us, and He doesn't want anybody to perish. That was the whole point of Jesus's coming: that all men might be saved, that "whosoever will" of the world might be saved.

When Jesus saves you, you find joy, happiness, contentment, and satisfaction. Not at some worldly party, but in the presence of the Lord. You will find genuine, unspeakable joy when you find Christ. When he comes into your heart, your life starts revolving around him. It will light you up. It will set you free.

When you experience God's freedom in your life, he shatters any bondage on you. Suddenly, that freedom in you begins to spill out onto other people. They see how God has liberated you, and that will set them free, too.

We have a whole world out there that's in bondage today, and they're looking for a way out. The bar scene's not the answer, and what they can buy in pill form won't get them where they need to be.

You can worship all kinds of gods, drive all sorts of neat cars, live in all types of neat houses, and buy all kinds of neat stuff. But listen, God offers His grace and mercy to us totally free. There is nothing greater than the joy that you find in Jesus.