

## **The Writing on the Wall**

Welcome to Harvest Community Church

Series: Daniel

**Text: Daniel 5:1-6 (NLT)**

Harvard professor, George Santayana, once wrote, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to **repeat** it”. Over the years, this statement has been paraphrased in a number of ways. ‘Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it’; ‘Those who do not know history’s mistakes are doomed to repeat them’. The very reason that God has given us these history lessons in Scripture is that we might learn to know Him. After all, “history” is “**His**-story.” That we ought to learn the lessons of history is abundantly clear in this chapter. Using the historical lessons of Nebuchadnezzar, the prophet Daniel instructed his descendant, King Belshazzar. What should we learn? We should learn the lessons of history to fully grasp that the Most-High God **rules** in the kingdoms of men. **Psalm 75:5-7**

For several decades Nebuchadnezzar ruled Babylon. Upon his death, the empire survived with a number of kings. Eventually one of the kings was overthrown by a group of conspirators who made Nabonidus king. Nabonidus was the father of Belshazzar, who is the grandson of King Nebuchadnezzar. Belshazzar was made **regent** of Babylon while Nabonidus was pursuing other interests in Arabia. In the last ten years of his reign, Nabonidus never set foot in Babylon.

Nearly 25 years have passed since the events of chapter four and over **seventy** years since chapter one. Now advanced in years, Daniel is a senior statesman in Babylon. He has outlasted a number of kings and in his time, Belshazzar, the last of the Chaldean kings of Babylon, will be killed and Babylon will pass from Chaldean rule to rule by Darius the Mede.

The death of Belshazzar at the hand of Darius is a partial fulfillment of the prophecy revealed to king Nebuchadnezzar by his dream in chapter two. There, Daniel informed Nebuchadnezzar that his kingdom was the first of four kingdoms to precede the coming of Messiah. His was the kingdom of gold, to be followed by a lesser kingdom of silver (Daniel 2:39). The kingdom of silver is introduced in Daniel 5, when Darius captures Babylon, and Belshazzar is put to death. The Medo-Persian kingdom is born, fulfilling the first part of the prophecy revealed through Daniel.

### **A Wicked Party**

In spite of the fact that the Medes and Persians were drawing near, Belshazzar hosted a wild drinking party. One author described the situation this way: “Outside the city walls camped the Persian armies. The Babylonians had suffered a crushing defeat just days before at the hands of the Persians, and Nabonidus had fled. Only the great city of Babylon remained unconquered, and the situation appeared bleak.” Belshazzar apparently thought he had little to worry about. In a **blasphemous** move, he chose to profane the living God by drinking from the vessels taken from the Jerusalem temple. It is important to note that this would have been a festival holiday celebrating the false gods of Babylon. This would have not just been a drinking party it was a form of idol worship.

The city was in immediate peril and instead of being prepared they partied. This is how the wicked behave. Israel did the same thing when being invaded by the Assyrians. **Isaiah 22:12-13**

### **A Warning Prophecy – Daniel 5:5-9 (NLT)**

God has a limit to how far He will allow men to go in their sin. In His longsuffering and mercy, God may allow men to continue in their sin for a time; but there is a time for **judgement**. The king and his Babylonian dinner guests crossed the line that fateful night in the banquet hall of Babylon. Judgment day had come, and the writing on the wall announced its arrival. Belshazzar was thumbing His nose at the true God. He was mixing the secular with the **sacred**.

### **Wisdom from a Prophet Daniel 5:10-17 (NLT)**

It is likely that the queen mother is Belshazzar's **mother**, Nebuchadnezzar's daughter. The queen mother is made aware of the commotion in the banquet hall and arrives to see her son vexed over the situation. She tells the king not to be afraid because there is one who can solve this problem. She must have recognized the similarities between this situation and the stories of her father's encounters with Yahweh. Since her father's experience had always turned out well in the end, she tells Belshazzar not to worry either.

It is apparent that at this point Daniel was not in the inner circle any longer. He was still in charge of some things. In times of crisis people will look for and remember those who have done well in the past. There is always a need for people with the qualities that Daniel possessed, **wisdom**, understanding and insight. Daniel was used to overseeing and directing people with ideas and beliefs that clearly do not line up with the ways of God. **Daniel 5:11 (NLT)** Sometimes God allows us extended seasons of working with unbelievers so that at the right moment we know how to communicate His message.

We know from Daniel's response to the king that all of these years later he was still walking in his **integrity**. He was not motivated by riches and position. He had already had those things in previous administrations. **Daniel 5:17 (NLT)** He was still bold, still respectful and now spoke to the king as one who was familiar with authority.

### **Daniel interprets the writing on the wall – Daniel 5:18-31 (NLT)**

There are **historical**, spiritual and practical lessons we learn from the interpretation.

- **Lesson # 1** - The Most-High God gives leaders their **authority** over nations with majestic glory and honor. Remembering history, Daniel began to explain the work of the Most-High God. As he did, he brought out one of the most intriguing themes in the entire book: **God gives**.
  - **Daniel 1:2** – the Lord gave Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar
  - **Daniel 1:9** – God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the leaders

- Daniel 1:17 – God gave the four young men learning and skill; He gave Daniel understanding of visions and dreams
  - Daniel 2:17-23 – God who gives wisdom to the wise gave Daniel wisdom and might
  - Daniel 2:37 – the God of heaven had given the kingdom, power, might and glory to King Nebuchadnezzar
  - Daniel 2:38 – the God of heaven had given Nebuchadnezzar authority over people, animals and birds
  - Daniel 3:28 – God sent His angel to deliver His servants
  - Daniel 4:16 – God caused Nebuchadnezzar to be given the heart of a beast
  - Daniel 5:18 – the Most-High God gave Nebuchadnezzar his kingship and greatness
  - Daniel 5:19 – the Most-High God gave Nebuchadnezzar authority among all peoples, nations and languages
  - Daniel 5:28 – God would give the kingdom to the Medes and Persians
  - Daniel 7:13-14 – the Ancient of Days gave the Son of man dominion, glory and a kingdom that all people, nations and languages should serve Him.
  - Daniel 7:22, 27 – the Ancient of Days will give authority to the saints of the Most-High God
  - Daniel 9:22 – the Lord sent His angel to give Daniel skill and understanding
- Lesson # 2 - The Most-High God **humbles** proud leaders and takes away their glory. Belshazzar knew what had happened before him. It is probable that he witnessed it as he grew up. This is a lesson for all world leaders and for all of us. Each generation has the opportunity to learn from history and not repeat it, the sad thing is that most do anyway.
- Lesson # 3 - The Most-High God sets up and takes down leaders to show that He reigns supreme in the kingdoms of men. **Romans 13:1-5, Daniel 2:20-21, Proverbs 21:1**
- Lesson # 4 - The Most-High God does these things so that coming **generations** may learn to honor the God who controls their very being. God's lesson to King Nebuchadnezzar needs to be recovered by each new generation. **Acts 17:28-29** God not only raises up and puts down nations and kings. This king was reminded of how **personal** God is. It is God who gives us the very **breath** that we take and the air that we breathe and oversees our destiny. The NKJV says that God owns all our ways.

- Lesson # 5 - The Most-High God numbers the days of nations, weighs them in the balances and gives them to whom He will. God determines if nations measure up to His expectations.

Mene, Mene – this was a standard weight of silver or gold (like the mina). Daniel interpreted, “God has numbered your kingdom and finished it” (5:26)

Tekel – this refers to a shekel of weight. Daniel interpreted, “You are weighed in the balances and found wanting.” (The Apostle Paul may have had this illustration in mind in Ephesians 4:1 when he commanded “Walk worthy of your calling.” The Greek word [axios] used there calls to mind a balance scale.)

Parsin (Upharsin) – this is from the word peres. This word can refer to a unit of measure (half shekel) but its intriguing to note that spelling of the word can also refer to Persia. Daniel interpreted, “Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.”

These words should echo down the halls of history right into our hearts. The Most-High God is still weighing nations in the balances today.

The historian Herodotus described that attack on Babylon by the general, Cyrus. He wrote that the general diverted the river Euphrates so that his men could enter the city and attack. Remember that the river ran through the city of Babylon right under the wall. With the river diverted they could stroll right in. Remember that during the Great Tribulation the Euphrates River will be dried up and the kings of the east will march on Israel. **Revelation 16:12** Right now the nation of Turkey has built a dam that can do just that.

To the best of our understanding, the name “Darius” was more of a title than a name. It is likely that the Darius referred to here is a reference to a man named Gubaru, who was appointed by Cyrus to be the governor of Babylon. One hundred and fifty years before this fateful night in Babylon, the Lord demonstrated His mastery over the kingdoms of the earth. The Lord named the man who would issue the proclamation to rebuild Jerusalem. His name was Cyrus. You can see this reflected in the prophecies of **Isaiah 44:28 & 45:1**.

A century and a half before the fateful night of Belshazzar’s fall, the Lord named the ruler whom He would use to restore His people to the land!

**Ezra 5:17, 6:3, 14** shows us the fulfillment of the prophecy made in **Jeremiah 25:11 & 29:10**.

The return to the Promised Land was part of God’s preparation to send the Promised Lord – Jesus Christ.

It was Cyrus who would work with Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah to see Jerusalem rebuilt, the Temple restored, and the Jews returned from exile. Daniel was right in the middle of history and prophecy being fulfilled. As we will see he continues to prophesy concerning nations until the end of HIS-story and Christ’s return.