

Daniel: A Hand Writing on the Wall

Daniel 5

MPS God is sovereign and worthy of all honor, glory, and praise because He holds life in His hands and gives eternal life in His Name.

OBJ Every person should believe in Jesus to repent of pride because of four aspects of God's sovereignty.

INTRO Have you ever received a message that just shocked you?

READ Daniel 5:1-31

King Belshazzar made a great feast for a thousand of his lords and drank wine in front of the thousand.

²Belshazzar, when he tasted the wine, commanded that the vessels of gold and of silver that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple in Jerusalem be brought, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. ³Then they brought in the golden vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. ⁴They drank wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

⁵Immediately the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, opposite the lampstand. And the king saw the hand as it wrote. ⁶Then the king's color changed, and his thoughts alarmed him; his limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together. ⁷The king called loudly to bring in the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers. The king declared to the wise men of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing, and shows me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around his neck and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom." ⁸Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or make known to the king the interpretation. ⁹Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, and his color changed, and his lords were perplexed.

[.1-4] Belshazzar is a new king, but he is not the next king after Nebuchadnezzar. Approximately thirty years and three kings later, Daniel 5 picks up with Belshazzar co-reigning with his father, Nabonidus. Nebuchadnezzar's death was disrupting for the Babylonian kingdom, and it shows in the instability of kings. But at least the kings are enjoying it. Few things are worse than the king celebrating while the kingdom suffers, but that's how it typically goes with bad kings. What makes them bad kings will be their ruin and end, though they will never see it coming, as this will be the end of the Babylonian empire.

Belshazzar hosts a great feast for thousands, people in his kingdom most important for him to impress. As he begins the drinking, he commands the vessels from the temple in Jerusalem be brought in so they can drink from them. And while drinking wine from the vessels they praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone. The writer describes a scene of flagrant extravagance where Belshazzar's arrogance is on full display, and everyone is encouraged to join in. He knew the vessels were instruments of worship for the Israelites, and using them was intended to show his dominance. Then, once indulgence was in full swing, inhibitions were lowered and the pride that invited them in now infiltrates all to celebrate and praise what they deem most valuable, that which is of greatest value in earthly treasures. It was not enough to drink the wine of celebration. Belshazzar wanted to be intoxicated with complete domination. This opening scene captures his rule for us. [Belshazzar was a bad king, who learned little from his predecessors and repeated their greatest faults, taking them to new heights by his own prideful arrogance.](#)

TRANS But God held particular interest in Belshazzar's rule because of His people. And He had a message for him. Immediately the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace. Shattering the façade of his pride, the king saw the hand as it wrote. The shock seized his whole body. The text describes an extreme physiological reaction of the body going into "emergency mode", blood is denied from the extremities and redirected to the major muscle groups, so his face turns pale. A bazillion thoughts flood the mind to make sense of the threat, but only overwhelms the intellect. Normal bodily functions collapse and fail under the shock so that the body loses control of itself. Finally, he calls out in desperation for his wise men and promises the kingdom to anyone who can read and interpret the handwriting on the wall, but none of them could interpret it for him. Shock continued its paralyzing effect on him. Fear has a



seizing effect on a person to varying degree, but none more than what is described for us here. [When God shows up in power, everything that once mattered no longer does, and man stands no chance but to be undone.](#)

It's like God said, "You desecrate my vessels of worship to steal my glory, so I will desecrate your palace of rule to show that you don't have any true glory." Not only did Belshazzar not have power or glory, but he lost all control of his own body. Verse 6 describe a comprehensive and complete loss of control of one's whole being, emotional, psychological, and physical, so that his arrogant pride quickly turned to humiliating incontinence. And the true absence of power was exposed when he soiled the royal garment from fear. He went from calling for a golden wine goblet to a needing a chamber utensil (bed pan). [Brazen pride and shameless arrogance turned Belshazzar's great feast into a royal mess!](#)

¹⁰ The queen, because of the words of the king and his lords, came into the banqueting hall, and the queen declared, "O king, live forever! Let not your thoughts alarm you or your color change. ¹¹ There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the spirit of the holy gods. In the days of your father, light and understanding and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods were found in him, and King Nebuchadnezzar, your father—your father the king—made him chief of the magicians, enchanters, Chaldeans, and astrologers, ¹² because an excellent spirit, knowledge, and understanding to interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar. Now let Daniel be called, and he will show the interpretation."

[.10-12] The queen enters the hall and tells the King that there is a man in the kingdom who has "the spirit of the holy gods" who can do what the king needs. She reminds how Daniel was one who had "light and understanding and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods" when he served under Nebuchadnezzar, who made him chief of all the wise men because of his unique and distinct skill. She even refers to him by his Babylonian name, which means, "O Lady, protect the King!"¹ Then she tells the king to call Daniel in so he can show the interpretation. The irony will not be lost, though, because even though he will call Daniel in, Belshazzar will only mock him.

¹³ Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king answered and said to Daniel, "You are that Daniel, one of the exiles of Judah, whom the king my father brought from Judah. ¹⁴ I have heard of you that the spirit of the gods is in you, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you. ¹⁵ Now the wise men, the enchanters, have been brought in before me to read this writing and make known to me its interpretation, but they could not show the interpretation of the matter. ¹⁶ But I have heard that you can give interpretations and solve problems. Now if you can read the writing and make known to me its interpretation, you shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around your neck and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom."

¹⁷ Then Daniel answered and said before the king, "Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another. Nevertheless, I will read the writing to the king and make known to him the interpretation. ¹⁸ O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father kingship and greatness and glory and majesty. ¹⁹ And because of the greatness that he gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whom he would, he killed, and whom he would, he kept alive; whom he would, he raised up, and whom he would, he humbled. ²⁰ But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit was hardened so that he dealt proudly, he was brought down from his kingly throne, and his glory was taken from him. ²¹ He was driven from among the children of mankind, and his mind was made like that of a beast, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. He was fed grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, until he knew that the Most High God rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he will. ²² And you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this, ²³ but you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven. And the vessels of his house have been brought in before you, and you and your lords, your wives, and your concubines have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see or hear or know, but the God in whose hand is your breath, and whose are all your ways, you have not honored."

²⁴ Then from his presence the hand was sent, and this writing was inscribed. ²⁵ And this is the writing that was inscribed: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, and PARSIN. ²⁶ This is the interpretation of the matter: MENE, God has numbered the

¹ Todd Wilson. Daniel; A 12-Week Study. Knowing the Bible Series. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 45.



days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; ²⁷TEKEL, you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting; ²⁸PERES, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.”

²⁹Then Belshazzar gave the command, and Daniel was clothed with purple, a chain of gold was put around his neck, and a proclamation was made about him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

³⁰That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed. ³¹And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old. **Daniel 5:1-31**

[.13-16] Daniel is brought in before the King, who speaks in a condescending manner, calling him an “*exile of Judah*”. He tells Daniel what he knew about him and his skill, and states that the other wise men could not read the writing. But if Daniel could read and interpret, he promised him the great reward of the Kingdom. The king tries to hold some measure of royal dignity and believes his promised reward can obtain anything he wants, but Daniel shows no interest in his rewards. **Though offered a life of luxury and power in the kingdom, Daniel opts for faithfulness to the true King. After all, what real reward is living under a king whose made a mess of his life, and knowing his rule is in its last hours.**

[.17-21] Daniel answered the king, telling him to keep his gifts and give the rewards to another. He will read the writing and make the interpretation known. Daniel reminds Belshazzar how God Most High gave the Kingdom to Nebuchadnezzar, and all his greatness and glory and majesty. And because of that, he could do whatever he wanted and chose to do. And that is what he did; he lifted up and he killed, he raised up and humbled. But when his heart filled with pride and he believed that all of his kingdom was because of himself, God disciplined him until He knew the Most High was truly God; “*until he knew that the Most High God rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he will.*”(21)

[.22-23] Daniel then turns to Belshazzar and tells him that he has not humbled his heart. And, though he knew all of this, he lifted himself up against the Most High God, desecrating the vessels of his house of worship, and “*praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see or hear or know*”. In doing all this, he chose to worship the gods of this world and denied the God in whose hand was all his breath and his ways.

[.24-28] Daniel then reads the writing on the wall, which states, “*MENE, MENE, TEKEL, and PARSIN.*”, and tells him the interpretation. The writing is in three Aramaic words of weight measurement in decreasing order. The words describe God’s judgment on Belshazzar and his kingdom. The first word means “numbered” with a determination of ending, and the repetition reflects the quickness with which this will occur. The second word means “weighed and found wanting”, a word that means to be judged of value and be found inadequate. The third words means “divided and portioned”, the intent meaning to be given to the Medes and Persians. This was obviously not good news. But Belshazzar gave the command for Daniel to receive what he had promised, likely still in attempt to make his rule and kingdom look good. But that very night he was killed and replaced by Darius the Mede. And with that, another king whose heart was consumed with pride had the kingdom taken from Him by the Most High God and given to another.

God is sovereign and worthy of all honor, glory, and praise because He holds life in His hands and gives eternal life in His Name.

God’s sovereignty is a foundational doctrine of our faith, that He is like no other. Daniel 4 and 5 reveal His sovereignty without challenge, by one king who confesses and another who pridefully rejects Him. God’s sovereignty doesn’t simply mean that He wins in certain situations, crises, or circumstance, but that His perfect Will always advances without threat. There is no partial sovereignty; sovereign means God is unmatched and incomparable in every way. **God as sovereign means He alone is worthy of all honor, glory and praise.**

Only one aspect in all creation dares challenge God’s sovereignty, man’s pride. Of all creation, only man dare to defy the command of Almighty God. But those who set themselves up to steal God’s glory will not prevail. And those who fill their heart to walk in pride He is able to humble.(Daniel 4:37) This tale of two earthly kings walking in pride, praising the gods of this world and desecrating the Most High God and stealing His glory, while not foreign to us, should get our attention. The back-to-back chapters of our Sovereign God tearing down those who walk in pride should speak loudly to us. When you



give so much time, energy and affection to praising the gods of this world, “*the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone,*”, who cannot see, hear, or know, you become accustomed to gods that do not talk back, and begin to think of yourself as godlike. But Belshazzar sets the hopeless façade of pride on full display for us.

Pride makes a total mess of life as it causes one to dare to question God’s sovereignty by scoffing at His power and trying to steal His glory. Pride is the seed of idolatry. The more one fills their life with false idols, the more their heart is filled with self-pride. And the more pride swells in the heart, the more willing and ready one is to prostrate self before false gods. [God’s sovereignty exposes the condemning façade of pride and invites our faith to trust in the One who saves.](#)

OBJ [Four Aspects of God’s Sovereignty revealed that calls every person to repent of pride.](#)

TRANS The four aspects of God’s sovereignty that we will consider today are each revealed by three-word phrases found in the text.

1. [God Speaks as Truth: “light – wisdom – understanding”.](#)

When the queen reminded Belshazzar about Daniel, she described “*the spirit of the holy God*” in him as “*light and understanding and wisdom*”. When he called for Daniel, Belshazzar was desperate for someone to read and interpret the handwriting on the wall. But Daniel was not distressed. He knew that the God he served is the Most High who speaks. He could interpret dreams and visions, and read handwriting on walls, because his God was not dead, but alive. [The silence of all the other wise men is telling in contrast to the true God who speaks.](#)

God speaks to reveal Who He is; He is truth. God is the God of truth not only because He speaks truth, but His very essence and nature is truth. (John 1:14; 14:6) Belshazzar was blinded to the mysteries of God because of the pride in his heart. Blindness is a quality of unbelief. (Revelation 3:17) Because of his faith in God, Daniel was distinguished as one in whom is light and wisdom and understanding.

God reveals Himself as light, wisdom, and understanding. He is the light of life that shines in the darkness. (John 1:5; 8:12) Encountering God is to experience His revelation as light. Believing in God and His revelation is referred to in Scripture as “*Light that dawns*”. (Psalm 112:4) He is wisdom and understanding unmatched (1 Corinthians 3:19), of which whole books and genre of books in the canon of Scripture reveal Him speaking to divinely reveal all mysteries of life and godliness. God speaks as truth with all light and wisdom and understanding to reveal all mysteries to those who believe. God speaks here through His faithful servant, Daniel. [The God who is light, wisdom, and understanding, is the One who reveals, interprets, and testifies that all people may Know that He alone is God!](#)

Q? [Where are you turning for light, wisdom, and understanding in your life? Are you trusting what you know to obey?](#)

Q? [Are you honoring the Lord with your whole life as the One in whose hands is your breath and all your ways?](#)

2. [God Relates as Personal: “sees – hears – knows”.](#)

Daniel tells Belshazzar that he has wrongly praised the gods of this world who “*do not see or hear or know*”. And he has done this in rejection of the God who holds his breath and all his ways. The gods of this world, gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone, are all blind, deaf, and dumb. But Daniel’s God is none of those things; He relates to personally to people, the very purpose for which He created us. When you are accustomed to gods who are blind, deaf, and dumb, and by their silence affirm all you want, like, and do, then it is undoing to have a God who is altogether other! So, when the living God speaks with a perfect knowledge of your life, it is paralyzing, even disorienting. The One who sees, hears, and knows, is the One whose wisdom is unsearchable, whose power is incomparable, whose understanding is incomprehensible, and whose ways and decrees are inscrutable.

God knows your life, friend, with greater depth, accuracy, and comprehension than you could imagine. Idolatry animates that which is dead to form it into one’s own image. God relates personally so He can reveal that He is the One who is alive, who sees completely, hears constantly, and knows perfectly. God is worthy of all your worship, your praise and honor, because He saw you before you were formed in the womb (Jeremiah 1:5; see also Psalm 139), and He’s not failed to hear



your every cry and know your every thought, desire, fear and longing. **God is the One for whom our whole life cries out for, and who satisfies the deepest longing of our whole being.**

Q? Are you seeking and listening to the God who knows you perfectly? Or, are you animating your sin and personifying death by glorifying dead gods?

3. God Judges as Lord Almighty: “numbered – weighed – divided”.

When Daniel interprets the handwriting on the wall, there is no doubt what is revealed. The only question that remains is, can the one who revealed it bring it about. That question is answered that very night as Belshazzar’s life is taken from him and his rule given to another. “Numbered, weighed, and divided” echoes the way every person who walks in pride of unbelief will be judged before God. Romans 1 declares the eternal damnation of sin on every human soul. The heart of pride that fills life with the gods of this world will stand before God Almighty without excuse for unrighteousness, for stealing God’s glory by praising and honoring creation over the Creator, who is forever to be praised. There are different types of crimes, both of a misdemeanor and felony nature. But sin is the act of treason against a holy God. And in his mercy, He wrote His law on our hearts. But in pride we exchanged His true glory for false images. We exchanged His true, eternal pleasures for the lust of our hearts and impurities of our body, dishonoring passions and shameless acts, to indulge fully in every manner of unrighteousness. God is patient, not wanting any to perish but all to come to eternal life, He waits to show mercy. But his patience is not without end.(2 Peter 3:8-10) God delights to show mercy, but not on our terms! He judges all, ultimately, who refuse to honor His Name, the only Name worthy of all praise, honor, and glory. **God righteously judges all by their sin who remain without excuse before Him.**

TRANS Because we are without excuse in our sin, what is our only hope?

4. God Saves as Love: “It is finished.”

The conflict of self-pride versus God’s sovereignty was settled once and for all in Jesus’ final words on the cross, “*It is finished.*” There was never a question of who would reign supreme. But from the moment of this declaration, the work to finish the revelation of the Sovereign One was complete. When Jesus hung on the cross, the weight of every deed and nature of sin condemned by God as “numbered, weighed, and divided”, was placed on Him and all the wrath of God consumed by Him as He cried, “*It is finished.*” **The glory of the gospel is that the God who is sovereign and worthy as Lord came to give up His life as a as propitiation and become our personal Savior.**

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— Ephesians 2:4-5

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead 1 Peter 1:3

The gospel is the glorious news of a Sovereign God who speaks a better word over an unworthy life. Sin and pride leaves you numbered” and brought to an end, weighed and found wanting, and divided to be dispersed and done away with. This is our plight in sinful pride. But through Jesus Christ, the sovereign God who loves to delights to show mercy, has spoken a better three words in our behalf, “It is finished.” All who trust in worldly gods have no voice that speaks for them. All who call on the Name of the Lord will be saved. **All who put their faith in Jesus are eternally saved in Him.**

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