

# Daniel 5 – The Writing on the Wall: God’s Judgment on Babylon

## Introduction

Daniel 5 records the **fall of Babylon under King Belshazzar**, illustrating that **God’s sovereignty extends over all kingdoms** and that pride and disobedience bring judgment. The chapter emphasizes:

### Key Themes:

- God’s supreme authority over nations and rulers
- Pride and sacrilege lead to divine judgment
- God’s sovereignty cannot be ignored or mocked
- Faithful witnesses, like Daniel, speak truth to power

### Historical Background:

- Belshazzar, son of Nabonidus (or co-regent), ruled Babylon near its end (539 BC).
- Babylon’s wealth and power made the city arrogant and secure, leading to the king’s blasphemous feast.
- The Medes and Persians, under Cyrus, conquered Babylon the very night of the writing on the wall.

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## Daniel 5:1–9 – Belshazzar’s Feast and the Blasphemy

### Scripture (CSB):

1 Belshazzar the king held a great feast for a thousand of his nobles, and he drank wine in the presence of the thousand.

2 While Belshazzar was drinking the wine, he gave orders to bring the gold and silver vessels 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 the gold and silver vessels that had been taken from the temple, the house of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives, and his concubines drank from them.

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

5 At that moment, 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 back of the hand as it wrote.

6 Then the king’s face grew pale, and his thoughts alarmed him. His knees knocked together, and his legs gave way.

7 The king called loudly for the enchanters, Chaldeans, and astrologers. The king said to the wise men of Babylon, “Whoever reads this writing and tells me what it means shall be clothed in purple, have a chain of gold placed around his neck, and rule as the third ruler in the kingdom.”

8 Then all the king’s wise men came, but they could not read the writing or tell the king what it meant.

9 So King Belshazzar became greatly alarmed, and his face grew pale, and his nobles were perplexed.

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## Word Study & Notes

- **Vessels from the temple** – symbols of **sacrilege and arrogance**, showing contempt for God.
- **Fingers of a man's hand** – supernatural, divine judgment manifested visibly.
- **Third ruler in the kingdom** – immense reward promised for interpreting the message, showing desperation.

## Historical/Cultural Insight

- Using sacred vessels in blasphemous feasts violated Jewish law and **mocked the God of Israel**.
- Babylonian rulers often ascribed honor to many gods, yet God alone **controls history and judgment**.

## Theological Insight

- God's holiness demands respect; sacrilege provokes judgment.
- Human pride blinds rulers to their accountability before God.
- God communicates warning clearly, but **repentance is required to avert judgment**.

## Cross-References

- Exodus 22:28 – Do not revile God or blaspheme.
- Psalm 2:1–4 – God laughs at the pride of nations.
- Proverbs 16:18 – Pride goes before destruction.

## How/Why Questions

1. Why did Belshazzar think he could mock God with impunity?
2. How does the visible writing on the wall demonstrate God's sovereignty?
3. Why were the wise men unable to interpret the writing?

## Application

- Respect God's holiness in all areas of life.
- Pride and arrogance bring vulnerability, even in positions of power.
- Recognize that God holds all rulers accountable.

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## Daniel 5:10–16 – Daniel Brought Before the King

### Scripture (CSB):

10 Then the queen came into the banquet hall because the king was greatly alarmed and his nobles had lost their composure. The queen said, "O king, live forever! Do not let your thoughts alarm you or your face grow pale.

11 There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God. In the time of your father, your father Nebuchadnezzar, light and understanding and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods were found in him. You, O king, did not find such wisdom in your father.

12 This Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar, has in him the Spirit of the Holy God, and light,

understanding, and wisdom, interpreting dreams, explaining riddles, and solving difficult problems. Call for him, and he will tell the interpretation.”

13 Then Daniel was brought before the king. The king said to Daniel, “Are you that Daniel who is one of the exiles from Judah, whom my father the king brought from Judah?”

14 I have heard that the Spirit of the gods is in you and that light, understanding, and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods are in you.

15 Now the wise men, enchanters, Chaldeans, and astrologers were brought to me to read this writing and make known to me its interpretation, but they could not tell me what it means.

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## Word Study & Notes

- **Spirit of the Holy God** – Daniel’s wisdom comes from God, not human ability.
- **Riddles** – Hebrew: *hidah*, mysteries or divine secrets.

## Historical/Cultural Insight

- Babylonian reliance on magic, astrology, and divination is shown ineffective before God’s wisdom.
- Daniel’s reputation as a godly interpreter contrasts with pagan arrogance.

## Theological Insight

- True wisdom is **from God**, not human knowledge or craft.
- God raises faithful witnesses to **reveal His truth to rulers**.

## Cross-References

- Daniel 2:28–30 – God reveals mysteries to the faithful.
- James 1:5 – Ask God for wisdom.
- Proverbs 2:6 – Wisdom comes from the Lord.

## How/Why Questions

1. Why was Daniel’s wisdom recognized even by pagan rulers?
2. How does Daniel’s God-given insight contrast with Babylonian sorcery?
3. Why is prayerful dependence on God crucial for wisdom?

## Application

- Seek wisdom from God in difficult situations.
  - God can use humble believers to reveal His truth to those in authority.
  - Trust God rather than human knowledge for solving impossible problems.
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# Daniel 5:17–31 – The Interpretation of the Writing

## Scripture (CSB):

17 Then Daniel answered the king, “Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to someone else. 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 sovereignty, greatness, glory, and majesty.

19 Because of the greatness that he gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whoever wished to lift up his head or be arrogant, he was punished.

20 But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit was hardened so that he acted arrogantly, he was deposed from his royal throne and his glory was taken from him.

21 He was driven away from mankind, and his heart was made like the beasts’ until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over the kingdom of mortals and sets over it anyone he wishes.

22 “You, Belshazzar, his son, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this.

23 Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. You have brought the vessels of his house before you, and you and your nobles, your wives, and your concubines drank wine from them. You praised gods of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see, hear, or know, but you have not glorified the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways.

24 Then the hand was sent, and this writing was inscribed.

25 This is the writing that was inscribed: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.

26 “This is the interpretation of the message: MENE: God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end;

27 TEKEL: You have been weighed on the scales and found deficient;

28 PERES: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.”

29 Then Belshazzar gave orders, and Daniel was clothed in purple, a chain of gold was placed around his neck, and a proclamation was made concerning him that he would rule as the third ruler in the kingdom.

30 That very night Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans was killed.

31 So Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.

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## Word Study & Notes

- **MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN** – Aramaic words meaning:
  - **MENE** – “Numbered” – God has numbered your days.
  - **TEKEL** – “Weighed” – You have been weighed and found wanting.
  - **PERES/UPHARSIN** – “Divided” – Your kingdom is divided and given to others.

## Historical/Cultural Insight

- Babylon fell **suddenly** that night, fulfilling God’s judgment.
- Belshazzar’s feast reveals **arrogance and sacrilege**, ignoring God’s prior lessons.

## Theological Insight

- God judges **pride, sacrilege, and rebellion**.
- Human power is temporary; God is **sovereign over the rise and fall of kingdoms**.
- Faithfulness and wisdom contrast with arrogance and blasphemy.

## **Cross-References**

- Psalm 2:4–5 – God laughs at the proud plans of rulers.
- Proverbs 16:18 – Pride goes before destruction.
- Isaiah 47:6–7 – Babylon’s arrogance leads to fall.

## **How/Why Questions**

1. Why did God write a message instead of sending a warning verbally?
2. How does Belshazzar’s pride mirror human tendencies today?
3. What does the fall of Babylon teach about God’s control over history?

## **Application**

- Humble yourself before God; pride invites judgment.
  - Worship God, not wealth or power.
  - Recognize that God’s sovereignty determines the rise and fall of nations.
  - Faithful witnesses like Daniel can provide clarity and truth even in a corrupt world.
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# **Summary of Daniel 5**

## **Key Lessons:**

- God is sovereign over all rulers and nations.
- Pride and sacrilege lead to sudden judgment.
- God’s judgment is just and cannot be avoided.
- Faithful obedience and wisdom are rewarded, while arrogance brings destruction.

## **Discussion Questions for Reflection:**

1. How does Daniel 5 show God’s authority over kingdoms?
2. Why is humility and worship of God essential for those in positions of power?
3. How can we learn from Daniel’s faithful witness in our workplaces, communities, and nations?