

Belshazzar's Feast and the Handwriting on the Wall



DANIEL 5:1-31

TEXT, EXPOSITION AND PRACTICAL HELPS

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DIVISION II

The History and Destiny of the Nations: Six Pictures Revealed in Daniel's Prophecies, [Daniel 2:1–7:28](#)

Belshazzar's Feast and the Handwriting on the Wall: A Picture of the Coming Judgment on the Defiant and the Pleasure-Seekers, [Daniel 5:1-31](#)

[\(Daniel 5:1-31\)](#) **Introduction:** the defiant and the pleasure-seekers of this world will face the sure hand of God's judgment. Any person who curses the Name of the LORD exposes a hard, reckless heart. The individual is dooming him- or herself. Imagine a person actually challenging God, aggressively daring the LORD of the universe to react and execute judgment. Yet this is exactly what so many of us do when we raise our voices in anger or shake our fists at the LORD. We deny the LORD, rebel against Him and curse His holy Name.

Think about the wicked and the pleasure-seekers of the world giving themselves over to the gratification of the flesh. They overindulge in any and everything that gives them a sense of pleasure, no matter how temporary the pleasure may be. Whether the overindulgence is in eating, drinking, recreating, buying and possessing, or participating in drunken, immoral orgies—no matter, the individuals are openly and brazenly defying God to His face, showing a total irreverence for God, the things of God, and God's holy commandments.

In the present Scripture, a new king sits upon the throne of Babylon, the ruler **Belshazzar**, a grandson of the great King Nebuchadnezzar and son of **Nabonidus** with whom he ruled for a number of years as coregent. The chapter opens with **King Belshazzar** giving a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and their wives and concubines. This means there were probably over two thousand people present for the event. **As will be seen, this would be the very night that the great Babylonian Empire would fall to the Persians, October 12, 539 B.C.**

In the first four chapters of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar was the king ruling over Babylon. Now, as indicated above, the scene has shifted to what will be the last ruler of Babylon, **King Belshazzar**. Under King Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon became the greatest empire ever known to man. **But after his death in 562 B.C., the empire began to rapidly deteriorate.**

The rulers during this period of decline were as follows:

1. **Evil-Merodach** succeeded his father **Nebuchadnezzar**, but he was assassinated after ruling *only two years* (562–560 B.C.). His assassin and successor was his brother-in-law **Neriglissar**, **Nebuchadnezzar’s son-in-law**.
2. **Neriglissar** or **Nergal-Sharezzar** ruled *only four years* (560–556 B.C.). Interestingly, he is mentioned as one of the high-ranking officials who was present when **Nebuchadnezzar** conquered Jerusalem. He was one of the officials placed in charge of looking after the prophet Jeremiah ([Jer. 39:3, 13](#)).

Jeremiah 39:3 (NASB)

“³ Then all the officials of the king of Babylon came in and sat down at the Middle Gate: Nergal-sar-ezer, Samgar-nebu, Sar-sekim the Rab-saris, Nergal-sar-ezer the Rab-mag, and all the rest of the officials of the king of Babylon.”

Jeremiah 39:13 (NASB)

“¹³ So Nebuzaradan the captain of the bodyguard sent word, along with Nebushazban the Rab-saris, and Nergal-sar-ezer the Rab-mag, and all the leading officers of the king of Babylon.”

3. **Lebashi-Marduk**, a young son of **Neriglissar**, succeeded his father as a puppet king. But after ruling for *only two months* (May–June, 556 B.C.), he was assassinated and succeeded by **Nabonidus**.
4. **Nabonidus** ruled the empire for *17 years* (556–539 B.C.). Most scholars believe that **Nabonidus** married a daughter of **Nebuchadnezzar** and that he was the father of **Belshazzar**. As stated above, **Belshazzar** was the king ruling at the time of Babylon’s fall to the Persians. Evidently, **Nabonidus** appointed his son to rule as coregent over Babylon while he himself ruled over the empire from Heran, or Tema, in Arabia, which was about 500 miles from Babylon. Historians say that he spent most of his 17-year rule in Heran. Thus in his absence, he needed his son to rule in Babylon.
5. **Belshazzar** ruled as coregent with his father **Nabonidus** from about 553–539 B.C. Note that Scripture refers to him as the son of Nebuchadnezzar when he was actually the grandson of the great king ([Daniel 5: 2, 11, 13, 18, 22](#)). In ancient history, the word *father* is often used to refer to male ancestors regardless of the generation.

As mentioned above, this would be the very night of Babylon’s fall. This is the story that gives us the well-known phrase, *the handwriting on the wall*, which announces eminent judgment. Although most people know nothing about Belshazzar’s great feast, many are familiar with the phrase.

This is, *Belshazzar's Feast and the Handwriting on the Wall: A Picture of the Coming Judgment on the Defiant and the Pleasure-Seekers, [Daniel 5:1-31](#)*.

- 1. The drunken, immoral banquet: a picture of immorality, irreverence, and idolatry (vv.1-4).**
- 2. The sudden and alarming handwriting on the wall: a picture of the world's guilty fear, helplessness, and hopelessness (vv.5-16).**
- 3. The courageous explanation of the handwriting by Daniel: a pronouncement of the king's doom, the end of his wicked reign (vv.17-31).**

1. ([Daniel 5:1-4](#)) Drunkenness, Example of, Belshazzar's Banquet—Orgy, Example of, Belshazzar's Banquet—Immorality, Example of, Belshazzar's Feast—Hard-hearted, Example of, King Belshazzar—Belshazzar, Sins of, Immorality and Defiance—Partying, Example of, Belshazzar's Drunken and Immoral Banquet—Irreverence, Example of, Profaning God's Name; Defiling Holy Things.

Belshazzar hosted a huge banquet for the nobles of Babylon, a banquet that turned into an immoral and blasphemous orgy. **Note the Scripture and outline:**

Over one thousand of the king's nobles and their wives and concubines attended the banquet ([Daniel 5:1, 3](#)). Ancient rulers were known for hosting lavish banquets to display the wealth, power, and glory of their kingdoms. Interestingly, the king held this large feast while the enemy, the Persian army, was camped outside the city gates laying siege to Babylon. Imagine such boldness! The leaders of Babylon must have felt the city was impregnable because of its massive walls, lookout towers, and bronze gates.

Also, the city appeared to be totally self-sustaining, for the Euphrates River ran through the city to provide water, and there was enough food and supplies stored up to last many years. Feeling perfectly secure, **Belshazzar** apparently planned this banquet to stir the morale of his people to face the daily assault of the Persians against the walls and gates of the city.

Soon after everyone arrived, both the king and the guests began to engage in wicked and defiant behavior ([Daniel 5:2-4](#)). Not only were the wives present for the banquet, but the concubines were as well. With wine flowing freely and everyone gratifying the lust of their flesh, the party quickly degenerated. At some point during the festivities, the king thought of a way to show the superiority of Babylon's so-called gods over those of other nations. He ordered his servants to bring in the gold and silver cups that **Nebuchadnezzar** had plundered from the temple in Jerusalem ([Daniel 1:2](#)). By drinking from these trophies of war, the nobles would be reminded that their so-called gods had always made Babylon victorious over other nations. Remembering this fact would help encourage the nobles in the face of the Persian siege of the city.

But **Belshazzar** overlooked one fact: these particular cups were the sacred vessels of the LORD, the living and true God. They were holy, set apart for the use of the LORD and His service alone. Thus when the king and guests began to drink from these holy cups, they were committing blasphemy against the LORD. They were profaning the very Name of God. They even toasted their false gods while they drank from the sacred cups dedicated to the LORD.

Belshazzar and his nobles were guilty of **three very serious acts** of wickedness:

1. drunkenness and immorality
2. blasphemy against the LORD
3. idolatry

Thought 1. What a warning to stay away from wild parties—parties where drinking can and oftentimes does lead to suggestive and immoral behavior! Strong drink dulls our senses and ability to reason. Drunkenness can cause us to lower our standards and weaken our morals, leaving the door wide open for irrational thinking and bad decisions we might soon regret.

In such an atmosphere, people frequently lose their inhibitions, saying and doing things they would not normally say and do. These things might be sexual in nature, or they might be brazen, bold, arrogant, or downright ugly talk. Loose lips easily profane God’s holy Name and even dare us to be irreverent toward God. Lastly, drunkenness can not only *lead* to idolatry but also can *be* idolatry. Any time we give ourselves over to the control of another—whether a person, substance, position, or otherwise—we make an idol out of that entity. No wonder God warns us so strongly about the dangers of drinking!

- 1) Listen to God’s warning against drunkenness.

Luke 21:34 (NASB)

“³⁴ Be on guard, so that your hearts will not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day will not come on you suddenly like a trap.”

Romans 13:13 (NASB)

“¹³ Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy.”

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (NASB)

“⁹ Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals,
¹⁰ nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.”

Galatians 5:19-21 (NASB)

“¹⁹ Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality,
²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions,
²¹ envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

Proverbs 20:1 (NASB)

“¹ Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, And whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise.”

Proverbs 23:20 (NASB)

“²⁰ Do not be with heavy drinkers of wine, *Or* with gluttonous eaters of meat.”

Isaiah 5:11 (NASB)

“¹¹ Woe to those who rise early in the morning that they may pursue strong drink, Who stay up late in the evening that wine may inflame them!”

Habakkuk 2:15 (NASB)

“¹⁵ Woe to you who make your neighbors drink, Who mix in your venom even to make *them* drunk So as to look on their nakedness!”

2) Listen to what God’s Word says about immorality.

Matthew 5:27-30 (NASB)

“²⁷ You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery';
²⁸ but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

²⁹ If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

³⁰ If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell.”

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (NASB)

“⁹ Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals,
¹⁰ nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.”

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²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions,
²¹ envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I

forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

2 Peter 2:12-14 (NASB)

“¹² But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed,

¹³ suffering wrong as the wages of doing wrong. They count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are stains and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, as they carouse with you,

¹⁴ having eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed, accursed children.”

Revelation 21:8 (NASB)

“⁸ But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part *will be* in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

Exodus 20:14 (NASB)

“¹⁴ You shall not commit adultery.”

2. (Daniel 5:5-16) Fear, Caused by, God’s Judgment—Helplessness, Caused by, God’s Judgment—Hopelessness, Caused by, God’s Judgment—Warning, of God’s Judgment, Given to Belshazzar—Warning, Example of, Handwriting on the Wall—Judgment, Warning of, Given to Belshazzar—Handwriting on the Wall, Warning, of Coming Judgment—Belshazzar, Warned, of Coming Judgment.

God suddenly put an end to the wicked revelry. Without warning, the fingers of a human hand appeared out of nowhere and began writing on the wall of the banquet hall.

Scripture describes the startling scene:

a. It was at the very moment of the king’s drunken blasphemy that the fingers of a human hand appeared (**Daniel 5:5^b**). Stunned, the king watched as the fingers began to write a message on the plaster wall near a lampstand.

b. The mood of the event quickly became somber, and a crippling fear gripped the king and the guests (**Daniel 5:6**). Merriment and carousing ceased, dancing stopped, servers and attendants halted in their tracks, and the musicians silenced their instruments. An eerie silence slowly swept through the hall as everyone watched the hand write four brief words on the wall. Sensing some ominous message, the king’s face turned pale and terror seized his soul. His knees began to knock so much that his legs gave way and he collapsed to the floor (**Daniel 5:6**).

c. As soon as he was able, the king screamed out and summoned his occult advisors to come interpret the handwriting ([Daniel 5:7-8](#)). When they advisors arrived, Belshazzar promised both wealth and political rank to the individual who could interpret the message. In addition, whoever interpreted the handwriting would become the third highest ruler in the kingdom. Remember that **Belshazzar** ruled as coregent with his father **Nabonidus**. Thus, the interpreter of the handwriting was to receive the highest honor that **Belshazzar** could bestow, the honor of serving right under the king himself. Nevertheless, the wise men were unable to help the king. The words made no sense to them. They could not read the words much less interpret the message.

d. The advisers' inability to interpret the handwriting only increased the king's fear and confusion as well as his guests' alarm ([Daniel 5:9](#)). They were both perplexed and disturbed about the situation.

e. News of the crisis spread rapidly throughout the palace and also reached the Queen Mother. She immediately rushed to the banquet hall to encourage and advise her son ([Daniel 5:10-12](#)). When she arrived, she promptly noticed the utter terror on Belshazzar's face. Quietly but forcefully, she told Belshazzar not to look so alarmed and pale before the guests. This suggests that the queen was telling her son to act like a king, strong and capable of handling the situation. In fact, she knew of a royal official named Daniel who could interpret the handwriting ([Daniel 5:11-12^a](#)).

She even spelled out the credentials of the prophet by stating that.....

1. he had the spirit of the gods in him
2. he had proven his ability in the days of Nebuchadnezzar
3. he had been appointed chief of the wise men by Nebuchadnezzar
4. he could interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve difficult problems

The Queen Mother then suggested that **Belshazzar** summon Daniel to explain the handwriting on the wall ([Daniel 5:12^b](#)). Apparently, the fact that the handwriting could be bad news never crossed the queen's mind. At least, there was no hint whatsoever of bad news in her counsel to **Belshazzar**. Whatever the case, it is certainly surprising that **Belshazzar** seemed to know nothing at all about Daniel. After all, Daniel had held one of the highest offices in Babylon during Nebuchadnezzar's reign. Furthermore, **Belshazzar** knew about his grandfather's dream and insanity as well as about his recovery and return to the throne ([Daniel 5:22](#)). Perhaps an explanation for his ignorance is the fact that Daniel had not played a major role at the court since the death of Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel had been **retired for over 20 years** now and was somewhere around **80 years old**. We know this because these events took place on the same night that Babylon fell, which was in **539 B.C.** ([Daniel 5:30-31](#)), and Daniel was exiled to Babylon as a young man in **605 B.C.** ([Daniel 1:1-2](#)).

f. Without delay, Belshazzar summoned Daniel to come interpret the handwriting ([Daniel 5:13-16](#)). As soon as Daniel appeared, the king asked him to identify himself. Once Daniel's identity was confirmed, the king told him what the Queen Mother had said, that the spirit of the gods was in Daniel, giving him special insight, understanding, and wisdom. Then the king informed Daniel that the wise men had already failed to read and explain the handwriting ([Daniel 5:15](#)). For emphasis, the king repeated what he had heard from the Queen Mother: that Daniel was able to give interpretations and to solve difficult problems. If Daniel could read and interpret the handwriting, he would receive the very same rewards that had been offered to the occult advisers ([Daniel 5:16](#)).

Thought 1. The handwriting on the wall is a clear picture of the guilty fear and helplessness we often experience when we face a crisis. Far too often we walk through life ignoring God and paying no attention to Him whatsoever. With “**Eat, drink, and be merry**” as our motto, we do what we want when we want. Then when a crisis strikes, fear and a sense of helplessness grip our hearts. Whatever the crisis is—a disease, financial difficulty, family problem, natural disaster, or accident—we feel terrified and completely hopeless. A sense of futility and despair sweeps over our soul, and we agonize in mental and often physical pain.

Scripture describes such a state of mind time and again:

[Matthew 27:5 \(NASB\)](#)

“⁵ And he threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself.”

[Luke 13:11 \(NASB\)](#)

“¹¹ And there was a woman who for eighteen years had had a sickness caused by a spirit; and she was bent double, and could not straighten up at all.”

[Acts 1:18 \(NASB\)](#)

“¹⁸ (Now this man acquired a field with the price of his wickedness, and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his intestines gushed out.”

[Acts 3:2 \(NASB\)](#)

“² And a man who had been lame from his mother's womb was being carried along, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple.”

[Ephesians 2:12 \(NASB\)](#)

“¹² Remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.”

Revelation 9:6 (NASB)

“⁶ And in those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will long to die, and death flees from them.”

Numbers 11:15 (NASB)

“¹⁵ So if You are going to deal thus with me, please kill me at once, if I have found favor in Your sight, and do not let me see my wretchedness.”

Job 3:20-22 (NASB)

“²⁰ Why is light given to him who suffers, And life to the bitter of soul,

²¹ Who long for death, but there is none, And dig for it more than for hidden treasures,

²² Who rejoice greatly, *And* exult when they find the grave?”

Job 7:6 (NASB)

“⁶ My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, And come to an end without hope.”

Job 7:15 (NASB)

“¹⁵ So that my soul would choose suffocation, Death rather than my pains.”

Job 10:1 (NASB)

“¹ I loathe my own life; I will give full vent to my complaint; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul.”

Job 17:15 (NASB)

“¹⁵ Where now is my hope? And who regards my hope?”

Job 21:34 (NASB)

“³⁴ How then will you vainly comfort me, For your answers remain *full of falsehood?*”

Psalms 42:6 (NASB)

“⁶ O my God, my soul is in despair within me; Therefore I remember You from the land of the Jordan And the peaks of Hermon, from Mount Mizar.”

Ecclesiastes 2:17 (NASB)

“¹⁷ So I hated life, for the work which had been done under the sun was grievous to me; because everything is futility and striving after wind.”

Ecclesiastes 4:1-2 (NASB)

“¹ Then I looked again at all the acts of oppression which were being done under the sun. And behold *I saw* the tears of the oppressed and *that* they had no one to comfort *them*; and on the side of their oppressors was power, but they had no one to comfort *them*.

² So I congratulated the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living.”

Isaiah 49:14 (NASB)

“¹⁴ But Zion said, "The Lord has forsaken me, And the Lord has forgotten me.”

Jeremiah 8:3 (NASB)

“³ And death will be chosen rather than life by all the remnant that remains of this evil family, that remains in all the places to which I have driven them,” declares the Lord of hosts.”

Lamentations 1:21 (NASB)

“²¹ They have heard that I groan; There is no one to comfort me; All my enemies have heard of my calamity; They are glad that You have done *it*. Oh, that You would bring the day which You have proclaimed, That they may become like me.”

Lamentations 3:18 (NASB)

“¹⁸ So I say, "My strength has perished, And *so has* my hope from the Lord.”

Jonah 4:3 (NASB)

“³ Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life.”

3. (Daniel 5:17-31) Handwriting on the Wall, Explained, Judgment of Babylon—Judgment, Prophecy Concerning, Handwriting on the Wall—Babylon, Prophecy Concerning, Fall of—Wicked, the, Judgment of, Pictured by Handwriting on the Wall—Daniel, Interpreted, Handwriting on the Wall—Belshazzar, Judgment of, Predicted and Fulfilled—Handwriting on the Wall, Explained, Symbolized Judgment.

Daniel courageously explained the meaning of the handwriting. And courage was needed by the prophet, for the message was a pronouncement of judgment on the wicked king and his nation. Their doom was sealed.

Scripture dramatically paints the scene as Daniel confronts the king:

a. Daniel graciously refused the reward offered by the king, but he stated that he was willing to interpret the handwriting (**Daniel 5:17**). His refusal is noteworthy, for it shows that Daniel’s heart was not swayed or controlled by greed. He was now an aged man, and he could have enlarged his estate rather significantly. But he wanted the king to know that his ministry could not be bought. He was the servant of the Most High God, a servant who had been called to help people, not to fleece them.

b. Daniel reminded the king that he had failed to follow the example of his grandfather **Nebuchadnezzar** (**Daniel 5:18-21**). Years earlier the LORD had made **Nebuchadnezzar** so great that all people feared him. He held absolute authority over the entire empire, authority over life and death, honor and disgrace. He had the authority to execute those he wanted to kill and to spare those he wanted to live. He could promote those he wanted to promote and disgrace those he wanted to disgrace. In addition, **Nebuchadnezzar** became arrogant and proud, exalting himself as being all-powerful. He failed to acknowledge the LORD as the *source*

of his ability and authority; he also failed to serve the people in mercy and compassion and to execute true justice throughout the empire. As a result, the LORD had humbled **Nebuchadnezzar** by removing him from the royal throne and stripping him of his glory. He was stricken with insanity and lived outdoors like an animal ([Daniel 5:20-21](#)). Furthermore, he remained insane until he humbled himself and acknowledged the LORD's sovereignty, that the LORD controls the nations and affairs of people.

No doubt, as Daniel reviewed **Nebuchadnezzar's** deep-seated pride and self-exaltation, **King Belshazzar** began to sense that his own pride and blasphemy against the LORD were about to be judged. If he experienced such conviction, he was correct.

c. Without hesitation, Daniel sternly rebuked the king. **Belshazzar** was guilty before the LORD ([Daniel 5:22-23](#)). Although **Belshazzar** had known about his grandfather's experiences, he had refused to follow in **Nebuchadnezzar's** footsteps of repentance.

He was guilty of five very serious offenses:

1. He was guilty of pride, refusing to humble himself before the LORD. And with the example of his grandfather to follow, he was without excuse.
2. He was guilty of being hard-hearted and defiant toward the LORD, guilty of lifting himself up in the face of God.
3. He was guilty of blasphemy and of profaning the holy Name and things of God. In a spirit of arrogance and shamelessness, he and his guests had taken the sacred cups of the LORD and drunk wine from them while toasting the false gods of Babylon.
4. He and his guests were all guilty of idolatry, of worshiping the false gods whom they were toasting.
5. He was guilty of failing to honor the LORD who holds in His hands the life and destiny of every human being. Belshazzar and his nobles may have been some of the most powerful leaders on earth in that day and time, but in the eyes of the LORD they were mere men who were failing Him in all aspects.

d. It was the king's wickedness that had aroused the LORD to send the hand that wrote the message on the wall ([Daniel 5:24-28](#)).

The message was only four brief words: **MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARES**

The word *Mene* means "numbered, counted, measured." God had numbered the days of **Belshazzar's** reign and that number was now up. The LORD, not man, determines when a nation rises and when it falls. Furthermore, the LORD, not man, determines how many days a person lives. When **Belshazzar** was born, the LORD counted out the days of his life. Now his days had run out and

were coming to an abrupt end. Note that the word *Mene* was written twice to emphasize the certainty that **Belshazzar's** days were at an end. His doom was an *absolute certainty*.

The word *Tekel* means “weighed” ([Daniel 5:27](#)). **Belshazzar** had been weighed and found wanting. He had been weighed against the righteousness of God and found to be totally deficient. The king had completely ignored the LORD and His holy commandments and had chosen instead to live a fleshly, covetous, and prideful life that glorified idols and dishonored God. He had chosen to pursue the fleshly pleasures and greedy spirit of this world and had arrogantly defied the LORD Himself. Therefore, when weighed in the LORD's balance, the king came up short, utterly lacking in righteousness and morality.

The word *Peres* means “divided” ([Daniel 5:28](#)). **Belshazzar's** kingdom was now to be divided and given to the Medes and Persians. The king felt that Babylon was secure because of its massive walls, stores of food, and seemingly endless supply of water from the river that ran through the city. But the Persian army had diverted the Euphrates, and while the king and his guests were reveling in their drunken orgy, the enemy was sneaking its army under the wall at the site of the dry riverbed.

Daniel's interpretation of the handwriting was not a warning to King Belshazzar, but rather a pronouncement of judgment. It was a sentence. The day for warning and a hoped-for repentance was over. The king had gone too far in his sinful behavior, beyond the point of ever repenting. As a result, the LORD had to judge him. **Belshazzar** was to immediately feel God's hand of judgment falling upon him.

In most cases, a king would order the execution of an advisor who pronounced such judgment. But surprisingly, **Belshazzar** gave Daniel the reward he had promised and had Daniel proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom ([Daniel 5:29](#)). Whether he did this out of deep conviction from God's Spirit or because he remembered Daniel's long service to Nebuchadnezzar, we will never know. But apparently **Belshazzar** was somewhat fearful about harming Daniel. Regardless, that very night **Belshazzar** was killed by the Persian army ([Daniel 5:30](#)). He was replaced as ruler of Babylon by Darius the Mede, who was 62 years of age ([Daniel 5:31](#)).

Other Scriptures refer to Cyrus as the conqueror of Babylon ([Daniel 1:21](#); [Daniel 6:28](#); [Daniel 10:1](#); [2 Chronicles 36:22-23](#); [Isaiah 44:28](#); [Isaiah 45:1](#)). Also, this is not the same person as Darius the First, who was ruling Persia when the Jewish exiles returned to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. Who, then, was Darius the Mede?

Although his identity is not certain, there are two major schools of thought.

1) Some think that Darius the Mede refers to **Gubaru**, a high-ranking military commander in the Persian army. Ancient Persian records state that after the conquest of Babylon, Cyrus appointed **Gubaru** to rule over the city and district. He may have done this as a stopgap measure until he had time to establish a permanent government for the huge empire he had conquered. It was also the custom for rulers in ancient history to assume a new name when they took the throne. This suggests that **Gubaru** took the name Darius when he began to oversee Babylon for King Cyrus.

2) Other scholars believe that Darius is King Cyrus himself. They think that the name “**Darius**” may simply be a throne name, a title of honor such as “**Pharaoh**” in Egypt or “**Caesar**” in Rome. Thus, the name “**Darius**” may simply have been another name for King Cyrus. Or perhaps Cyrus chose to use the name “**Darius**” as his throne name in Babylon. Ancient rulers often used different names in different parts of their empires, names that were familiar and accepted by the local populations. Some commentators also say that the word “**and**” in [Daniel 6:28](#) should be translated even. If so, then what that verse is saying is that Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, “**even in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.**”

While these two explanations seem to be the best, the certainty of the identity of Darius the Mede remains unknown.

But who was Darius the Mede? Former Scriptures had referred to Cyrus as the conqueror of Babylon ([Daniel 1:21](#); [Daniel 6:28](#); [Daniel 10:1](#); [2 Chronicles 36:22-23](#); [Isaiah 44:28](#); [Isaiah 45:1](#)).

Opinions differ as to who Darius the Mede was, but there seems to be two major opinions. **First, Darius the Mede** refers to one of the military commanders in the Babylonian army, a commander who was named **Gubaru**. Right after the conquest of Babylon, ancient Persian records state that Cyrus appointed **Gubaru** to rule over the city and district of the newly conquered Babylon. It was the custom for rulers in ancient history to assume a new name when they took the throne. This suggests that **Gubaru** became known as Darius while he was overseeing Babylon for King Cyrus.

Second, the name *Darius* may simply be a throne name, a title of honor such as *Pharaoh* that was used in Egypt or *Caesar* that was used in Rome.

Thus, the name *Darius* may simply have been another name for King Cyrus. **Two facts would suggest this:**

- (1) It was common for rulers of ancient history to use different throne names when they conquered various nations. Perhaps Cyrus chose to use the name *Darius* as his throne name in Babylon.

- (2) Then some commentators point out that the word *and* in [Daniel 6:28](#) should be translated *even*. If so, then the verse would say that Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, “**even in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.**”

Thought 1. The day is coming when every one of us will see God’s “**handwriting on the wall.**” On that day, we will stand before the LORD to face His judgment. That day may not be far off for some of us. And as shocking as it sounds, a number of us are looking at death square in the face right now and do not know it. And after death, the judgment of God ([Heb. 9:27](#)).

Hebrews 9:27 (NASB)

“²⁷ And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment.”

The question each of us must ask is this, “When God weighs me in the balance, will I be found wanting?” The only people who can measure up to God’s standard are those who have placed their faith in Christ. Any who have not trusted Christ as personal Savior will be found lacking and deficient. They will be rejected by the LORD.

Listen to what God’s Holy Word says about the end of a life that fails to measure up:

Romans 6:21 (NASB)

“²¹ Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death.”

1 Corinthians 11:13-15 (NASB)

“¹³ Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God *with her head uncovered?*

¹⁴ Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him,

¹⁵ but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering.”

Philippians 3:18-19 (NASB)

“¹⁸ For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are enemies of the cross of Christ,*

¹⁹ whose end is destruction, whose god is *their appetite*, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.”

Hebrews 6:8-9 (NASB)

“⁸ But if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.

⁹ But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way.”

1 Peter 4:17 (NASB)

“¹⁷ For *it is* time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what *will be* the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?”

Revelation 21:8 (NASB)

“⁸ But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part *will be* in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

Psalms 37:38 (NASB)

“³⁸ But transgressors will be altogether destroyed; The posterity of the wicked will be cut off.”

Psalms 73:17 (NASB)

“¹⁷ Until I came into the sanctuary of God; *Then* I perceived their end.”

Proverbs 14:12 (NASB)

“¹² There is a way *which seems* right to a man, But its end is the way of death.”