

## **“DANIEL INTERPRETS HANDWRITING.”**

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**Scripture Texts: Daniel 5:13-31**

### **Introduction.**

Think just for a moment where we are. Where does our text take place? Babylon. Where is Babylon today? Iraq. Where is God in our text? In Babylon. Who is God dealing with? With pagan kings, ruthless killers, international terrorist. This is ISIS.

Why is God there? What is God doing in Iraq with ruthless kings and murderers and tyrants and dictators? God shows Himself Lord over all the affairs of all nations and peoples and kings. God is using them all in His redemptive purposes. That was true then, it is true today. Violent killers like ISIS are not outside of God's control or God's purposes.

### **“I have heard you solve problems,” vss. 13-16.**

At the Queen Mother's advice Belshazzar summons Daniel. It's possible his tone is meant to be a bit condescending. Belshazzar reminds Daniel of his place, you are one of those exiles, a conquered people. And to that he adds some skepticism, “I have heard.”

Daniel is a nobody and Daniel's God has been defeated and defiled, yet here is Belshazzar depending on him and his God. Belshazzar's only help would come from the despised people of a despised God.

God loves to use the lowly, the despised, the foolish and weak things to shame the wise and strong.

Our only help comes from a lowly, despised, rejected, crucified Messiah. To the Jews the Messiah could only be mighty, to the Greeks the Messiah could only be wise. To the Jews Jesus lacked power, to the Greeks Jesus lacked sense.

Our God is a God who turns the world upside down again and again.

Now more than ever we should be praying God would raise up Daniels, full of the Spirit of God, having light and understanding and excellent wisdom from God, to speak truth to our leaders, to those in authority over us.

Where are the men today with these credentials? Men who have been with Jesus, who walk in His will and ways? Where are those of whom Isaiah spoke:

**Isaiah 11:2** And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him,

the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
the Spirit of counsel and might,  
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

The great Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was a prophet of our times, he was exiled from his homeland to the US from 1974 to 1994. During that time, nearly 40 years ago (June 8, 1978), in a famous commencement speech at Harvard University, he said: “There are meaningful warnings which history gives a threatened or perishing society. Such are, for instance, the decadence of art, or a lack of great statesmen.”

We need to pray for great statesmen, for Daniels.

### **Those who don't learn from history ... , vss. 17-23.**

Notice Daniel doesn't do what the king asks right away. First, he seeks to educate the king, to instruct him so he understands why this harsh judgment is about to fall on him.

Belshazzar didn't ask for all this. He just wanted to know what the words on the wall meant. He didn't want a history lesson, just someone to solve the mystery.

But God wants us to know Him and His ways. Think about how long it took for God to send a Messiah after the fall, or how long His people suffered in slavery before being delivered. God is painting a picture and He wants us to know the whole big picture. We want shortcuts, we want the Readers Digest version.

Notice also Daniel is not in it for the money, he cares nothing for what the king cares about or thinks valuable and important. He is motivated by faithfulness to God and His Word and not by any material gain. The promises of reward won't change what he says. He cannot be bought.

It is good to have leaders who can't be bought, who aren't in it for the money, who have the integrity to resist those kinds of temptations.

He tells Belshazzar what God did for Nebuchadnezzar, that it was God who raised him up and God who humbled him when he became proud and God who raised him up again.

God can take the most arrogant leaders, the most vile, the most calculating and shrewd leaders and reduce them to nothing, even less than nothing, to animals, brute beasts.

***“And you his son, Belshazzar, knew all this and have not humbled yourself” (5:22).***

You knew this, you knew what happened and why. You knew this but didn't humble yourself. You knew this but didn't tremble and fear at the prospect of falling into the hands of the living God.

He reminds Belshazzar that he knew all this but failed to learn anything from it. It is folly not to learn from the mistakes of those who have gone before us. He had heard enough that he could have availed himself of the same grace, but instead refused.

His sin is not ignorance, but arrogance, audacity to think his greatness is his own doing.

Notice how strongly Daniel drives the point home in verses 22-23 ***He uses you or your fourteen times!*** It comes out like an assault rifle, round after round, exposing the king's folly.

**Daniel 5:22-23** 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.

He refused to acknowledge the God of the heavens. More than that he showed contempt of God by desecrating the holy things of God. He trifled with the things of God. And worst of all he sang the praises of worthless idols, gods who can hear or see or act.

This is the essence of sin, the willful and deliberate decision and choice of darkness over light, of falsehood over truth, of evil over righteousness. It is hostility toward God.

**Romans 1:21-23** For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Sin takes the truth of God and turns it into a lie, it calls good evil and evil good. The clearest form of it was the people who killed Jesus, rejecting Him, when He was standing before them as truth and light. They killed Him even knowing He was the Son of God.

Notice having knowledge doesn't save you. Knowing about God and the Bible and heaven and hell doesn't mean you will be changed by it.

We live in a day and age when education is touted as our salvation. If we can educate kids about drugs they won't use them. If we can get better information to more people they won't make bad choices and decisions. They won't get sick or have accidents or get over weight. They will have enough in retirement, they will have better marriages and better kids.

Information is important but transformation is essential and that is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Word without the Spirit is dead. Faith without obedience is dead (James 2:14-26). The Spirit of God must take the Word of God and apply it effectively and fruitfully to our hearts so that we respond in obedience.

When the Word of God doesn't humble us and cause us to worship the true God, we are no better off than Belshazzar.

### **Weighed and found wanting, vss. 24-31.**

Daniel announces the judgment of God on Belshazzar. The handwriting on the wall is God's judgment and Daniel is the mercy of God if the king will hear and believe and repent. Such is the kindness and severity of God (Romans 11:20-22).

#### ***Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin.***

***Mene*** means numbered, God has counted the days of his reign and they are now over.

God numbers and counts everything from the days of our lives to the hairs of our heads to the sands of the sea shore and stars in the heavens. God knows and determines our beginning and our end.

***Tekel*** means weighed, God numbers and He weighs and he was found wanting, he was a light weight without substance. His life was empty, deficient in moral or eternal worth or value.

No doubt as king he thought his life worth a lot, especially the way he was honored and revered.

***Parsin*** means divided, broken in two, his kingdom will be divided and given over to the Medes and Persians. Not only will all he has be taken from him, but it will be given to his enemies.

#### ***Verse 29.***

Belshazzar does the wrong thing here, he honors Daniel, but not Daniel's God. Where is the king's anger, where is his fear and trembling, where is his repentance? How hard a heart that doesn't even flinch at these words? Does the party just start up again?

At least in Nineveh they repented in sackcloth and ashes after Jonah preached. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 all ended with confessions from King Nebuchadnezzar, but not so here.

#### ***Verse 30.***

Jesus warned:

**Luke 21:34** But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap.

That very night the armies of the Medes and Persians diverted the waters of the Euphrates until they could quietly slip into Babylon and it fell with no resistance.

That night he died as he lived, without God and without hope. The party is over.

## Implications and Applications.

I pointed out before that chapter four about Nebuchadnezzar and chapter five about Belshazzar are set side by side to show us the contrast between mercy and judgment, of one being saved and the other being destroyed. We spoke this morning of the reality of the mystery of one being chosen and another being rejected.

We must acknowledge this reality in Scripture. How do we explain the mystery of one being elected and another being rejected?

Abel and Cain; Jacob and Esau; David and Saul; The eleven and Judas; Neb. and Bel.

On the one hand we must humble ourselves before the sovereign wisdom and grace of God. But we also see the character and personal decisions of each person merited the response he got from God. The person rejected is always shown being fully responsible for being rejected.

When we say no to God, God says no to us.

**Second**, don't be in awe of earthly power or fame or wealth, it is all fleeting. God has weighed it in the balance and it will soon end. All the glitters is not gold, and even gold fades away.

Kim Kardashian had \$11 million in jewelry stolen in Paris a couple of weeks ago. How true are Jesus' words, don't store up treasures here on earth where thieves can break in.

What do we envy or covet or wish we had? What does our neighbor or friend have we want or what do we have that we boast in?

Daniel knew this well, he wasn't interested in purple or gold. Purple and gold are fleeting. To be ranked third was an empty reward. The reward for a prophet is the Word of God proclaimed with a response of belief and repentance.

Nothing is more rewarding to a prophet or preacher than repentance, than hearts that are humble and submitted to God. The sack cloth and ashes of Nineveh were a far more beautiful reward than purple robes and gold chains.

**I Samuel 15:22** Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.

Don't let your listening be without response, without action.

**Third**, Belshazzar was feasting while enemy armies were amassed outside the walls. Today a rebellious humanity enjoys wine, women and song, eating, drinking and being merry while the truth about God is all around them. They are surrounded by the realities of a creator over all of this creation and yet they continue in their selfish pleasure seeking.

They rely on their false gods and handmade idols but to their own destruction. They take what belongs to God and use it for our own sinful pleasures.

As Belshazzar was weighed and found wanting, so was his kingdom. When God puts our nation in the balance, what do we see? A nation wanting, a nation in moral and spiritual rebellion against a holy God.

The wickedness and evil we are promoting and exporting cries out for justice and righteousness, for God to intervene.

He can bring our country to ruin in a heartbeat or in an election. Our government in which we trust so much could completely fail us in a moment. Only His kingdom will survive and endure.

*Finally*, when we are weighed, will we be found wanting?

Romans 3:23 declares we have been weighted in the balance, “we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”

**Romans 3:10-12** None is righteous, no, not one; 11 no one understands; no one seeks for God. 12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.

What is our life? What are our days? But a shadow and a mist, fleeting and few, fragile and short. What is the substance of our lives, what do they mean, what do they stand for? How do we spend our days and use them? For His glory or ours? Is the fruit of the Spirit in evidence?

Have we weighed ourselves in the balance of God’s Word? Do we test our souls against this standard? Do we ask ourselves how we are doing in imitating Christ or showing the fruit of the Spirit? Is my heart broken as David’s was over sin? Do I rest secure in true confidence in Christ in an hour of great difficulty? Can we say for me to live is Christ and to die is gain?

All of our lives are found wanting, until we find our lives in Christ. Apart from Him we are truly nothing and there is nothing good in us. But in Christ, by Christ, we can do all things through Him who works in us. With the Holy Spirit in us we are being transformed and conformed to the image of Christ. Because of the Holy Spirit there is good in us.

When God puts us in the balance, it is the weight of Christ that will count.

Faith gives life weight and substance. Holiness gives life weight and substance. The word glory in the Bible carries the meaning of weighty, or heaviness, a weighty presence that knock people off their feet.

**2 Corinthians 4:17** For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

Upon weighing, pray “God give me greater faith, give me greater affection for you, greater zeal in worship.”