

# Daniel Series Part 12

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[ 0 : 00 ] We all love a party, some more than others, no doubt. What about you? Are you a party animal? I imagine there's quite a range of perspectives on what constitutes a good party.

Well, Belshazzar was a party animal, and he knew how to throw a party. As we return to the book of Daniel, we come to a chapter that relates events surrounding one serious party in the palace at Babylon.

If we think of the chapter, the whole of chapter 5, as a work of drama, now I stress, not a work of fiction, for this is true, but a work of drama, if we think of the chapter in that way, we can think of verse 1 as the opening act, and verse 30 as the closing act of the play, of the drama.

And as we consider these two verses, we could hardly conjure up a more sobering contrast between the beginning and the end of this particular drama. Notice how it begins.

What a happy start to the drama.

[ 1 : 22 ] King Belshazzar, what a guy, and what a party. A great banquet, but great hardly does it justice. Wine, women, and song, and all in copious quantities.

The great and the good of Babylon were happily drinking themselves under the gold-encrusted royal tables. And at the very center of the revelry, the mighty and fun-loving Belshazzar.

What a guy, what a king. Isn't that the kind of king we'd all like to have? Mighty, powerful, and fun-loving to go with it. Well, so begins the drama.

But how does it end? Well, let's go to the closing act of the drama. We read there in verse 30, The party that very night.

The very night of the big party. That very night, Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain. The party, quite literally, dies a death.

[ 2 : 31 ] It dies a royal death. Belshazzar begins the evening as the life and soul of the party.

But he ends it that very night. A lifeless corpse sprawled in a pool of blood on the marble floors of the royal palace.

How to explain this macabre turn of events. Where did the party go horribly wrong? Well, as we seek to answer that question, we can identify where the answer begins by noticing the appearance of an uninvited and mysterious guest at Belshazzar's party.

We read in verse 5 of chapter 5, Suddenly, in the midst of the revelry, in the midst of the partying, in the midst of everybody having one seriously good time, suddenly, the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall near the lampstand in the royal palace.

The king watched the hand as it wrote. His face turned pale, and he was so frightened that his knees not together in his legs gave way.

[ 4 : 00 ] The party's in full swing, and as the revelers drink from the temple goblets and sing the praises of the gods of gold and silver, there appears this mysterious hand that begins to write on the palace wall in full view of all those present, and very particularly of the king himself.

And the king is terror-struck by this uninvited guest and the mysterious message that he brings. What is the message that was brought to Belshazzar?

We're going to gloss over the king's initial attempts to secure an interpretation. We've read the chapter. We've seen how he sought an answer and failed to find one.

We're going to cut to the quick with regard to the meaning of the words engraved in the royal wall as they are provided for us by Daniel. We find the meaning of these words in verses 24 through to 28.

Daniel helps us in two ways. He identifies, very importantly, we might think obviously, but importantly, the provenance of the words, who is the author of these words, but also the meaning of the words in question.

[ 5 : 23 ] In verse 24, it becomes very clear who the message is coming from. There we read in verse 24, therefore he sent the hand that wrote the inscription.

And to whom does Daniel refer when he speaks of he sent the hand? Well, we've read the chapter and what Daniel has been speaking of or the one of whom Daniel has been speaking is the Most High God, the God of heaven.

And Daniel very clearly says to Belshazzar, it is the Most High God who sent the hand that wrote the inscription. So it's clear who is the author of the message.

But what of the meaning of the message? Well, the meaning is given in verses 25 through to verse 28. The message consisted of four Aramaic words.

Well, really three words, one repeated twice. Mene, mene, tekel, parson. And it would appear that these words all refer to different units of measurement or weights, as would be used on a scale.

[ 6 : 35 ] You can picture the image of a scale and weights that are used in order to make use of that particular piece of apparatus. Now, in this regard, these words that have as their meaning different weights or measurements, in this regard, it's not altogether clear why the wise men are described in the chapter as being unable to read the writing.

What exactly is meant by that? Is the meaning that they were literally unable to pronounce the words, that the script was such that it was undecipherable to them?

Or does it mean that they were unable to read it in the sense of reading it with any kind of understanding? I'm not altogether sure what is meant by what is said in the chapter.

It is certainly true, at the very least, that they were unable to read it with any kind of understanding.

They possibly recognized the words, but were unable to work out what they could possibly mean.

Certainly, that's the important point, that the meaning was hidden to them. Now, this Aramaic script, as with Hebrew script, it does not employ vowels.

[ 7 : 56 ] And so, the reader of these words, as of any words in Aramaic or Hebrew, on the basis of the consonants that are before him and the context in which these words are being written, has to determine what vowel sounds to provide to join up the consonants and make up words.

Now, in the case of the words on the wall here in the palace in Babylon, by introducing alternative vowels, it is possible to change the meaning of the words from these measurements or weights that I've just mentioned two, three verbs.

So, the consonants remain the same, but you introduce different vowels and you have different words. You can imagine how that could work. Now, when you do that, the three verbs mean as follows, and Daniel provides us with the meaning, but the three verbs are to number, to weigh, and to divide.

It's clear that Daniel, directed by God, is able to work out that this is the divine intent, that these words should be understood as these verbs, to number, to weigh, and to divide.

But, of course, Daniel is able to go further than that. Not only does he identify that these are the verbs that are relevant, that God is intending to declare to Belshazzar, but Daniel is able, with God's help, to give an interpretation of the significance of these verbs.

[ 9 : 34 ] And that we have in front of us very clearly in verse 26 through to 28. God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end.

It's the first verb that is repeated twice in the inscription. Then you have been weighed on the scales and found wanting, tekem, and then finally, peres, your kingdom, is divided and given to the Medes and the Persians.

The message is composed, really, as we've noticed, of two statements concerning Belshazzar that are sandwiched by a further statement that serves to explain the reason for what is declared in the other two.

That may sound a bit involved, but let me explain that. The key element in the message is the central one. You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting.

God is passing judgment on Belshazzar. Belshazzar has failed to live and to rule as God required of him. He had been found wanting.

[ 10 : 44 ] This judgment of God upon Belshazzar serves to explain what comes before and what follows in the message.

God is determined to bring his kingdom to an end. What is the reason for that? Well, the reason for that is that he had been found wanting and God is determined to divide the kingdom, to hand it to another, to the Medes and the Persians.

That too, a consequence of God's judgment to which he had come concerning Belshazzar. You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting.

Now, while the actual message does not explicitly establish what will be Belshazzar's personal fate, and verse 29 would suggest that Belshazzar himself was oblivious to the imminence of the events foretold.

Notice there that he, having been given the interpretation, regardless of how sobering and somber it was, he fulfills the promise that he had made and grants Daniel the purple, the gold chain, proclaims him the third highest ruler in the kingdom.

[ 11 : 58 ] It would suggest that Belshazzar was still under the illusion that, well, he would continue and Daniel would accompany him in governing the kingdom. However, what is to come to pass soon becomes very gruesomely clear.

The judgment pronounced involves Belshazzar's immediate death in those sobering words that very night. That very night.

The very night that the message was received. The very night that the judgment was proclaimed and announced and the reasons given that very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain.

These are the facts of what happened. These are the facts concerning how this party in Babylon went horribly wrong for Belshazzar, but we need to delve a little deeper and ask some big questions.

Why was Belshazzar judged by God? Where had it all gone wrong for this man? Why had he fallen short and been found wanting?

[ 13 : 11 ] Now, there is much that could be said on the basis of the evidence provided in the chapter, but it seems that the key is to be found in one sobering statement by Daniel concerning Belshazzar found in verse 22.

But the full impact of what Daniel says in verse 22 will only be appreciated if we read from verse 18. So, bear with me as we read again from verse 18 to introduce us to a few words, but they hold the key to understanding why Belshazzar was judged in such a seemingly severe way on this occasion. Daniel is addressing the king to introduce the interpretation of the words that are there engraved on the palace wall. And he says, O king, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendor because of the high position he gave him all the peoples and nations and men of every language dreaded and feared him.

Those the king wanted to put to death he put to death. Those he wanted to spare he spared. Those he wanted to promote he promoted. And those he wanted to humble he humbled. But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory.

He was driven away from people and given the mind of an animal. He lived with the wild donkeys and ate grass like cattle and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and sets over them anyone he wishes.

[ 14 : 46 ] But you, his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself and then come the key words though you knew all this.

Though you knew all this. You see, his great guilt and the justice of the condemnation that came upon him was because he knew all this.

He knew what had happened to Nebuchadnezzar. He knew of Nebuchadnezzar's greatness and of his pride and of his folly. He knew how he had been brought low by God.

He knew how he had come to acknowledge the God of heaven, the God of Daniel. He knew what Nebuchadnezzar had said concerning the need for all to bow before the God of Daniel.

He knew all this. This is the problem. This is why the judgment of God comes upon him because of what he knew.

[ 15 : 49 ] He knew all this. What did he know? Well, all those things that Daniel speaks of in the words that introduced Daniel's declaration.

You knew all this. He knew the big truth of the book of Daniel that heaven rules. He knew that. Del Sazer knew.

But of course, the concern is not only what did he know, but what did he do with what he knew? He did nothing.

He did nothing with what he knew. He knew all these things. He knew them. He knew them to be true. But he did nothing. He deliberately and consciously chose to ignore that which he knew. In fact, he did the exact opposite of that which he knew he ought to do. But you, says Daniel, you, his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself.

[16:57] You knew what happened to Nebuchadnezzar. You knew the outcome of his folly. You knew all that he discovered concerning this God before whom all must bow, but you chose not to bow.

Instead, in verse 23, instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. He knew what he ought to do, but he chose to do the opposite.

Before continuing to explore Belshazzar's folly, pause for a moment and take, and indeed this would be good for all of us to do, to take a long, hard look at ourselves.

What do you know? What do you know concerning what God requires of you? What do you know of what God has graciously done that you might experience forgiveness and friendship with God?

What do you know concerning who Jesus is and what he has done? What do you know concerning the eternal destiny of sinners who choose to ignore the gracious invitation of the Savior to repent?

[18:15] What do you know? It is commonly said that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, but in matters of the soul and of eternity, the greater your knowledge, the greater the danger.

The question for you, as it was for Belshazzar, is what do you do with what you know? But back to Belshazzar, what were the consequences of Belshazzar's choosing to ignore the knowledge that he had concerning the Lord of Heaven?

Well, the consequences were that he became a fool. If you could summarize it, he became a fool. He wasn't born a fool. He didn't have to be a fool. He became a fool. And his folly finds expression in two connected ways.

He became foolish in his beliefs. There at the party, when the goblets are brought and all are drinking from the goblets from the temple, what do they do?

And Belshazzar joins in, of course. They praise the gods of gold and silver of bronze, iron, wood, and stone. The folly of it declared by Daniel in verse 23 towards the second half of the verse.

[19:34] You praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways.

Belshazzar became foolish in his beliefs. He suppressed the knowledge of God. He rejected the knowledge of the true God and instead he worshipped the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, of wood.

Gods made by the hand of man who cannot see or hear or understand. There's a quote that is often quoted. I'm sure many of you will be familiar with it, but the frequency with which it is quoted doesn't in any way diminish the truth that it expresses.

A quote of G.K. Chesterton, when people stop believing in God, they don't believe in nothing, they believe in anything. Well, here we have it played out in the life of Belshazzar.

He knew, he knew the God of heaven, but instead he worships the God of stone and wood and copper and bronze. Foolish in his beliefs, but foolish also in his conduct.

[20:49] And of course, these things are intertwined. Foolish in his conduct, a life lived for today with no care for tomorrow. He fiddled while his empire crumbled.

The time reference in verse 30 at the end of the drama is very revealing. You see, we're told not only that he died, but we're told the means by which he died, the means that God used.

That very night, Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom at the age of 62. You see, what is being said, what is being said is that that very night Babylon fell.

Not simply that that very night Belshazzar died, Babylon, the great Babylon, the great empire, fell that very night. And the Medes and the Persians became the dominant empire in the world.

Now, just for a moment, think about it. Is it conceivable that the Medes and the Persians could have destroyed Babylon, could have conquered Babylon, to put it more accurately, that very night had they not already been surrounding the city?

[22:00] Of course they were there, and of course Belshazzar must have known that the enemies were encamped around about the city, but what does he do? He parties. parties.

He parties. And that very night they swamp Babylon, and they execute the judgment of God upon Belshazzar.

You see, foolish in his conduct. Whether he chose to close his eyes to the reality, whether his pride was such that he imagined that the walls of Babylon would withstand, I don't know.

But he was foolish in his conduct. There's a time to party, but this certainly was not the time. You see, this downward spiral in which Belshazzar finds himself, this downward spiral of rejecting truth, of embracing error, and the consequent moral decay follows precisely the pattern described by Paul in his letter to the Romans in chapter 1 that we've read.

Paul describes it. What do men do? They suppress the truth. This is what Belshazzar did. He knew, but he suppressed the truth. Then what do they do? What does Paul tell us?

[ 23 : 23 ] They exchange the truth of God for a lie. That's what Belshazzar did. He exchanged the truth of the God of heaven for gods of gold and silver. And then what happens?

God gives men over. He gives them over to their foolish lives and their immoral conduct. And this is what happened to Belshazzar.

And so the day came, a day that will come for all, the day when Belshazzar was weighed and found wanting, and that very night he was slain.

What about us? How will we fare on the heavenly scales? Now you are no Belshazzar. You would never plumb to such depths.

You don't even like drunken parties. But if you were weighed in the scales of God, how would you fare?

[ 24 : 30 ] Well, I would suggest in the light not of my opinions of you, but in the light of God's Word, that you would fare very badly. You would be found wanting. Indeed, we would all be found wanting.

We are all found wanting. The very best of us fall very far short of God's standard of righteousness. As the Word of God tells us with clarity, all have sinned and fall short.

Fall short of the glory of God. And for those who struggle to accept this truth, and maybe in your own mind there is a voice of protest rising, but I don't do lots of bad stuff.

I'm not such a bad person. Listen to the wise words that we find in the book of Proverbs chapter 16 and verse 2. All a man's ways seem innocent to him, but motives are weighed by the Lord.

You see, what the Word of God is recognizing is that our measures are so different to God's measures. You see, according to my measure, I'm a great guy, and I shouldn't be judged by God.

[ 25 : 49 ] But my measure is not important. It's God who weighs, and it's His measure that determines our eternal destiny and the judgment that He will come to concerning ourselves.

you think you're great. You think you're good. You think that God should receive you with open arms in heaven. Well, you may think that, but what matters isn't what you think. What matters is what God thinks, because it's God who does the weighing.

He is the one who weighs. He weighed Belshazzar, and He weighs us. Do we then somberly conclude that we will all suffer the fate of Belshazzar?

Will you be struck by the just and righteous punishment of God and so experience not only physical but much more somberly eternal death? Well, you may. You may.

It all depends on what you do with what you know concerning Jesus Christ. You see, the great problem with Belshazzar is what he chose not to do with what he knew.

[ 27 : 01 ] And your eternal destiny is determined by what you do with what you know. You see, Jesus, the eternal Son of God, he has everything to do with this matter of the divine scales.

He was sent by God the Father to solve this problem of sin. It's my problem, and it's your problem. Separate it from God. We deserve God's just judgment.

The same judgment would rightly be delivered to us. You have been weighed in the scales and found wanting, and it's a huge problem. And what God has done is send Jesus to solve the problem, to solve the problem of the divine scales.

Because Jesus died a death in the place of others. He who lived a perfect life, he who was not found wanting. And having died and risen again, he now offers to all who trust in him not only the gift of forgiveness, but the gift of his perfect righteousness.

So if you picture the divine scales, picture the divine scales without Jesus. And without Jesus, your sin weighs weighs the scales down on the side of judgment and eternal death.

[ 28 : 28 ] But for those who trust in Jesus, your sins are forgiven. They're forgiven and forgotten by God and cast from the scales to the depths of the ocean.

They're no longer there to weigh the scales down on the side of judgment. But not only so, the righteousness of Jesus Christ is placed on the scales on your behalf and the scale is weighed down in your favor.

And when God looks at the scales, he says, this man, this woman is vindicated. There is nothing on the scales to condemn. There is everything to embrace.

The righteousness, the weighty righteousness of Jesus Christ weighing down the scales in your favor. Praise God for so great salvation.

What you have to do, you have to recognize your condition and your need and call out in repentance to the one who is able and willing to forgive you.

[ 29 : 36 ] What you have to do is put your trust in this Jesus. Speak to Him. His name is a precious name not to be used and misused as we were thinking.

But use His name to speak to Him now. Ask Him to be your Savior, to be your Lord. Did you know all this? Well, you do now.

You do now. What will you do with what you know? Will you, like Belshazzar, choose to ignore what you know?

Then your fate will be as somber as the fate of Belshazzar. You see, hell is a destination we choose. We choose to go to hell and to endure God's just and righteous judgment upon us.

Hell is not a subject of polite conversation, but it is the place established by God for the likes of Belshazzar. The Bible is disturbingly graphic in its descriptions of hell.

[ 30 : 45 ] And some of them clearly are symbolic rather than literal. Flames and darkness, clearly they are, it is picture language. But of all the conscious torments to be endured, there can be few more hellish than the cry of those who for all eternity will lament.

But I knew. But I knew. But I knew. Let us pray.