DANIEL 5

The End of an Empire

Daniel 5 — A Deep Dive

> *“ ‘TEKEL’—you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient.*
> DANIEL 5:27

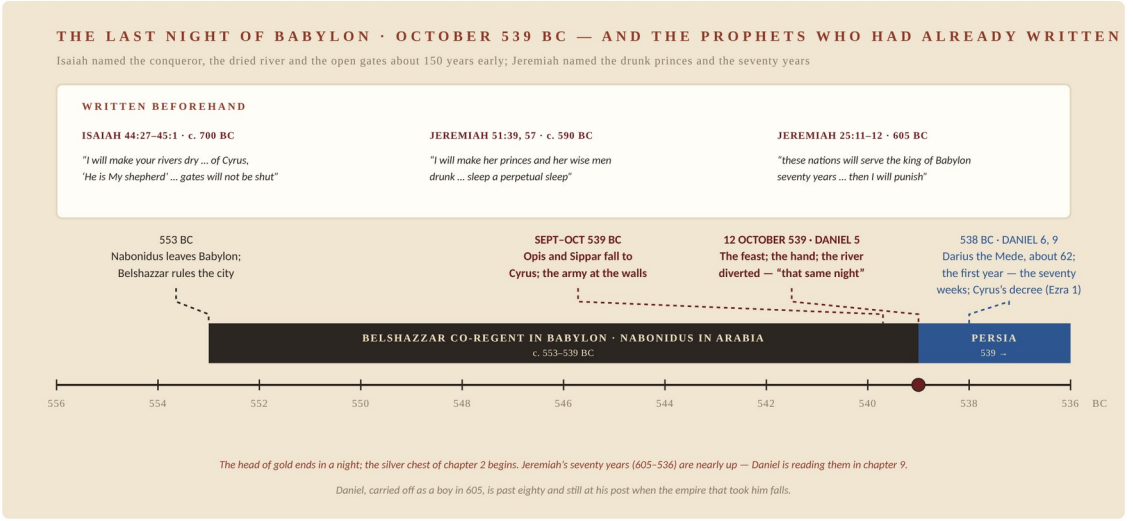
A SMITH FOR CHRIST STUDY · THREE VOICES: TSARFATI · MACARTHUR · GUZIK

Where the story stands

1. Chapter 4 ended with Nebuchadnezzar on his knees, restored and praising the King of heaven.

2. Chapter 5 opens more than twenty years later, on the last night of his empire, with a king who had heard that story all his life and learned nothing from it.

3. Belshazzar was the eldest son of Nabonidus, Babylon's last king, and ruled the city as co-regent while his father spent years in Arabia.



A Feast Under Siege, and a Hand on the Wall

DANIEL 5:1

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

AMIR TSARFATI

Tsarfati sets the night: the Persians at the walls, the city confident in its defenses, and a king who answers a siege with a party. He notes what the vessels were, the furniture of the worship of the one true…

JOHN MACARTHUR

MacArthur calls the feast the portrait of a man who has lost the fear of God. Belshazzar is not an atheist; he knows exactly whose vessels those are.

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik supplies the history: Nabonidus, the Nabonidus Chronicle and Cylinder, the co-regency from about 553, and the critics who said Belshazzar never existed. He quotes Trapp on drink, it takes “ale out of the…

THE ORIGINAL **LECHEM RAV · “A GREAT FEAST”**

A Feast Under Siege, and a Hand on the Wall

THE VESSELS · FROM THE TEMPLE TO THE FEAST AND HOME AGAIN

The chapter's repeated word. Taken from the house of God, kept with some reverence, toasted to idols — and carried back to Jerusalem by the man who ended Babylon

TAKEN	STORED	TOASTED	ANSWERED	RETURNED
605 · 597 · 586 BC	Daniel 1:2	Daniel 5:2–4	Daniel 5:5, 23–24	Ezra 1:7–11
Nebuchadnezzar carries the articles of the house of the LORD out of Jerusalem (2 Chron 36:7, 10, 18)	Brought "to the house of his god … into the treasury of his god" — with reverence, as trophies	Belshazzar, drunk, drinks from them with his nobles, wives and concubines, and praises the gods of gold	"Then the hand was sent from Him" — the God whose vessels they were writes on the wall	Cyrus brings them out — 5,400 articles counted to Sheshbazzar — and they go home to Jerusalem

WHY THE VESSELS WERE THE LAST STRAW

The grandfather took them as a conqueror and kept them as holy; the grandson used them to say Babylon's gods had beaten Israel's. It was not a lapse but a statement — and heaven answered it in the same hall.

The Forgotten Man

DANIEL 5:10

The queen entered the banquet hall because of the words of the king and his nobles; the queen spoke and said, "O king, live forever! Do not let your thoughts alarm you or your face be pale.

AMIR TSARFATI

Tsarfati notes how completely Daniel has dropped out of the picture. He was chief of the wise men under Nebuchadnezzar; under Belshazzar he is not in the hall and not in the king's mind.

JOHN MACARTHUR

The queen mother's speech is a sermon on memory. MacArthur points out that everything Belshazzar needed to know was already in his own family's history, the dreams, the furnace, the seven years in the grass, and that he had let it all go.

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik observes that Daniel is probably in his eighties and "seems to have been forgotten, or at least set aside." He finds that encouraging rather than sad: faithful men are often forgotten by the powerful, and God is not.

THE ORIGINAL **MALKETA · "THE QUEEN"**

The Forgotten Man

"THIRD RULER IN THE KINGDOM" · WHY THE BEST BELSHAZZAR COULD OFFER WAS THIRD

For centuries critics said Daniel invented Belshazzar. The cuneiform records explain both the man and the strange reward (vv. 7, 16, 29)

FIRST	SECOND	THIRD
king of Babylon, 556–539 BC	*his eldest son, co-regent in Babylon*	*purple, a gold chain, third rank*
NABONIDUS	**BELSHAZZAR**	**THE REWARD**
Nebuchadnezzar's line by marriage; spent about ten years at Tema in Arabia; back in the land for the end, but not in the city	Named on the Nabonidus Cylinder and in the Chronicle; ruled the city c. 553–539; "grandson" of Nebuchadnezzar through his mother	All a co-regent had to give — offered to the wise men (v. 7), to Daniel (v. 16), and given to him (v. 29) hours before the city fell

THE RECORD CAUGHT UP WITH THE BOOK

No king list named Belshazzar; Daniel did. The tablets found in the 19th century name him as Nabonidus's son and ruler in Babylon — and "third" is exactly the rank left to give.

You Knew All This

DANIEL 5:18

O king, the Most High God granted sovereignty, grandeur, glory and majesty to Nebuchadnezzar your father.

AMIR TSARFATI

Daniel retells chapter 4 to a man who grew up in it. Tsarfati notes that this is the kindest thing in the chapter: before the verdict, the prophet gives the king the testimony that could have saved him, a grandfather who was humbled and restored.

JOHN MACARTHUR

"Until he recognized that the Most High God is ruler over the realm of mankind." MacArthur calls this the thesis of the book of Daniel, and notes that Daniel preaches it to Belshazzar as history, not theory.

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik draws out the structure: the sermon has three parts, what God gave Nebuchadnezzar, what pride cost him, and what humility restored to him, and only then the charge. He points out that Daniel speaks of…

THE ORIGINAL **YEHAV · "GRANTED"**

You Knew All This

TWO KINGS, ONE LESSON · DANIEL'S SERMON SETS CHAPTER 4 BESIDE CHAPTER 5

The grandfather was humbled and restored; the grandson knew the whole story and would not humble his heart. Judged by the light he had.

	NEBUCHADNEZZAR · CHAPTER 4	BELSHAZZAR · CHAPTER 5
What God gave	*sovereignty, grandeur, glory, majesty (5:18–19; 4:22)*	*a city, a throne, a thousand nobles — and his grandfather's story (5:22)*
The pride	*"his heart was lifted up … behaved arrogantly" (5:20; 4:30)*	*"exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven" (5:23)*
The sacrilege	*took the vessels, but kept them in a treasury (1:2)*	*drank from the vessels and praised gods of gold (5:3–4, 23)*
The warning	*a dream, Daniel's counsel, twelve months' grace (4:19–29)*	*none left to give — "you knew all this" (5:22)*
The judgment	*deposed, driven out, a beast's heart, grass and dew (5:21; 4:33)*	*numbered, weighed, divided — "that same night" (5:26–30)*
The end	*"until he recognized … the Most High" — restored (5:21; 4:34–37)*	*slain; the kingdom given to the Medes and Persians (5:28, 30–31)*

Numbered, Weighed, Divided

DANIEL 5:25

Now this is the inscription that was written out: 'MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.'

AMIR TSARFATI

Tsarfati takes the three words as the shape of every judgment of God on a nation: the days are counted, the weight is taken, the kingdom is handed on. He underlines that the number was already fixed,…

JOHN MACARTHUR

"Weighed on the scales and found deficient." MacArthur says this is the sentence every man will hear who is weighed by his own works.

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik cites Clarke's summary, numeration, weighing, division, and notes the courage of Daniel in reading it aloud: he announces to the king, in the king's hall, that the king's kingdom ends tonight. He also…

THE ORIGINAL **MENE MENE TEQEL U-PHARSIN · "NUMBERED, WEIGHED, DIVIDED"**

Numbered, Weighed, Divided

MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN · THREE WEIGHTS ON A WALL, READ AS THREE VERBS

As written, weights and measures — like "dollar, dollar, dime, half-dollars." As Daniel read them, the sentence of a kingdom (5:25–28)

מנא
MENE · MENE

a mina (the weight)

NUMBERED

"God has numbered your kingdom and put an end to it" — said twice, for certainty. The days were counted (Jeremiah 25:11–12).

תקל
TEKEL

a shekel (the weight)

WEIGHED

"You have been weighed on the scales and found deficient" — lacking (1 Samuel 2:3; Psalm 62:9; Proverbs 16:2).

ופרסין
UPHARSIN · PERES

and half-minas (the weight)

DIVIDED

"Your kingdom has been divided and given over to the Medes and Persians" — and peres sounds like Paras, Persia. The pun is the verdict.

"THAT SAME NIGHT" · v. 30 — HOW THE CITY FELL

Herodotus and Xenophon: Cyrus's engineers diverted the Euphrates, which ran through the city under the walls, and his soldiers walked in along the riverbed while the city feasted.

Isaiah 44:27 — "I will make your rivers dry"; 45:1 — "gates will not be shut"; Jeremiah 51:39, 57 — drunk princes who sleep and do not wake. Written long before; kept to the hour.

What to carry from this chapter

1

Belshazzar was real.

Critics called him an invention until the Nabonidus Chronicle and Cylinder named him as Nabonidus's son and co-regent, which is why the best he can offer is third ruler (

2

Knew is the spine of the chapter.

"You knew all this" (verse 22).

3

The vessels were the last straw, not the first.

Taken from the temple and kept with some reverence by Nebuchadnezzar (chapter 1, verse 2), toasted to idols by his grandson (verse 3), carried home by Cyrus (Ezra 1, vers

4

The hand wrote where everyone could see.

"Opposite the lampstand" (verse 5): God's judgments on nations are not done in a corner, and the man who mocked heaven could not stand up

More to carry

5

Daniel could not be bought.

“Keep your gifts for yourself” (verse 17), then he receives them (verse 29).

6

Three weights, three verbs.

Mina, shekel, half-minas on the wall; numbered, weighed, divided in Daniel’s mouth, and peres puns on Paras, Persia.

7

Prophecy kept its appointment to the hour.

Isaiah named Cyrus and the dried river 150 years early; Jeremiah named the drunk princes and the seventy years; the Euphrates ran low that same night

8

Daniel outlived the empire.

The boy who refused the king’s food (chapter 1) reads the last king his sentence (chapter 5) and serves the next empire (chapter 6).

Talk it through

1. Belshazzar answered a siege with a party and toasted his idols with God's vessels. What is the "party" you throw when you do not want to face what is at the walls, and what holy thing are you handling lightly while you do it?

2. The wise men could read the letters and not the meaning. Where are you relying on the world's expertise to read something only God's Word can interpret?

3. Daniel had been set aside until the crisis. If you have been forgotten by the people who used to need you, what does it mean that the queen remembered and God never forgot?

CLOSING

He had his grandfather's story and the vessels of his grandfather's God, and he toasted his idols with them. The hand wrote where everyone could see; the prophet read it for nothing; and that same night the river ran low and the number was up. God's patience is long, and it is counted.

Teaching the Word. Watching the Times. — Smith For Christ

Full Deep Dive, O·I·A study, reflection journal and film: see the Daniel study page.