

Daniel

Chapter 5

The Writing on the Wall

King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them. ² While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets 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 in the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. ⁴ As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone. ⁵ 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. ⁶ His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way. ⁷ The king called out for the enchanters, astrologers and diviners to be brought and said to these wise men of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing and tells me what it means will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around his neck, and he will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom." ⁸ Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or tell the king what it meant. ⁹ So King Belshazzar became even more terrified and his face grew more pale. His nobles were baffled. ¹⁰ The queen, hearing the voices of the king and his nobles, came into the banquet hall. "O king, live forever!" she said. "Don't be alarmed! Don't look so pale!" ¹¹ There is a man in your kingdom who has the spirit of the holy gods in him. In the time of your father he was found to have insight and intelligence and wisdom like that of the gods. King Nebuchadnezzar your father—your father the king, I say—appointed him chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners. ¹² This man Daniel, whom the king called Beltshazzar, was found to have a keen mind and knowledge and understanding, and also the ability to interpret dreams, explain riddles and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means." ¹³ So Daniel was brought before the king, and the king said to him, "Are you Daniel, one of the exiles my father the king brought from Judah?" ¹⁴ I have heard that the spirit of the gods is in you and that you have insight, intelligence and outstanding wisdom. ¹⁵ The wise men and enchanters were brought before me to read this writing and tell me what it means, but they could not explain it. ¹⁶ Now I have heard that you are able to give interpretations and to solve difficult problems. If you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around your neck, and you will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom." ¹⁷ Then Daniel answered the king, "You may keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else. Nevertheless, I will read the writing for the king and tell him what it means. ¹⁸ "O king, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendor. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory. ²¹ 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. ²² “But you his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this. ²³ Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. You had the goblets from his temple brought to you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines drank wine from them. 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. ²⁴ Therefore he sent the hand that wrote the inscription. ²⁵ “This is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN ²⁶ “This is what these words mean: *Mene*: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. ²⁷ *Tekel*: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting. ²⁸ *Peres*: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.” ²⁹ Then at Belshazzar’s command, Daniel was clothed in purple, a gold chain was placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom. ³⁰ That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, ³¹ and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, at the age of sixty-two.

Ch 5 Luth: “Another example against the tyrants.... The hardened and unrepentant tyrant [Belshazzar] is punished mercilessly for his evil. At one blow he loses everything, land, people, and his own life. This is surely written to terrify all similar tyrants” (AE 35:298). (TLSB)

5:1–4 The orgy of revelry and blasphemy on such occasions is confirmed by the ancient Greek historians Herodotus and Xenophon. (CSB)

Daniel begins his account of the last night in Babylon under Neo-Babylonian rule without a hint that the Persian army has advanced upon the city. The first-time reader has no idea that grave danger lurks outside the city’s famed walls. This adds to the drama that unfolds in the chapter. Belshazzar’s actions, which look foolish even without this knowledge, seem even more foolish when we learn that Babylon fell that night (5:30–6:1). Why would a king hold a drunken feast when the defense of the city should be his first and only priority? (CC)

5:1 *King*. Belshazzar (meaning “Bel, protect the king!”) was the son and viceroy of Nabonidus. He is called the “son” of Nebuchadnezzar (v. 22), but the Aramaic term could also mean “grandson” or “descendant” or even “successor” (see NIV text note on v. 22). See also [note](#) on v. 10 and NIV text note on v. 2. (CSB)

Ruled as Babylonian king while his father, Nabonidus, was elsewhere. (TLSB)

thousand of his lords. Many nobles (and their wives) attended the great feast (v 3). (TLSB)

5:2 HE GAVE ORDERS – Daniel the author tells us that Belshazzar ordered the sacred vessels from God’s temple to be brought and used for drinking “when he had tasted the wine” (5:2). Some interpreters suggest that he did this after the first taste of wine following a meal. Others have understood this to be a euphemism for drunkenness. Either way, it demonstrates an incredible arrogance and lack of judgment. Earlier, in 605 BC, God had allowed Nebuchadnezzar to take captives from Judah, including Daniel, and to seize “some of the vessels of the house of God,” which Nebuchadnezzar brought “to the land of Shinar, into the house of his god” (1:2). The redundant statement “he brought the vessels into the treasury of his god” (1:2) highlights the hubris of Nebuchadnezzar, who assumed that his pagan gods had triumphed over Israel’s God. To be sure, God had allowed the heathen Babylonians to execute his judgment on his apostate people Israel, but the Babylonians too would come under divine judgment, as indeed will all unbelievers. The OT prophets make this point abundantly clear. (CC)

vessels ... out of the temple in Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar had brought these to Babylon (1:2). (TLSB)

father. Nebuchadnezzar was a powerful king (vv 18–19) and regarded as father of the nation. (TLSB)

5:3 SO THEY BROUGHT – Daniel immediately reports that Belshazzar’s order is obeyed (5:3). His use of repetition, one of his favorite literary devices, emphasizes the almost mechanical way in which the pagan subjects obey the order of their heathen king. By the end of 5:3, the reader has come to see the king as foolish and sacrilegious. Even from a pagan point of view, his hubris would call for divine retribution. His wives and nobles are painted as dutiful followers of a fool. (CC)

5:4 Using these sacred vessels for a toast to Babylonian idols at a boisterous drinking party was a sacrilegious act, mocking the Lord God (v 23). A letter (407 BC) from a Judean settlement in Elephantine, Egypt, complains of a similar abuse of sacred vessels taken from their temple. (TLSB)

THEY PRAISED THE GODS – Then the profane revelers add another insult to the one true and triune God: “they praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone” (5:4, recounted in 5:23). These are the gods in whom they trust. They give these gods credit for their defeat of Israel and for their ability to humiliate Israel’s God by means of their abuse of his temple vessels. While the pagans understand their gods to be more than mere metal, wood, or stone, Daniel heightens the sense of their foolishness by the implicit comparison of their real identity (only lifeless metal, wood, or stone) with the true, living God, who had demonstrated his power over all idols during Nebuchadnezzar’s reign (especially in Daniel 3). The praising of these pagan gods is a direct affront to Israel’s God by implying that he is subordinate to gods of gold, silver,

bronze, iron, wood, and stone. This is a more direct insult to God than Nebuchadnezzar, despite his arrogance, had ever made. (CC)

GOLD, SILVER, BRONZE, IRON, WOOD, STONE – Daniel’s description of the constitutive elements of these gods is itself a satire of them (cf. Is 37:19; 40:18–20; 44:9–20). The reader may also recall that Nebuchadnezzar had dreamt of a statue consisting of most of these same elements (gold, silver, bronze, iron, clay), but the advent of God’s kingdom in the Messiah shattered them all (2:35, 44–45). In the modern age, few may still openly venerate such idols. Nevertheless, unbelievers may revel in a false sense of triumph over Christians, thinking that Christ was defeated by his crucifixion and burial and is unable to save those who trust in him. Yet the vindication of all believers shall come on the Last Day (cf. Ps 25:3; 2 Tim 1:12; 11:7–12). (CC)

5:5 *Suddenly*. See **notes** on 4:31 – (*The words were still on his lips*. See Lk 12:19–20); 1Th 5:3. (CSB)

The sudden appearance of this remarkable portent was not on the evening’s program. (TLSB)

plaster. Used to seal mud bricks; an excellent painting or writing surface. (TLSB)

opposite the lampstand. The writing was well illuminated so all could read it. (TLSB)

5:6 **FACE TURNED PALE** – The vision of a hand writing on the wall is the most eerie of all phenomena described in the OT. However, instead of dwelling on it, Daniel focuses the narrative on Belshazzar. When he sees the hand, he becomes alarmed, and his hips and knees are weakened and trembling. While this may have been true of the other guests, Daniel wants his readers to see God’s judgment as falling specifically on Belshazzar as the one whom God holds responsible for the foolish sacrilege during the banquet. The king’s thoughts “alarmed him” (5:6), a clause that is used elsewhere of Daniel’s reaction to God’s revelation (4:19; 7:18). However, Daniel’s alarm never leads to pure fright as Belshazzar’s does. The difference, of course, is that Daniel knows the gracious God of Israel, whereas Belshazzar only knows God’s wrath. (CC)

5:7 *clothed with purple ... gold*. Symbols of royal honor. (TLSB)

third ruler. High government office, likely third in rank after Belshazzar and his father Nabonidus, who was away at that time. (TLSB)

Belshazzar in his panic screams for his wise men to be brought to him. He then makes an offer that betrays his desperate situation: anyone who can read and interpret the writing will receive royal honor and serve as “third” ruler in the kingdom (see the fifth textual note on 5:7). Since Belshazzar himself was only second in rank under his coregent father, Nabonidus, “third” would be the highest possible rank for someone under Belshazzar. The historical accuracy of this statement as recorded by Daniel the author is another indication that this is an eyewitness account. The suggestion by some that Belshazzar does not have the authority to offer such a position without Nabonidus’

permission overlooks the urgency of the situation. Either Belshazzar has already been informed of his father's defeat on the battlefield, in which case Belshazzar cannot obtain permission from him, or Belshazzar is so frightened that at this point he is not overly concerned about scrupulously observing protocol. In any event, he offers the successful interpreter the highest honor and rank that he can bestow. His offer of this immediate promotion emphasizes the grave importance of knowing what has been written on the wall. (CC)

third highest ruler in the kingdom. Nabonidus was first, Belshazzar second. (CSB)

5:8 Only the consonants were written, perhaps in an older script. The Babylonian wise men were unable to get the sense of the message. (TLSB)

COULD NOT READ THE WRITING – Daniel will read the inscription as three words and then interpret them as a play on the words. Even if the word division and vocalization were certain, arriving at the correct interpretation intended by God required a huge step that required divine revelation (see commentary on 5:25–28). (CC)

The wise men's failure resulted in an intensifying of Belshazzar's panic as well as total bewilderment on the part of his nobles (5:9). The wise men were supposed to be good at interpreting riddles and esoteric signs by means of their occult methods. However, they had no way of reading this riddle written by the one true God. Just as in chapters 2 and 4, where God gave Nebuchadnezzar prophetic dreams that only Daniel could interpret, the correct interpretation could only be given by the inspiration of the same God who authored the writing. (CC)

Similarly, the Holy Scriptures are the written Word of God, but they remain opaque to unbelievers. The proper interpretation of Scripture requires humility, prayer, and above all, the guidance of the same Spirit by whom God inspired the Scripture writers. (CC)

5:10 *queen.* See NIV text note. She could have been (1) the wife of Nebuchadnezzar, or (2) the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar and wife of Nabonidus, or (3) the wife of Nabonidus but not the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar. (CSB)

Because the queen has knowledge of events involving Daniel in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar (before Belshazzar's time), and because the king's wives were already at the banquet (5:2–3), commentators are generally agreed that the woman characterized here as "queen" was the queen mother: the mother of Belshazzar and the wife of Nabonidus, Belshazzar's father. That she was the grandmother of Belshazzar is an interpretation as ancient as Josephus, and many of the rabbis held that she was Belshazzar's mother. The queen entered the banquet uninvited, a definite breach of protocol. (CC)

It is not surprising that Belshazzar (drunk with wine and in a panic) needs to be reminded of Daniel's abilities as an interpreter of dreams and signs. At this time, Daniel would have been well-advanced in years. He may have been retired from royal service.

More importantly, there had been two palace coups since Nebuchadnezzar's death. The new kings may have demoted or forcefully retired many of Nebuchadnezzar's advisors in order to appoint new ones whom they thought would be more loyal to them. Therefore, Daniel could have been living in Babylon even if his abilities were unfamiliar to Belshazzar. (CC)

5:11 *the time of your father.* Nebuchadnezzar died in 562 B.C.; the year is now 539. (CSB)

wisdom. Highly valued by Israelites and pagans. (TLSB)

The queen's words provide a firm link between this account and especially Daniel 4. She calls Daniel a man "in whom is a spirit of holy gods," echoing Nebuchadnezzar's words (4:8-9, 18). She refers to Nebuchadnezzar, first as Belshazzar's "father" and then by name. Finally, she notes that Daniel can interpret dreams, as he did for Nebuchadnezzar. By quoting the words of the queen, Daniel the author is gradually drawing his readers' attention to the parallel between Nebuchadnezzar's arrogance and Belshazzar's arrogance, between God's judgment on Nebuchadnezzar and his coming judgment on Belshazzar. This parallel will be made more explicit by Daniel's own words to the king in 5:18–21. (CC)

5:12 *this Daniel.* The person whom the queen described in such glowing terms was finally named. Daniel would have been an aged man by this time (see note, 1:21). (TLSB)

5:1–12 Belshazzar hosts a great feast at which he and his guests drink toasts to their idols from the sacred vessels of the Jerusalem temple. God, whom Belshazzar mocks, suddenly shows His presence. This is a warning for us all. "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked" (Gal 6:7). God calls for repentance and faith. He likewise provides faithful interpreters of His Word to make His Law and promises known. • Holy God, may I ever respect Your almighty power and heed Your saving Word. Amen. (TLSB)

5:13 ONE OF THE EXILES – When Daniel is brought before the king, it is obvious from Belshazzar's words that he is already acquainted with Daniel. The queen did not tell him about Daniel's ethnic background, but Belshazzar already knows about it. Since Belshazzar calls Daniel "one of the exiles of Judah whom my father the king brought from Judah," he makes a clear connection between the vessels brought from Judah and Daniel, who was also brought from Judah. (This same connection was in Dan 1:2–7.) This may explain why the king, though he knew about Daniel, did not summon him with the rest of the wise men (5:7–8): the king had shown contempt for Judah's God, and he did not want to hear from a Judean who worshiped that God. (CC)

5:14 *I have heard.* Belshazzar had not met Daniel previously. (TLSB)

However, Belshazzar is so desperate, and his nobles, whom he may have sought to encourage, were so perplexed, that he was now forced to acknowledge and resort to Daniel. However, the king seems to express his contempt for Daniel's God by his

treatment of Daniel himself. He merely claims to have heard of Daniel's ability from others, but he refuses to state directly that such ability actually resides in Daniel. Contrast his qualified words in 5:14 with Nebuchadnezzar's direct affirmation in 4:9). Unbelieving Belshazzar's arrogance has made him cynical and reluctant to acknowledge Daniel's God-given ability to read and interpret the divine writing. Also note that the pagan queen gave a higher appraisal of Daniel than Belshazzar does. She characterized the Holy Spirit dwelling in Daniel as "a spirit of *holy* gods" (5:11), whereas Belshazzar refers to the Spirit in Daniel only as "a spirit of gods" (5:14). This too also signals Belshazzar's resentment at Daniel's prowess as a wise man. (CC)

5:16 YET I HAVE HEARD – This contempt continues after Belshazzar describes the inability of the Babylonian wise men to read the writing (5:15). He continues by saying, "Yet *I have heard* about you that you are able to clarify meanings and to solve knotty problems. Therefore, *if you are able ...*" (5:16). This phraseology is a doubting challenge to Daniel to demonstrate that he is indeed wiser than the Babylonians who failed. Still, Belshazzar offers Daniel the same reward (5:16) that he promised the other wise men (5:7), perhaps thinking that at this point he will not have to honor his promise, since this aged Judean cannot possibly be as wise as his own advisors. (CC)

5:17 *keep your gifts for yourself.* See Ge 14:23 and **note**. (CSB)

Daniel refused to allow any prospect of reward to influence his interpretation of the message. (TLSB)

Daniel's reply to Belshazzar is direct and forceful. He does not greet the king with a salutation, as was customary (e.g., as the queen did in 5:10). Daniel had always been respectful of Nebuchadnezzar because God had used the heathen king to judge his unfaithful people Israel (1:1–2) and had determined that Daniel should serve under him. However, Daniel knows the coming judgment on Belshazzar and that God has given his kingdom to others. Therefore, he feels no obligation to engage in pleasantries. In this way, Daniel demonstrates God's disapproval of Belshazzar and God's impending judgment on his impious act of drinking from the temple vessels and honoring pagan gods with them. (CC)

Furthermore, Daniel refuses the king's reward (5:17) to demonstrate that his wisdom is not for sale, nor is his God. Moreover, Daniel could not be accused of tailoring his interpretation merely to gain a reward. Later, Daniel will receive the gifts from Belshazzar (5:29), but by then he has proven that he is not a prophet for hire nor is his God's wisdom capable of being bought. However, Belshazzar is in no position to object, so he allows Daniel to continue with his scathing condemnation of the king. (CC)

5:18 *gave Nebuchadnezzar ... kingship.* Nebuchadnezzar learned that this was true (v 21). (TLSB)

GREATNESS... – The description of Nebuchadnezzar's greatness here (5:18) combines four words, "kingdom," "greatness," "splendor," and "glory," that occur

together elsewhere only at the end of those events, when Nebuchadnezzar was restored (4:36). In this way, Daniel emphasizes for his readers that the greatness of Nebuchadnezzar both before (5:18) and after (4:36) his bout of insanity was a gift from God. (CC)

5:19 **THOSE THE KING WANTED** – The description of Nebuchadnezzar’s glory is primarily from Daniel 4. However, the description of Nebuchadnezzar’s use of his authority in killing and pardoning, promoting and demoting (5:19) is unique to Daniel 5 and is intended to demonstrate that Nebuchadnezzar was given divine authority from the only source that could grant it: the God of Israel (cf. 5:21). (CC)

Had the power of life and death over those he ruled. God has similar yet far greater power. (TLSB)

5:20 *spirit was hardened.* Became proud of his achievements.

5:21 *until he acknowledged.* See **note** on 4:25. (CSB)

Nebuchadnezzar’s insanity is also described in clauses drawn from Daniel 4. Daniel adds a detail not found elsewhere when he states that Nebuchadnezzar lived “with the wild donkeys” (5:21). In the final clause of 5:21, Daniel makes the point that it is the God of Israel, “the Most High God,” who controls human kingdoms. This is the God whom Belshazzar has insulted and treated with contempt. Although Daniel does not contrast the one true God with the lifeless, powerless gods of Babylon until later (5:23), that comparison is implicit already here in the appellation “the Most High God” (5:21). (CC)

By this point in Daniel’s words, Belshazzar must have known that the inspired interpretation that Daniel would give about the words written by God would not be favorable. (CC)

5:22–23 Three charges were brought against Belshazzar: (1) He sinned not through ignorance but through disobedience and pride (v. 22); (2) he defied God by desecrating the sacred vessels (v. 23a); and (3) he praised idols and so did not honor God (v. 23b). (CSB)

Daniel’s description of the false gods repeats his description of them in the narration of the events of the banquet (5:4), but he now adds his contempt for them because they do not see, hear, or have any knowledge (5:23). This is a traditional biblical condemnation of idols (Deut 4:28; Ps 115:4–7; 135:15–17; Rev 9:20). Although the pagans thought of their gods, represented by the idols, as living and perceiving, the gods in fact do not exist and are no more alive than the materials of which their representations are made. As Paul declares, “We know that ‘an idol in this world is nothing,’ and that ‘there is no God but one’ ” (1 Cor 8:4). Yet Paul also adds that worship of such idols really is worship of demons, who exist and are powerful evil spirits, so believers must refrain from all such idolatry (1 Cor 10:20–21; cf. 1 Jn 5:21). (CC)

Part of the reason that Daniel emphasizes to Belshazzar that the idols cannot see or hear or know is so that he can contrast these gods to the one true God, who holds Belshazzar's breath in his hand and who is ruler over all the king does (5:23). Daniel is telling the king that he got it backwards: he praised lifeless, powerless gods while profaning the vessels of the living, almighty God. It is this God whom Belshazzar holds in contempt who sent the hand to write the message on the wall. If Belshazzar did not understand that the message was going to be one of judgment and condemnation before this, he surely must have been prepared for it now. (CC)

5:22 *not humbled ... knew all this.* Daniel condemned Belshazzar for the same sin of pride. (TLSB)

5:23 *lifted up yourself.* Contrast Nebuchadnezzar, who finally lifted his eyes to heaven (4:34). Drinking from the sacred vessels and praising Babylonian gods was an affront to the Lord of heaven. (TLSB)

God in whose hand is your breath. The true God, who had sent the writing hand (vv 5, 24), held in His hand the life of Belshazzar as surely as He holds the life of every person. Cf Ps 139. (TLSB)

5:25–28 *MENE, MENE, TEKEL, and PARSIN.* Each Aram word had several meanings. As nouns, they could refer to three weights: “mina, shekel, and half (of a mina or shekel).” As verbs: “he counted (numbered), he weighed, he halved (divided divided).” *PERES.* Singular of *Parsin*; sounds like “Persia.” Daniel interpreted these words to mean that God had judged Belshazzar, found him guilty, and would bring his kingdom to an end by giving it to the Medes and Persians.

Medes and Persians. Peoples to the north and east of Babylon; often no distinction was made between the two groups. (TLSB)

5:25 **INSCRIPTION** – After taking the opportunity to reproach the king for his sin, Daniel read and interpreted the inscription on the wall. His reading begins with the first word, *m^enē*. Daniel's repetition of the first inscribed word in his oral reading here, “Mene ... Mene,” is no mistake (see the first textual note on 5:25). By dividing the consonants of the inscription so that the first word has three consonants and by vocalizing the first word in the Aramaic *q^etēl* pattern, Daniel reveals the pattern for how the entire inscription is to be read. It consists of three words, each having three consonants and each in the *q^etēl* pattern: *m^enē*, *t^ekēl*, *p^erē*. Moreover, his repetition of the first word shows that he is reading aloud somewhat freely; he is orally reading the entire inscription with a hint of its interpretation. That explains why, when reading the third word aloud, he converts the singular *p^erē* to the plural *ūpharīn*, to signal that it will have a double play on words in his interpretation (CC)

5:26–28† See NIV text notes. (CSB)

5:27 *weighed on the scales.* Measured in the light of God's standards (cf. Job 31:6; Ps 62:9; Pr 24:12). (CSB)

5:28 *Medes and Persians.* The second kingdom of the series of four predicted in ch. 2 (see Introduction: Author, Date and Authenticity). (CSB)

5:29 DANIEL WAS CLOTHED – Although Daniel had spurned the king’s offer of rewards for reading and interpreting the handwriting on the wall (5:17), Belshazzar still orders that he be given the promised honors. Though Daniel’s interpretation might have been deemed worthy of death under other circumstances, the fright of the king and the promise he had made in front of his guests probably forced him into honoring Daniel. (CC)

Though Daniel’s interpretation was not pleasing to the king, the king kept his promise. (TLSB)

5:30 *That very night.* See Pr 29:1; Lk 12:20. (CSB)

God was ultimately responsible for Belshazzar’s death, as the vision of judgment showed. (TLSB)

The transition of world powers from the Chaldean kings to the Medo-Persian kings is signaled by the contrast between “King Belshazzar the Chaldean” (5:30) and “Darius the Mede” (6:31). Interestingly, Darius’ age is given as “about sixty-two.” This is a way of identifying who this Darius is. Darius is the only person whose age is given in Daniel. Moreover, Darius would have been born about 601 BC, at the height of Babylonian power and just after Daniel was taken into captivity with the first wave of exiles from Judah in 605 BC. Thus Daniel signals that even at the beginning of Israel’s captivity, God had already begun to implement his plan to bring it to an end, as he promised through his prophets (e.g., Is 44:24–45:8; Jer 25:11–12; 29:10; Ezek 34:11–16). (CC)

This narrative ends with powerful Law and Gospel. The swift death of Belshazzar (Dan 5:30) is the ultimate judgment of God upon him (cf. 1 Sam 25:37; Acts 5:5, 10; 12:23). According to the interpretation of the handwriting, God’s plan also included the transfer of the kingdom to Darius. Daniel the author signals that both of these are the work of God. In the case of Belshazzar’s death, he uses a passive verb, *לָקַח*, “was killed” (5:30), which does not require the naming of the human killer, thereby pointing to this act as carried out to fulfill God’s judgment proclaimed by Daniel (cf. Gen 2:17; Ezek 3:18–19; Rom 1:32; 6:23a). (CC)

5:31 *Darius the Mede.* Perhaps another name for Gubaru, referred to in Babylonian inscriptions as the governor that Cyrus put in charge of the newly conquered Babylonian territories. Or “Darius the Mede” may have been Cyrus’s throne name in Babylon (see NIV text note on 6:28; see also 1Ch 5:26 for a similar phenomenon). (CSB)

Not mentioned in any other ancient document. May be an alternate name for some other person who governed Babylon after its capture in 539 BC. A likely candidate is Cyrus, whose mother was a Mede and did not give him the name Cyrus (Hdt 1:113–14). See note, 6:28. The prophets attributed the conquest of Babylon to the Medes (Is 13:17; Jer 51:11). There are further

references to Darius the Mede in Dn 6; 9:1; 11:1. This person must be distinguished from the more famous Darius I, king of Persia (522–486 BC). (TLSB)

took over the kingdom. The head of gold is now no more, as predicted in 2:39. (CSB)

sixty-two. Detail to distinguish the ruler from others of similar name. (TLSB)

5:13–31 Daniel, after being introduced to Belshazzar, reminds him of how God has chastened Nebuchadnezzar for his pride. Belshazzar does not learn from this lesson, and so, as the writing reveals, he will be humbled and his kingdom given to another. The fall of Babylon made a deep impression on the biblical writers (Is 21:9; Rv 18:2) and came to symbolize the end of the world. All human history will end. Only the kingdom of God is forever, and He rules for the sake of our justification. • Lord Jesus, keep me watchful for Your coming and prepared for Your rule. Amen. (TLSB)