

Daniel

Chapter 5

The Handwriting on the Wall

King Belshazzar made a great feast for a thousand of his lords and drank wine in front of the thousand. 2 Belshazzar, when he tasted the wine, commanded that the vessels of gold and of silver that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple in Jerusalem be brought, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. 3 Then they brought in the golden vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. 4 They drank wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone. 5 Immediately the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, opposite the lampstand. And the king saw the hand as it wrote. 6 Then the king's color changed, and his thoughts alarmed him; his limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together. 7 The king called loudly to bring in the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers. The king declared to the wise men of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing, and shows me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around his neck and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom." 8 Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or make known to the king the interpretation. 9 Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, and his color changed, and his lords were perplexed. 10 The queen, because of the words of the king and his lords, came into the banqueting hall, and the queen declared, "O king, live forever! Let not your thoughts alarm you or your color change. 11 There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the spirit of the holy gods. In the days of your father, light and understanding and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods were found in him, and King Nebuchadnezzar, your father—your father the king—made him chief of the magicians, enchanters, Chaldeans, and astrologers, 12 because an excellent spirit, knowledge, and understanding to interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Beltshazzar. Now let Daniel be called, and he will show the interpretation."

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." (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 then 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 immediately. *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 *color changed* – 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)

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*. 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 days 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)

Daniel Interprets the Handwriting.

13 Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king answered and said to Daniel, “You are that Daniel, one of the exiles of Judah, whom the king my father brought from Judah. **14** I have heard of you that the spirit of the gods is in you, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you. **15** Now the wise men, the enchanters, have been brought in before me to read this writing and make known to me its interpretation, but they could not show the interpretation of the matter. **16** But I have heard that you can give interpretations and solve problems. Now if you can read the writing and make known to me its interpretation, you shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around your neck and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.” **17** Then Daniel answered and said before the king, “Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another. Nevertheless, I will read the writing to the king and make known to him the interpretation. **18** O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father kingship and greatness and glory and majesty. **19** And because of the greatness that he gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whom he would, he killed, and whom he would, he kept alive; whom he would, he raised up, and whom he would, he humbled. **20** But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit was hardened so that he dealt proudly, he was brought down from his kingly throne, and his glory was taken from him. **21** He was driven from among the children of mankind, and his mind was made like that of a beast, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. He was fed grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, until he knew that the Most High God rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he will. **22** 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. **24** “Then from his presence the hand was sent, and this writing was inscribed. **25** And this is the writing that was inscribed: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, and PARSIN. **26** This is the interpretation of the matter: MENE, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; **27** TEKEL, you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting; **28** PERES, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.” **29** Then Belshazzar gave the command, and Daniel was clothed with purple, a chain of gold was put around his neck, and a proclamation was made about him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom. **30** That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed. **31** And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.

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. (TL SB)

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 *but 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 *gifts for yourself*. 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 he would* – 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. (CSB)

5:21 *until he knew the Most High God*. 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. (CSB)

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

5:25 *inscribed* – 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^ʿtēl* 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^ʿtēl* pattern: *m^ʿnē*, *t^ʿkēl*, *p^ʿrē*. 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^ʿrē* to the plural *ūpharīn*, to signal that it will have a double play on words in his interpretation (CC)

5:27 *weighed in the balances*. 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, *נִקְרָא*, “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. (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)

received 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)