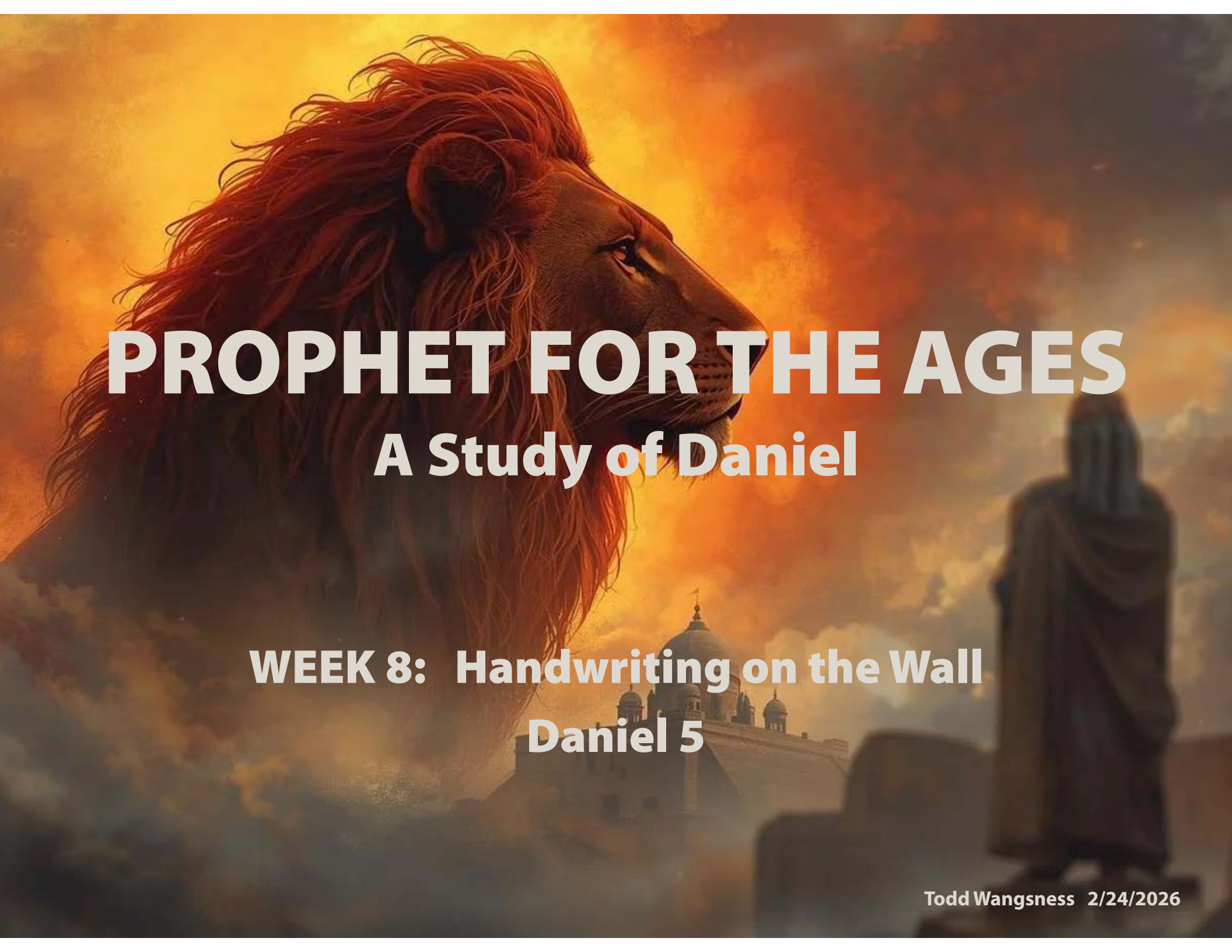




PROPHET FOR THE AGES

A Study of Daniel

WEEK 8: Handwriting on the Wall
Daniel 5

Prophet for the Ages: Handwriting on the Wall

Daniel 5 Major Themes

The Sovereignty of God

- God is the ultimate ruler who grants power, removes it, and determines the rise and fall of empires

Pride and Arrogance

- Belshazzar's pride is central — he hosts a lavish, blasphemous feast, using sacred vessels from Jerusalem's temple to praise false gods while ignoring the lessons from Nebuchadnezzar's humiliation

Blasphemy and Idolatry

- The king profanes holy items taken from God's temple by using them for drunken revelry and praising idols of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone

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Daniel 5 Themes (cont.)

Divine Judgment

- God examines human lives and nations morally, pronounces verdict, and executes justice—often suddenly and irrevocably

Failure to Learn from History

- Chapter 5 warns against presuming on God's patience, showing that ignored lessons lead to irreversible consequences

Faithfulness Amid a Corrupt Culture

- Daniel stands out as faithful, Spirit-empowered, and unafraid to speak truth to power

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Notable Quotes About Daniel 5

"Tekel; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. There is a weighing time for kings and emperors, and all the monarchs. They that have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication, shall soon also have to drink with her of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath; and they shall reel to and fro, their loins shall be loose, their knees shall smite together, when God fulfils the old handwriting on the rock of Patmos."

-- Charles Spurgeon

"When you read Daniel chapter 5, you are reading an eyewitness account of the fall of the Babylonian Empire by one who was a prime minister of that very empire itself. So, when you read Daniel chapter 5, you are reading an eyewitness account of the fall of the Babylonian Empire by one who was a prime minister of that very empire itself. And so, he is set apart as God's man, and the record he has given us is wonderfully true."

-- John MacArthur

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Daniel 5 Overview

- These themes tie into the broader message of the book of Daniel
- God rules over all human history and authority, humbles the proud, exalts the humble, and will ultimately establish His eternal kingdom
- Chapter 5 serves as a sobering warning about pride, irreverence, and the certainty of divine reckoning
 - *Job 33:14-18 Indeed God speaks once, Or twice, yet no one notices it. 15 In a dream, a vision of the night, When deep sleep falls on people, While they slumber in their beds, 16 Then He opens the ears of people, And horrifies them with warnings, 17 So that He may turn a person away from bad conduct, And keep a man from pride; 18 He keeps his soul back from the pit, And his life from perishing by the spear. [NASB]*

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Kings of Babylonian Empire



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Overview of Daniel's Prophecies in Chronological Order			
Prophecy	Date	Daniel's Age	Reference
Great Image	602 BC	18	Dan 2:1-45
Four Beasts	553 BC	67	Dan 7:1-28
Ram & He-Goat	551 BC	69	Dan 8:1-27
Fall of Babylon	539 BC	81	Dan 5:1-31
Seventy Weeks	539 BC	81	Dan 9:1-27
Future of Nations	536 BC	84	Dan 11:2-45
Future of Israel	536 BC	84	Dan 12:1-13

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Prophesied Timeline of Babylon's Empire

- Jeremiah prophesied that Babylon's empire would end with Nebuchadnezzar's grandson
 - *Jer 27:6-7 And now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant; and the beasts of the field I have also given him to serve him. 7 So all nations shall serve him and his son and his son's son, until the time of his land comes; and then many nations and great kings shall make him serve them.*
- Bible scholars place the timeframe of this prophecy in 594 BC – 56 years prior to its occurrence in 539 BC

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Belshazzar's Feast

Dan 5:1-4 *Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in the presence of the thousand. 2 While he tasted the wine, Belshazzar gave the command to bring the gold and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple which had been in Jerusalem, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. 3 Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken from the temple of the house of God which had been 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 and iron, wood and stone.*

- 23 years have passed since the events of chapter 4 describing Nebuchadnezzar's humiliation and restoration
- This was one BIG BASH! One thousand rulers attended the feast.
- The sexual overtones with references to his wives and concubines with free-flowing alcoholic consumption cannot be overlooked – it was a licentious party!
- Belshazzar commanded that the gold and silver vessels taken from the temple and used during this drunken orgy and used for idolatry

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Give the King a Hand!

Dan 5:5 *In the same hour the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote.*

- The Aramaic term for *in the same hour* ('shaah') means *a brief time or moment*
- In other words, as soon as they brought in the temple vessels, the hand appeared
 - The terminology involves *suddenness* and *precision* in its timing
- Archeological evidence of the banquet hall shows it was 55 ft wide by 180 ft long
- Most – if not all – the attending guests would have been able to see the hand appear and begin writing
- The Aramaic term for *part of the hand* ('pas') means *palm of the hand*
 - So, everyone saw a complete hand with fingers emerge from the wall and begin writing on it

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What a Mess

Dan 5:6 *Then the king's countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other.*

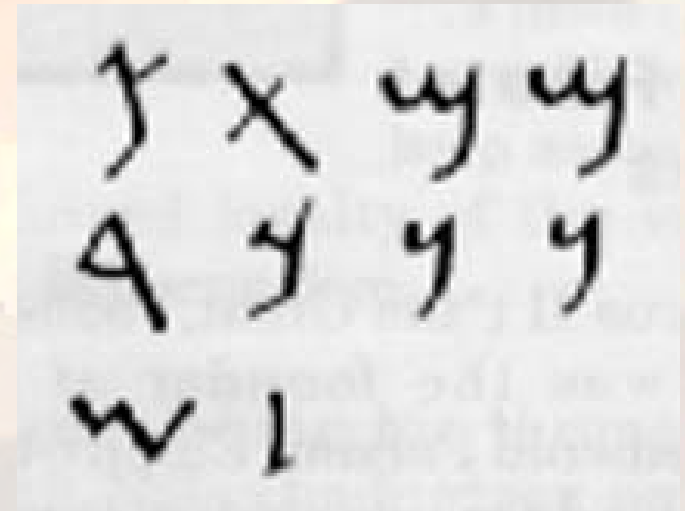
- The Aramaic literal translation is a bit more specific here!
 - *“joints of his hips were loosened”* actually refers to the sphincter muscles in his reproductive organs giving way!
 - *“Clean-up needed at the Masters Table!”* 🤪
- The verse goes on to describe a true *knee-knocking* experience!

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The Wise Guys Show Up Once Again

Dan 5:7-9 *The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. The king spoke, saying to the wise men of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing, and tells me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around his neck; and he shall be the third ruler in the kingdom." 8 Now all the king's wise men came, but they could not read the writing, or make known to the king its interpretation. 9 Then King Belshazzar was greatly troubled, his countenance was changed, and his lords were astonished.*

- Rabbinic tradition maintains that the Aramaic words written on the wall were written in *atbash* code, that is, they were written as three words one atop the other
- Thus, the words were written horizontally, but were to be read vertically and right-to-left. Also theorized that letter substitution was used, i.e. *aleph* switched with *tov*.
- Consequently, the wise men were not able to deduce what the words even were, much less their meaning



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Belshazzar's Feast

Dan 5:10-12 *The queen, because of the words of the king and his lords, came to the banquet hall. The queen spoke, saying, "O king, live forever! Do not let your thoughts trouble you, nor let your countenance change. 11 There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God. And 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, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers. 12 Inasmuch as an excellent spirit, knowledge, understanding, interpreting dreams, solving riddles, and explaining enigmas were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar, now let Daniel be called, and he will give the interpretation."*

- Commonly believed that the *queen* was actually Belshazzar's mother, Nitocris, the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar
- Although, NKJV says *Spirit of the Holy God*, in Aramaic it is *spirit of the gods*, meaning she also was pantheistic (believed in multiple gods)

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Daniel to the Rescue ... Again

Dan 5:13-16 *Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king spoke, and said to Daniel, "Are you that Daniel who is one of the captives from Judah, whom my father the king brought from Judah? 14 I have heard of you, that the Spirit of God is in you, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you. 15 Now the wise men, the astrologers, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing and make known to me its interpretation, but they could not give the interpretation of the thing. 16 And I have heard of you, that you can give interpretations and explain enigmas. 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."*

- Daniel is now 81 years old
- The fact Belshazzar had to be reminded about Daniel from his mother implies Daniel had been *put out to pasture* some time ago and no longer was a regent over the wise men or the province of Babylon

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Daniel Schools Belshazzar

Dan 5:17-19 Then Daniel answered, and said before the king, “Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another; yet 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 a kingdom and majesty, glory and honor. 19 And because of the majesty that He gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whomever he wished, he executed; whomever he wished, he kept alive; whomever he wished, he set up; and whomever he wished, he put down.

- Daniel bluntly rejected the king’s rewards – yet committed to revealing the interpretation to Belshazzar without compensation
- Then he proceeded to recount the history of Belshazzar’s grandfather, King Nebuchadnezzar
 - Daniel emphasized it was the Most High God that gave Nebuchadnezzar his kingdom and majesty
 - Nebuchadnezzar’s reign was absolute – everyone feared him

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Dan 5:20-21 But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him. 21 Then he was driven from the sons of men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till he knew that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses.

- Daniel reminded Belshazzar that his grandfather's reign was totalitarian and no man could thwart his will
- As a result, his spirit became prideful and haughty – until he was humiliated for seven years as we studied last week
- Nebuchadnezzar learned (the hard way) that it is the Most High God in heaven that *rules in the kingdom of men and appoints ... whomever He chooses*

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Daniel Gives Belshazzar a Dressing Down

Dan 5:22-24 *“But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this. 23 And you have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven. They have brought the vessels of His house 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, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know; and the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified. 24 Then the fingers of the hand were sent from Him, and this writing was written.*

- Daniel reminds Belshazzar that he was aware of all this history – yet failed to humble himself before the Lord
- He pointed out that Belshazzar intentionally desecrated the temple vessels with idolatry and – in spite of his knowledge of the history of God’s dealings with Nebuchadnezzar – chose not to honor and glorify the Most High God
- Daniel makes it *very clear* the appearance of the hand was sent from God along with the words written on the wall

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Dan 5:25 *“And this is the inscription that was written:*

– **MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN**

Dan 5:26-29 *This is the interpretation of each word.*

– **MENE:** *God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it;*

– **TEKEL:** *You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting;*

– **PERES:** *Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.”*

- All three Aramaic words are designations for units of weight or money
- “Mene”: 50 shekels equaled one mina prior to and during the exile
 - Post exile, the value was changed to 60 shekels per Eze 45:12
- “Tekel”: Corresponds to the Hebrew word *shekel*
- “Upharsin”: Three part word *u-phars-in*. ‘U’ means ‘and’. ‘Phars’ means to break in two or divide. ‘In’ is a suffix that makes the noun plural. *Peres* is the singular form.
- In summary, the inscription could be translated as: “two minas, a shekel, and a half-mina”

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- While the words themselves are expressions of either weight or money – that fact alone does not explain the riddle
- Daniel approached it systematically
- “Mene” is equivalent to the Hebrew word *mina*, which comes from the root *manah*
 - *Manah* means to ‘number’ and to ‘appoint’
 - Since it was used twice, both meanings are in view
 - Consequently Daniel interpreted the dual use of the word as:
 - “God has numbered your kingdom and finished it (appointed it to end).”
- “Tekel” is equivalent to the Hebrew word *shekel*, which means “to weigh”
 - The application to Belshazzar is that he was evaluated according to God’s standard of righteousness and failed to meet it
- “Peres” corresponds to the Hebrew word *paras*, which means “to divide” or “break in two”
 - It is also the root of the Hebrew noun “Paras”, meaning “Persia”
 - Daniel interpreted this word as, “Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians”

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The Inscription as a Monetary Value

- **Mene:** 1 mene (Hebrew *mina*) was equal to 1000 gerahs
- **Tekel:** 1 tekem (Hebrew *shekel*) was equal to 20 gerahs
- **Peres:** 1 peres (Hebrew *paras*) was equal to a half-mina or 500 gerahs
- Adding up the terms of the inscription:
 - **MENE MENE TEKEL UPHARSIN** (Note: *upharsin* is a way of saying “and Peres”)
 - $1000 + 1000 + 20 + 500 = 2,520$ gerahs
- Belshazzar took the temple vessels and desecrated them during the debauchery
- Later, those same vessels were recovered and placed back in the treasury to be reserved for the future use in the restored temple
- If we take the result above and treat it as years and apply the “day for a year” principle ([Eze 4:6](#)), we get some very interesting results when applied to the decree of Darius I to restore control of the temple mount to the Jews that occurred in a few short years
- We will discuss these interesting results next week

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Daniel's Reward

Dan 5:29 *Then Belshazzar gave the command, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a chain of gold around his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.*

- In verse 17, Daniel told Belshazzar his services were not for sale
- Regardless, Belshazzar rewarded Daniel and appointed him *third ruler in the kingdom*
- The Babylonian Empire would collapse later that very evening
- Nevertheless, Daniel was appointed a high position in the kingdom and assumed this role for a few hours until Babylon was invaded by Darius the Mede later that evening
- This appointment paved the way for Daniel's significance to the Persians
- When the Medo-Persians captured the city, they left its infrastructure in place
- Those who held high positions in Babylon retained those influential positions under Medo-Persian rule, including Daniel

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The Babylonian Empire Ceases to Exist

Dan 5:30 *That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. 31 And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.*

- Although Darius the Mede is mentioned in this verse as *receiving the kingdom*, the true monarch of the Medo-Persians was Cyrus the Great
 - Scholars regard Darius as a governor or viceroy appointed by Cyrus
 - Darius is identified with *Gubaru*, the general who entered Babylon first and administered it under Cyrus
- Cyrus incorporated Babylon into his empire and issued the famous Cyrus Cylinder
 - The Cyrus Cylinder proclaimed tolerance and allowed exiled peoples (including the Jews) to return back to their homeland
 - This was codified into a decree issued a couple years after this event
 - The timeframe of this decree is also of very interesting portent
 - We will also discuss this next week

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Questions To Ponder

- How does the account of Belshazzar's feast illustrate the biblical principle that pride comes before a fall?
 - Can you think of other biblical examples where this principle is evident?
- In what ways can we be a godly influence in our own "banquet halls" or spheres of influence?
- Consider the role of Daniel's reputation in this account. How can you cultivate a reputation that honors God and opens doors for His purposes in your life?
- How does the account of Belshazzar illustrate the truth of Proverbs 16:18, and how can we apply this principle in our daily lives?
 - *Pro 16:18-19 Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall. 19 Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, Than to divide the spoil with the proud.*
- How can the message of the *handwriting on the wall* encourage us as believers to trust in God's sovereignty over current world events?