A Practical Study of DANIEL

PART II

SESSION #9: Daniel 5:1-12

TEXT:

v. 1 King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them.
v. 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.
v. 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.
v. 4 As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.
v. 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.
v. 6 His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way.
v. 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.”
v. 8 Then all the king’s wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or tell the king what it meant.
v. 9 So King Belshazzar became even more terrified and his face grew more pale. His nobles were baffled.
v. 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!
v. 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.

v. 12 This man Daniel, whom the king called Belteshazzar, 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.”
INTRODUCTION:

The Catholic Horse

Bubba was from Alabama and was a hard-shell Southern Baptist. He loved to sneak away to the racetrack. One day he was there betting on the ponies and losing his shirt when he noticed a priest step out onto the track and bless the forehead of one of the horses lining up for the 4th race. Lo and behold, this horse—a very long shot—won the race. Bubba was most interested to see what the priest did in the next race. Sure enough, he watched the priest step out onto the track as the horses for the fifth race lined up, and placed a blessing on the forehead of one of the horses.

Bubba made a beeline for the window and placed a small bet on that horse. Again, even though another long shot, the horse the priest had blessed won the race. Bubba collected his winning and anxiously waited to see which horse the priest bestowed his blessing on for the 6th race. The priest showed, blessed a horse, Bubba bet on it, and it won! Bubba was elated!!!

As the day went on, the priest continued blessing one of the horses, and it always came in first. Bubba began to pull in some serious money, and by the last race, he knew his wildest dreams were going to come true. He made a quick stop at the ATM, withdrew big money and awaited the priest’s blessing that would tell him which horse to bet on.

True to his pattern, the priest stepped out onto the track before the last race and blessed the forehead, eyes, ears and hooves of one of the horses. Bubba bet every cent, and watched the horse come in dead last. He was dumbfounded. He made his way to the track and when he found the priest, he demanded, “What happened, Father? All day you blessed horses and they won. The last race you blessed a horse and he lost. Now I’ve lost my savings thanks to you”; he complained when he met the priest on the way out of the racetrack.

The priest nodded wisely and said, “That’s the problem with you Protestants—you can’t tell the difference between a simple blessing and the Last Rites.”

[Received via e-mail from Doug Byrd, February 7, 2004]
Gabriel came to the Lord and said, “I have to talk to you. We have some Texans up here who are causing problems.

They’re swinging on the pearly gates, my horn is missing, barbecue sauce is all over their robes, their dogs are riding in the chariots, and they’re wearing baseball caps and cowboy hats instead of their halos. They refuse to keep the stairway to heaven clean. There are watermelon seeds and pig feet bones all over the place. Some of them are walking around with just one wing.”

The Lord said, “Texans are Texans, Gabriel. Heaven is Home to all my children. If you want to know about real problems, call the Devil.”

The Devil answered the phone, “Hello? Damn, hold on a minute.” The Devil returned to the phone, “O.K., I’m back! What can I do for you?”

Gabriel replied, “I just want to know what kind of problems you’re having down there.” The Devil said, “Hold on again. I need to check on something.” After about 5 minutes the Devil returned to the phone and said, “I’m back. Now what was the question?”

Gabriel said, “What kind of problems are you having down there?” The Devil said, “Man, I don’t believe this . . . Hold on.” This time the Devil was gone 15 minutes.

The Devil returned and said, “I’m sorry Gabriel, I can’t talk right now. Those damn Texans have put out the fire and are trying to install air conditioning.”
My Kind of Place

It’s my kind of town when the sun goes down
they pert near roll up the street.
Where a young girl and a boy, one strong and one coy
At the district 4-H can still meet.

It’s my kind of place where you know every face
at the coffee shop each mornin’ at six.
And if times is tough and your road mighty rough
they'll all help you out in a fix.

It’s my kind of school, neither correct nor cool
allows kids who want to, to pray.
Where little girls giggle and little boys wiggle
and wear cowboy hats when they play.

It’s my kind of city where a woman is pretty
and works hard till the lights go dim.
He think she’s a queen, the sweetest he’s seen
can’t figure out what she sees in him.

It’s my kind of tune some old boys will croon
about horses and cows and sorrow.
A sun that will set with beauty, you bet
leavin’ some fun for tomorrow.

It’s my kind of horse, a cow pony of course
whether buckskin or roany or bay.
Neither wild nor too tame, neither snuffy nor lame
who knows how to work hard all day.

It’s my kind of home where ever I roam,
comfortably welcomes me in.
And no one hoots if there’s mud on my boots
or thinks failin’ to shave is a sin.

It’s my kind of land where the leaders have sand
and don’t back down from doin’ what’s right.
Where justice is fair, every man treated square
and the lawbreakers are in for a fight.

(Side 2, #38)
Expression, painful:
1. look like you squatted with your spurs on
2. look like lightning just struck your zipper
p. 101

Fingernails, long and sharp: if she came after you with both hands, you’d think you had been attacked by a flock of flying screwdrivers
p. 113

In pain: hurtin’ worse than a parakeet caught in a badminton game.
p. 151

Take this child—as Frederick Buechner so wonderfully puts it—born in the geriatric ward for which Medicare picked up the tab, this child named Isaac—which means “laughter.” Abraham and Sarah laughed at first because they didn’t believe; they laughed at the sheer impossibility of it. They laughed because they were told they would have a son when they had reached an age when they didn’t even dare to buy green bananas. And after the child was born, they laughed because they did believe. They laughed that when Sarah went to Wal-Mart, she was the only shopper to buy both Pampers and Depends. They laughed that both parents and baby had to eat the same strained vegetables because nobody in the whole family had a single tooth.
p. 214
SOMETHING ABOUT BEING 80—GEO. H. W. BUSH

Executive Privilege — Life is Good
George H. W. Bush, 05.24.04

... but you can’t be 41 forever. Age 80—What’s it like? Let me help you with that one.

Maybe other old guys can learn something from this octogenarian. Maybe as they ache and repeat themselves and tilt when they walk and wonder how others cope, they will see they are not alone. That should encourage them to head more confidently toward the finish line.

First of all, there are a lot of changes when you get to be 80. In my case, I still feel like charging ahead and living life to the hilt, but my body lags behind. My mind is out there on the playing field or on the campaign trail or circling the globe, but my skeletal structure cries out suggesting I give it a break...

No question about it, balance at 80 offers great challenges; and, oddly, lack of balance does not get much sympathy from the younger crowd. One little falter and your kids look at you like the town drunk...

At 80, body kinds of things matter more. I love a good sauna or a hot tub. Massage therapy is great; make that essential. I hope heaven has these wonders.

My back aches more now. So do my legs. So I have tried stretching. Everyone says, “When you get older, you must stretch.” The problem is stretching is boring. There is no competition in stretching, no winners and losers. But it does help. It is better when someone helps you stretch. I like just lying there and letting someone else tie me into a half granny. Well, not exactly, because I don’t bend that much. I like riding a low-hung exercise bike. I can fast walk but I can no longer jog. I miss the jogging. I miss the adrenaline rush that came on after a good, brisk three- or four-mile jog...

Anyway, this year he [Chevy Chase] drilled me in the groin with a well-hit forehand. Several years ago he never would have got me: My reactions would have spared me. But reaction times are down, danger to the groin up. No more real tennis, but I sure miss it.

What was your question? Oh, yes—hearing. My hearing has deteriorated, not dangerously so, however. I can hear selectively. I can tune people out when I want to.
One has to be careful with the tuning out, because if the question is shot right at you, you don’t want to look dumb. But if the question is shouted from, say, the wife’s bathroom, you don’t need to respond. Sometimes I can make out the question clearly, at other times it is all just a giant mumble.

I try my hearing aid. Once you get past the part where the device screeches into your ear when you first put it in, it can be helpful.

My hearing aid helps when, say, I am watching a rental from Blockbuster. The bad news is it kills when you are at a cocktail party or even in the office. The other day, eating out, I was coasting along hearing pretty well when someone crumpled up some paper a few tables away. It sounded like a low-yield nuke had just gone off.

I have no problem with the cosmetics of hearing aids. I don’t care if it is the “tiniest hearing aid ever made.” Hey, if you are 80, people expect you to be deaf as a post.

But I no longer want to hear how much they enjoyed the Dave Matthews concert way the hell up near the Canadian border:

“It took us five hours to get to the concert area, and then we had to walk for an hour because there was no parking. We stayed up all night. Pierce slept in the back of a pickup truck.” I listened but I didn’t care. Is that selfish? All I could think about was recommending a good psychiatrist to all of them. Who, if totally sane, would drive all day, walk for hours, listen to a rock concert—in the rain yet—then spend the rest of the night camped in the bed of a pickup truck? Give me a break.

. . . At 80 you can say at dinner “I am so darn old, I hope you’ll forgive me if I excuse myself and go to bed.” No one argues, everyone understands. In fact, I know the younger ones are glad to see the old fogey go. It is wonderful. Several years ago after dinner, our grandkids used to challenge me. “Let’s play peggiety” or “I can beat you at backgammon, Gampy.” Every once in a while I’d accept the challenge. Now it’s, “I won’t even pass go; I’m going to bed.”

There are things kids say that don’t exactly disturb me now that I am 80, but things that make me wonder what they are learning. They use the word “like” all the time. My beloved teenagers can’t say a sentence without saying “like.”

Like “Hi, Gampster, are you like going out in the boat, and if you do will you like take me with you?” Why do kids do this? Why don’t their teachers tell them to cease and desist? They should simply tell the kids “Don’t say ‘like’ all the time.” Maybe it is only us old guys who notice, because we like didn’t learn
to talk that way and like now everyone under 20 goes “like” all the time. It’s a new phenomenon. I hope our grandkids grow out of it before I get to be 85.

At 80, I find I still look forward to things. I still have goals. I look forward to my parachute jump on my 80th birthday. Barbara is okay with it, but she has managed to contain her enthusiasm. “One way or another, George, this will be your final jump.” I asked her to rephrase it. She wouldn’t. . . .

Another goal is to live until 2008, because I want to attend the commissioning of CVN77, the newest and most modern aircraft carrier ever to sail the seas. The ship has been named for me, _George H.W. Bush_. Our daughter, Doro, is the sponsor of the ship. That makes CVN77 “her ship.” The commissioning of this grand carrier in 2008 is something I really look forward to.

I also look forward to our 60th wedding anniversary less than a year from now. But even in my 80th year, it doesn’t seem we have been married that long. It has been a wonderful journey.

Forgetful—that’s where my mind is. I can clearly remember some things that happened 40 years ago, and yet now I can’t remember where I put my glasses and who’s coming to lunch and sometimes I can’t instantly recall the names of close friends. Everyone says, “Well, sir, you have met so many people, how can you possibly remember names? Your mind must be full of names and places and events. How can you begin to remember last week’s speech in Orlando or Las Vegas?” The truth is my mind gets a little lazy these days. I am afraid I don’t concentrate on names when being introduced to new people. . . .

To understand what’s happening to me now, I asked Dr. John Eckstein, my doctor at the Mayo Clinic, about the brain.

John tells me that the front of the left temporal lobe is where one stores and then remembers people’s names. Okay, so my left temporal lobe is a little lazy. Maybe it is full, maybe a few quarts over the top; but, hey, at 80 I don’t worry about this lobe, and I am not going to start eating seaweed, plankton or dried guava. I know I won’t be around for many years more so forget it—don’t worry about it.

Besides, I can always bluff through it. “Say, how’s the wife?” or “How’s it going, pal?” “You look great: how’s the old lady?” Careful with that last one, though. A lot of old ladies have gone to heaven or been dumped.

At 80, I do find myself reading the obituary pages a lot more. “Hey, Bar, did you see where Andrew died last week?”
“Last week? I thought he died years ago.”

I now understand more clearly what Phyllis Diller meant when she said “All my friends are dying in alphabetical order.”

Here’s another very important point about aging at 80. Back when I was a younger man, I could rationally discuss with a friend an ailment I might have. Now, if I start to tell a friend about my hip operation I must brace myself for a lengthy discussion about his operation, his prostate surgery or his wife’s gall bladder. It is better not to discuss your body parts with anyone.

How to sum it up. Being 80 is okay, not bad at all. Herewith a few general conclusions:

1) Life is good for Barbara and me. We have many happy memories . . .

2) It hurts more when the press and political opponents criticize one of my sons than when they used to knock the socks off me. I know that criticism, fair or grossly unfair, goes with the territory; but it still hurts a lot when someone you love is attacked day in and day out.

3) It is true that the older you get, the faster time flies. It’s going by lightning fast.

4) Family is everything, and prayers matter a lot.

5) Satchel Paige was right when he said, “Don’t look over your shoulder. Something might be gaining on you.” So I look forward. I want to give something back. I want to live life to its fullest. Every night Barbara and I say our prayers and we count our many blessings and we give thanks to God.

At 80, there are a lot of breathtaking sunrises ahead, and many brilliant sunsets, too.

In the Navy we young pilots all prayed for CAVU: Ceiling and Visibility Unlimited. But, you see, at 80, that is where my life is now. Thanks to my family and my friends, my life is CAVU.

(Received via e-mail from Bob Ammons, June 5, 2004)
Eighty years old. No eyes left, no ears, no teeth, no legs, no wind! And when all is said and done, how astonishingly well one does without them!

POET PAUL CLAUDEL

p. 345

Age is nothing but experience, and some of us are more experienced than others.

HUMORIST ANDY ROONEY

p. 247

A life directed chiefly toward the fulfillment of personal desires will sooner or later always lead to bitterness.

PHYSICIST ALBERT EINSTEIN

p. 177

Abide with us, o Lord, for it is toward evening, and the day of our life is far spent.

p. 106

Let us turn our attention now to Daniel 5.

There have been quite a number of significant events take place. As the scene of Daniel 5 opens, we need to have some of these things before us so we can make sense out of what we are reading about in Daniel 5.
There is about TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF HISTORY BETWEEN the closing of Daniel 4 and the picking up of the story in Daniel 5.

I have suggested that Daniel was born probably in 625 B.C. His good friend, Nebuchadnezzar, died in 562 B.C. when Daniel was 63 years old.

The scene of today’s study is 539 B.C. This would make Daniel 86 years of age as we begin this chapter.

*The Bible Knowledge Commentary* helps us a great deal with the following observations:

The events recorded in Daniel 1-4 pertained to the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, who expanded and united the Babylonian Empire. Nebuchadnezzar died in 562 B.C. after ruling 43 years. The ensuing years of Babylonian history till its overthrow by Cyrus in 539 B.C. were marked by progressive deterioration, intrigue, and murder. Nebuchadnezzar was succeeded by his son Evil-Merodach who ruled for two years (562-560 B.C. . . . Evil Merodach was murdered in August 560 by Neriglissar, Nebuchadnezzar’s son-in-law and Evil-Merodach’s own brother-in-law. Neriglissar then ruled four years (560-556 B.C.). . . At this death, he was succeeded by his young son Labashi-Marduk, who ruled only two months (May and June 556) before he was assassinated and succeeded by Nabonidus, who reigned 17 years (556-539 B.C.). . . .

Nabonidus did much to restore the glory that had belonged to Babylon under the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. Nabonidus’ mother was the high priestess of the moon god at Haran. Perhaps because of her influence, he had great interest in restoring and expanding the Babylonian religion and did much to restore abandoned temples. He was absent from Babylon for 10 of his 17 years, from 554 through 545. In Haran he restored the temple of the moon god Sin, and then he attacked Edom and conquered parts of Arabia when he then lived for some time.

Belshazzar was Nabonidus’ eldest son and was appointed by his father as his coregent. . . . This coregency explains why Belshazzar was called king . . . and why he exercised kingly authority even though Nabonidus actually held the throne.

p. 1344
Showers summarizes the historical background:

King Nebuchadnezzar died on October 7, 562 B.C. After three other men had ruled and passed from the scene, Nabonidus became king of Babylon in 556 B.C. Nabonidus was king when the events of Daniel chapter five took place.

Wiersbe puts it this way:

The events in this chapter occurred several years after those recorded in chapter 4. Belshazzar was coregent with his father Nabonidus, which explains why Daniel was named third ruler in the kingdom (v. 29).

The king may have been new, but the sin was old: pride and self-confidence. At that very hour, Darius was besieging the city; but so certain was Belshazzar of his defenses that he ridiculed Jehovah and praised the false gods of Babylon. It was Proverbs 16:7 over again.

God gave Nebuchadnezzar a year to repent, but He judged Belshazzar that very night. The king had not learned from those who had gone before, and Daniel told him so (vv. 17-23). But it was too late!

The self-confident sinner had better beware (Luke 11:16-21), and so should a proud world that says, “peace and safety!” (1 Thess. 5:1-11). In Noah’s day and in Abraham’s day, judgment came when people least expected it (Luke 17:26-32). It will happen again.

Proverbs 16:7

When a man’s ways are pleasing to the Lord, he makes even his enemies live at peace with him.

Longman says:

The major difference between chapters 4 and 5 is in the response of the king. In Daniel 4, Nebuchadnezzar ultimately repents of his arrogance and is restored to his former position. In Daniel 5, Belshazzar does not repent and is destroyed.

p. 49
Longman says further:

... the theme of Daniel 5 fits into the theme of the whole book: *In spite of present appearances, God is in control.* This theme is important in the context of the oppression of God’s people at the hands of arrogant pagan rulers like Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar. In the case of the former, God shows how he can overcome the pride of a powerful ruler by humbling him into repentance. In the case of the latter, God shows what he does with one who remains unrepentant. In either case, God shows himself to be more powerful than these hostile yet powerful kings, thus again giving comfort to his faithful, suffering people.

p. 134

Feinberg says:

In 555 B.C., Nabonidus usurped the throne. He was the father of Belshazzar and was ruler of Babylon in 538 B.C., when it fell to the Medes and Persians under Cyrus. Because of his frequent military campaigns in the west, Nabonidus left the rule of his empire in the hands of his son, Belshazzar. It seems most likely that Belshazzar was related to Nebuchadnezzar through his mother. Thus, in this chapter, we near the end of the empire represented by the head of gold in the great statue described in chapter 2.

p. 64

Smith says:

The chief feature of interest pertaining to this chapter is the fact that it describes the closing scenes of the Babylonish empire, the transition from the gold to the silver of the great image of chapter 2, and from the lion to the bear of Daniel’s vision in chapter 7. This feast is supposed by some to have been a stated annual festival in honor of one of their deities. On this account, Cyrus, who was then besieging Babylon, learned of its approach, and knew when to lay his plans for the overthrow of the city.

p. 114
Baldwin says:

With the armies of a conqueror pressing at the capital this deputy ruler took refuge in an orgy of wine. Throwing off all restraint and defying the accepted sanctions, he sent for the sacred cups and bowls which had been plundered years before from the Jerusalem temple . . . so that he and his guests could use them at the banquet.

p. 119

Daniel 1:2

And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god.

Baldwin says further:

Seen in the light of this background Belshazzar's banquet was sheer bravado, the last fling of a terrified ruler unsuccessfully attempting to drown his fears. Little wonder that panic seized him and made a fool of him as soon as the unexpected happened. The fact that his father abandoned the capital and left him to face the enemy arouses a certain amount of sympathy for this weak and sacrilegious prince.

p. 120

Keil & Delitzsch in verses 1-4 say:

The verses describe the progress of Belshazzar's magnifying himself against the living God, whereby the judgment threatened came upon him and his kingdom. A great feast, which the king gave to his officers of state and to his wives, furnished the occasion for this.

p. 179
Haskell says:

It was the last night of a nation’s existence, but the people knew it not. Some slept in unconscious peace; some reveled and whirled away in thoughtless dance. In the dens of Babylon, men steeped in vice continued their wild orgies; in the palace halls Belshazzar feasted with a thousand of his lords. Music resounded through the brilliantly lighted rooms. The nobles lounged about the tables sumptuously spread. Court women and concubines of the king entered those halls. It was a feast of Bacchus, and they drank to the health of the king on his throne. He ordered that the sacred vessels be brought from the temple to show that no being, human or divine, could raise a hand against him, the king of Babylon.

p. 68

Walvoord says:

About seventy years had elapsed since the capture of Jerusalem recorded in Daniel 1. In the interpretation of the image in chapter 2, Daniel had predicted to Nebuchadnezzar, “After thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee” (Dan 2:39). Now, in chapter 5, this prophecy is about to be fulfilled. Nebuchadnezzar’s humiliating experience in chapter 4 had been followed by his death in 562 B.C. Approximately twenty-three years elapsed between chapter 4 and chapter 5.

p. 116

J. Vernon McGee says:

During the feast of Belshazzar introduced here in verse 1, Gobryas, the Median general, was besieging the city of Babylon from without. Xenophon, the Greek historian, describes how they took the city by detouring a canal of the Euphrates River back into its main channel and then letting the army flow under the walls of the city.

p. 557
Stortz observes:

Daniel 5 shows an obvious example of God bringing his judgment to bear upon a wicked, godless, and arrogant young ruler in Babylon named Belshazzar. This is history with a theological and didactic purpose, which is the significance of what is called “prophetic history.” In this chapter we learn things about the nature of God and what our response to him should be, whether we are a prince or a pauper. Since God is a God of justice, we must humble ourselves before him.

Humility before a just God is what Nebuchadnezzar (Nabonidus) learned through his experience recorded in Daniel 4. This lesson forms his closing message in the last verse of that chapter, setting the stage for chapter 5 and giving fatherly advice to his wild son. “Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble” (Daniel 4:37, emphasis added).

pp. 74-75

Parker summarizes everything in chapter 5 with this brief statement:

. . . Nothing good ever came from a bad source.

p. 410

Ironside says:

We are now to be occupied with the closing up of the history of the Babylonian empire—the last solemn scenes in connection with the downfall of the head of gold.

p. 78
Swindoll, Walvoord & Pentecost say:

Jeremiah prophesied when Babylon was at the height of its power. Shortly afterward Babylon was captured by Cyrus. The city wasn’t destroyed, but the nation ceased to exist. The Medo-Persian Empire took over, and fifty thousand Jews were allowed to go home at that time. Many of them went back thinking that this must be the beginning of God’s promised restoration, the time God had predicted. They went back to the land expecting the Messiah, and found instead trouble, heartache, sorrow, difficulties, and problems. They began wondering what was going on. God called two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, to encourage the nation. The people were to get busy doing God’s work, and they were to watch. God was still working out His program, though it might take longer than they had expected.

pp. 127-28

They say further:

Babylon eventually fell to Cyrus. Fifty thousand Jews returned home, and wondered if Babylon’s fall to Cyrus was the fulfillment of God’s prophecies. And God said, “No, I’m holding wickedness in check, but someday wickedness will dwell again in the land of Shinar. Those prophecies will be fulfilled at their proper time.”

p. 130

David Jeremiah titles this chapter:

YOUR NUMBER IS UP

p. 98

Phillips & Vines say:

In this chapter we have the initial fulfillment of the prophecy given to Nebuchadnezzar. The head of gold is replaced by silver in the image. The Babylonian empire is now swept away by the Medo-Persian empire.

p. 74
Phillips & Vines say further:

Between chapter 4 and chapter 5 a period of about twenty-three years transpires. Daniel was now an old man. Although a captive from his native land, he had served faithfully in the kingdom for almost seventy years. He was probably in his late eighties. Belshazzar was now ruling over the city of Babylon.

Miller says:

The date would have been October 12, 539 B.C., about thirty years after the events of chap. 4.

He says further:

He believes that when news of Nabonidus’s defeat at Sippar fifty miles to the north of his subsequent flight (two days previous) were known in Babylon, Belshazzar moved quickly to proclaim himself the first ruler of the empire, the de facto king. Thus the festival was the celebration of Belshazzar’s coronation.

He says further:

Xenophon seems to indicate that the Babylonians were observing a customary festival that simply happened to fall at this time, and Herodotus appears to support this idea. Thus it may have been that an annual feast was in progress, and the Persians merely took advantage of the opportunity.
Gangel says:

Belshazzar had such a night, not in reference to his election but to his eviction. It was a bad call to throw the party in the first place with enemy armies surrounding Babylon. It was a bad call to send for the holy vessels of the Jewish temple in order to celebrate pagan deities. It was a bad call to summon the faulty faculty of weak wizards to determine the mysterious cryptogram. And it was a bad call not to fall on his face in repentance after God’s prophet told him the meaning.

Our text lies theological miles away from the closing verses of Daniel 4. Nebuchadnezzar had died in 562 B.C., and twenty-three years had passed before the opening words of Daniel 5. The Babylonians had watched a series of worthless kings come and go: Evil-Merodach (562-560); Neriglissar (560-556); Labashi-marduk, who reigned less than a year; and Nabonidus, who took the throne in 556 and reigned until the very night described in this chapter, October 29, 539 B.C.

p. 128

Gangel says further:

Daniel had not been playing golf between these chapters. He was occupied with receiving and writing prophecies that we shall read later in this book. Walvoord says: “In the quarter of a century which elapsed between chapter 4 and chapter 5, the further revelations given to Daniel in chapters 7 and 8 occurred. Chapter 7 was revealed to Daniel ‘in the first year of Belshazzar, king of Babylon’ (Dan 7:1) and the vision of the ram and he-goat in chapter 8 occurred ‘in the third year of the reign of [King] Belshazzar’ . . .

p. 129

He says finally:

The casual Bible reader might consider this chapter valuable information about ancient empires, and the beginning and the end of the chapter certainly provide that. But the great bulk of the verses center on the foolishness and wickedness of the pagan king and how God’s heavenly judgment ended his kingdom.

p. 129
Wiersbe says:

Many people who know little or nothing about the Babylonians, Belshazzar’s feast, or Daniel’s prophecies use the phrase “the handwriting on the wall.” The phrase comes from this chapter (v. 5) and announces impending judgment.

p. 61

Walvoord says:

The situation which King Belshazzar faced at the time of the banquet was that the Medes and the Persians had already conquered all of the empire of Babylon except the city of Babylon itself. Babylon was built to withstand a siege of twenty years, and according to the account of Herodotus, it was a tremendous city fourteen miles square, the outer walls of the city were 87 feet thick and 350 feet high with 100 great bronze gates in the walls. There was also a system of inner and outer walls with a water moat between which made the city even more secure. The wall was so strong and broad that chariots could parade on top of the wall four abreast. Herodotus also pictured hundreds of towers which reached 100 feet in the air above the wall.

p. 224

He says further:

The banquet was designed to reassure the leaders and the people of Babylon of the superiority of their god Bel and the certainty of their victory over their enemies.

p. 225
Campbell summarizes everything historically when he says:

Daniel 5 records the fulfillment of the first part of that vision with the fall of Babylon and the rise of Persia. But this chapter is also significant for its demonstration of the trustworthiness of the Book of Daniel, and by extension, all of Scripture. One writer claimed that this chapter is “notable for its historic inconsistencies.” Bible critics have stumbled over the first words of the chapter, “Belshazzar the king,” because the ancient historians cited Nabonidus as the last king of Babylon and made no mention of Belshazzar. Is the Book of Daniel in error on this point? As a matter of fact, archeology has demonstrated that both the classical historians and the Bible are accurate. Babylonian cuneiform documents, such as the Nabonidus Chronicle, confirm that Belshazzar was the eldest son and co-regent of Nabonidus, reigning in that capacity from 553-539 B.C.

Spurgeon says:

There is a weighing time for kings and emperors, and all the monarchs of earth, albeit some of them have exalted themselves to a position in which they appear to be irresponsible to man. Though they escape the scales of earth, they must surely be tried at the bar of God. For nations there is a weighing time. National sins demand national punishments. The whole history of God’s dealings with mankind proves that though a nation may go on in wickedness, it may multiply its oppressions; it may abound in bloodshed, tyranny, and war; but an hour of retribution draweth nigh. When it shall have filled up its measure of iniquity, then shall the angel of vengeance execute its doom. There cannot be an eternal damnation for nations as nations, the destruction of men at last will be that of individuals, and at the bar of God each man must be tried for himself. The punishment, therefore, of nations, is national. The guilt they incur must receive its awful recompense in this present time-state. It was so with the great nation of the Chaldeans.
Dyer says:

The final kings of Babylon were but shadows of Nebuchadnezzar’s power and splendor. Nabonidus ascended the throne in 556 B.C., but he preferred rebuilding temples in the distant cities of Haran and Tema to governing the people of Babylon. For ten years he stayed out of town, and his son, Belshazzar, ruled in his stead.

Belshazzar inherited Nebuchadnezzar’s pride, but unfortunately he did not inherit his grandfather’s administrative and military abilities. King Cyrus of Persia moved to capture the Babylonian empire, and in late September or early October, 539 B.C., Cyrus defeated Babylon’s army on the Tigris River just south of modern-day Baghdad. On October 10, Cyrus captured the city of Sippar, just forty miles north of Babylon, and two days later, on October 12, the Babylonian Chronicle reports that “the army of Cyrus entered Babylon without a battle.”

He says further:

The official Babylonian court record simply says that the Persian army entered Babylon on October 12, two days after capturing Sippar, and captured the city without a battle.

The ancient historian Herodotus provides additional information. Cyrus diverted the water of the Euphrates River into a canal upriver from Babylon so that the water level dropped “to the height of the middle of a man’s thigh.” The Persian army knew that on this particular night the Babylonians were “making merry at a festival,” so the walls would be poorly defended.
v. 1 King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them.

Peterson paraphrases verse 1:

King Belshazzar held a great feast for his one thousand nobles. The wine flowed freely.

p. 1590

“BELSHAZZAR” does TWO THINGS in verse 1. He:

1. “GAVE A GREAT BANQUET” and
2. “DRANK WINE WITH THEM.”

If my conjectures are correct and Daniel was born in 625 B.C., here in 539 B.C., Daniel would be 86 YEARS OLD.

What is completely amazing to me is how BELSHAZZAR can live in such DENIAL as to the reality of the circumstances and go ahead and celebrate this festival with this feast.

I guess you can have a little better understanding of it when you recognize how long SADDAM HUSSEIN lived in denial during the crumbling of his administration.

Isaiah 22:12, 13 (NLT)

The Lord, the LORD Almighty, called you to weep and mourn. He told you to shave your heads in sorrow for your sins and to wear clothes of sackcloth to show your remorse. But instead, you dance and play; you slaughter sacrificial animals, feast on meat, and drink wine. “Let’s eat, drink, and be merry,” you say. “What’s the difference, for tomorrow we die.”

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The LORD JESUS says something similar about the times of NOAH in his OLIVET DISCOURSE in:

Matthew 24:38, 39 (NLT)

In those days before the Flood, the people were enjoying banquets and parties and weddings right up to the time Noah entered his boat. People didn’t realize what was going to happen until the Flood came and swept them all away. That is the way it will be when the Son of Man comes.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

Babylon was being besieged by the Persian army, led by Ugbaru, governor of Gutium, while Belshazzar, inside the city, was giving a great banquet for 1,000 of his nobles. . . “Bel (another name for the god Marduk). . . Perhaps the banquet was given to show Belshazzar’s contempt for the Persians and to allay his people’s fears. Archeologists have excavated a large hall in Babylon 55 feet wide and 165 feet long that had plastered walls. Such a room would have been sufficient to house a gathering of this size. Belshazzar considered his city secure from assault because of its massive walls. Within the city were supplies that would sustain it for 20 years. Therefore the king felt he had little cause for concern.

p. 1344
While the Persians were watching the water level drop, the festival inside Babylon was in full swing. King Belshazzar was giving a banquet for a thousand of his nobles, probably in the throne room of Nebuchadnezzar’s southern palace.

For the 1987-88 Babylon Festivals, the throne room was used for musical concerts. Hundreds could sit comfortably in the room in spite of the large stage constructed for the performers. As I sat and listened to music, it was easy for me to visualize Belshazzar and his thousand nobles crowded into that regal room on the fateful night.

Perhaps to steel his commanders for the anticipated siege, Belshazzar focused their attention on Babylon’s past victories. He gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that he and his nobles, his wives, and his concubines could drink from them.

And drank wine before the thousand. This does not probably mean that he “vied with them in drinking”... but that he “drank in their presence, while seated at a separate table,”—as was the custom of the Persian kings on the occasion of their great banquets...

The king made a great feast to the principal officers and great men of his court, and was himself present at it. This feast was made at a time of public rejoicing, being an annual festival, when the whole night was spent in revelling: which season Cyrus took the advantage of to make himself master of the city, ...
Matthew Henry says:

Historians say that Cyrus, who was now besieging Babylon, knew of this feast, and presuming that they then would be off their guard, buried in sleep and wine, took that opportunity to attack the city, and so made himself master of it.

p. 1090

He says further:

He bade defiance to God’s judgments. His city was now besieged; his life and kingdom lay at stake. He should therefore have proclaimed a fast; but, as one resolved to walk contrary to God, he proclaims a feast.

pp. 1090-91

Stortz says:

Life in the magnificent city of Babylon, with its Hanging Gardens, one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world, seemed normal on the night of October 12, 539 B.C.² The biggest event in town was a huge banquet thrown by King Belshazzar for a thousand of his nobles (5:1). We learn from extrabiblical sources, both cuneiform records and Greek historians Herodotus and Xenophon,³ that the Persians were at that time poised on the plains outside of Babylon ready to take the city.

p. 75

He says further:

This scenarios seems most plausible because history records that the Persian army conquered Babylon with a sneak attack. The city of Babylon was considered invincible. There were double walls all around the city, and the walls were too thick to destroy by ancient methods. But the Euphrates River ran right through the middle of the city, and the plan was for some men from the Persian army to go upstream and dam the river. In a few hours the water stopped flowing, and the Persian army walked into the city under the walls using the muddy riverbeds. There was no resistance by the Babylonian army, and Babylon fell that very night as a result of the judgment of God. Why didn’t King Belshazzar see the handwriting on the wall? Oh, but he did.

p. 76
McGee says:

Belshazzar’s feast may have been in defiance of the enemy on the outside, or perhaps he wanted to build up the morale of those within. We are told here that it began with a big cocktail party.

p. 557

Showers says:

. . . several ancient sources indicate that Medo-Persian troops, under the leadership of King Cyrus, had conquered the areas surrounding the city of Babylon perhaps as much as four months prior to the night of Belshazzar’s feast. This would explain why so many Babylonian officials were in the capital city at this time. The officials had fled to this fortress city before the advancing Medo-Persian army. Thus, it is a fact that, on the night that Belshazzar defiled Jehovah’s vessels, the very people whom God had foretold would take Babylon were encamped outside that city’s walls. Babylon was cut off from outside help.

pp. 51-52

Leupold says:

It will be noted that the Biblical record does not report much about this insignificant king, whose reign was brief, and whose deeds were apparently not worthy of record. The only thing that distinguished him was one superb act of insolence which is set down as a notable matter of record. The connection in which this deed is reported is highly suggestive: he committed this misdeed under the influence of wine. The wine devil breaks down wholesome restraints.

p. 214

Feinberg says:

At the very hour Belshazzar held his feast, his capital of Babylon was under siege by Cyrus the Persian. Since he had abundant food and provisions in the city, Belshazzar seems to have cared little for the besiegers. This was probably an annual feast day held in honor of some of the Babylonian deities.

p. 64
Longman says:

Belshazzar must have known that an attack would come sooner or later. It was in this context that the banquet described in our chapter took place. Was it to rally and encourage the leaders? To give them a diversion in the face of the onslaught? To feast today for tomorrow we die? Perhaps a bit of all three, but we are safe to assume that tension permeated the air in the Babylonian capital at this time.

Gangel says:

Belshazzar (whose name means “Bel, protect the king”) reigned in Babylon while his father Nabonidus was off fighting the Persians. However he had already been captured, and the forces of the united Medes and Persians at that very moment surrounded the territory of Babylon and had already conquered the suburbs.

Why, on such a frightening evening, would a king decide to throw a party? Many reasons have been offered. Perhaps a reaffirmation of pagan gods to build the courage of his royal leaders seemed like a good idea at the time. Or maybe they genuinely believed that the gigantic walls of Babylon would protect them from any kind of invading force indefinitely. So we crash the party as the top brass of the kingdom decide to do a Babylonian impression of Isaiah’s condemnation of Jerusalem: “But see, there is joy and revelry, slaughtering of cattle and killing of sheep, eating of meat and drinking of wine! ‘Let us eat and drink’ you say, ‘for tomorrow we die!’” (Isa. 22:13), a philosophy that Paul considered quite reasonable if there was no hope of resurrection (1 Cor. 15:32).

1 Corinthians 15:32

If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.
Gangel says further:

Leon Wood observes: “Oriental custom called for the king to sit at a separate table at such feast; there he could give guidance for attitude, atmosphere, and tempo. The notice here that Belshazzar drank wine before the others is to say he was setting the atmosphere as one of carefree hilarity. All present, then, should not only feel free to follow his lead but make it a point to do so” (Wood, Daniel, p. 68).

p. 130

Campbell says:

The year was 539 B.C. The great city of Babylon faced a crisis of survival because the Persian armies had surrounded her massive walls and were trying to breach them. No doubt Belshazzar sensed the fright of his people and therefore staged a magnificent banquet to bolster their sagging morale and to show his own faith in Babylon’s gods and strong fortifications.

p. 58

Blair says:

Some have supposed this to have been an annual celebration, probably dedicated to certain heathen deities worshiped by Belshazzar. It was a time of unrestrained revelry and gross immortality with little thought being given to the dangers posed by their enemies, the Persians.

p. 99

Wiersbe says:

This was in the first year of Belshazzar (v. 1). In his arrogant false confidence, Belshazzar was defying the will of God. “He says to himself, ‘Nothing will shake me; I’ll always be happy and never have trouble’ . . .

p. 63
Psalm 10:6

He says to himself, “Nothing will shake me; I’ll always be happy and never have trouble.”

David Jeremiah says:

Proverbs 31:4-5 says: “It is not for kings, O Lemuel—not for kings to drink wine, not for rulers to crave beer, lest they drink and forget what the law decrees.”

Another prophet warned: “Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine and champions at mixing drinks . . . as dry grass sinks down in the flames, so their roots will decay” (Isa. 5:22-24).

This drunken orgy was accompanied by overtones of sensuality by the presence of the women. What you have is not unlike many of the great parties that go on in our day.

p. 100


Cartoonist Charles Schulz, the creator of Peanuts, quipped, “Life is easier if you dread only one day at a time.” But the truth is that you don’t have to dread your days if you settle the decisions you need to make and the disciplines you need to practice in the critical areas of your life.

p. 31
Jonathan Edwards on True Happiness

“The enjoyment of [God] is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied... Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, or children, or the company of earthly friends are but shadows, but enjoyment of God is the substance. These are but scattered beams, but God is the sun. These are but streams, but God is the fountain. These are but drops, but God is the ocean.”

—Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

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A MAN ONCE WENT TO SLEEP in his boat while on the Niagara River. As time passed, the boat drifted closer and closer to the rapids and he became caught in them. It was too late to do anything and he went over the Falls to his death! Drifting became fatal on that day.

p. 49
v. 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.

Peterson paraphrases verse 2:

Belshazzar, heady with the wine, ordered that the gold and silver chalices his father Nebuchadnezzar had stolen from God’s Temple of Jerusalem be brought in so that he and his nobles, his wives and concubines, could drink from them.

pp. 1590-91

“BELSHAZZAR” is obviously getting a little TANKED UP when he gives the “ORDERS TO BRING IN THE GOLD AND SILVER GOBLETs” that had been “TAKEN FROM THE TEMPLE IN JERUSALEM” earlier when Nebuchadnezzar and his forces were there.

The REASON “BELSHAZZAR” calls for these religious items is:

“SO THAT THE KING AND HIS NOBLES, HIS WIVES AND HIS CONCUBINES MIGHT DRINK FROM THEM.”

“BELSHAZZAR” has stipulated a very SELECT GROUP that are going to participate in this project of DESECRATING THE SACRED:

1. “THE KING,”
2. “HIS NOBLES,”
3. “HIS WIVES,” and
4. “HIS CONCUBINES.”
The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

The banquet itself showed Belshazzar’s contempt for the power of men. Then, to show his contempt for the power of the true God, he ordered that the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar . . . had taken from the temple in Jerusalem . . . be brought to the banquet hall so the assembled revelers might drink from them. In drinking, the people honored the gods of Babylon—idols made of gold . . . silver . . . bronze, iron, wood, and stone. Nabonidus, Belshazzar’s father, had attempted to strengthen the Babylonian religion. In keeping with that, this act by his son may have been an attempt to undo the influence of Nebuchadnezzar’s honoring the God of Israel . . . The polygamous king’s wives and concubines were there too.

Feinberg says:

While under the wine’s influence, Belshazzar did something he probably would not have done in more sober moments: “He gave orders to bring the gold and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem.” These had evidently been stored in the palace as cherished trophies of conquest, and now the king wanted to display them and have his guests drink from them.

What made Belshazzar think of the Lord in the midst of this revelry? It could have been a drunken fancy; it could be that he had been warned of the prophecies of Babylon’s doom. Whatever the cause, there is no doubt that Belshazzar’s act was one of open defiance of God. That such holy vessels, dedicated to the worship and service of the true God, should be so openly desecrated strikes the reverent reader of Scripture with astonishment. When men are beside themselves, nothing is too sacred to be profaned.

Gangel says:

Veldkamp offers a modern metaphor: “We might compare it to a group of drunks stealing the church’s communion set in order to drink from its glasses at their favorite bar. It’s a wonder that Belshazzar and the other revelers didn’t choke on the wine, that no one was struck dead” (Veldkamp, p. 92).
Leupold says:

The *Aramaic* says: “When he tasted the wine.” This apparently indicates what we have rendered: “When the wine was beginning to taste good.” It cannot mean: at the very first sip of wine. The wine had already produced that well-known boldness and pseudo-courage. In this case this unwholesome frame of mind led to a deed that is unparalleled in the records of antiquity. Temples may have been destroyed and sacked, but such vandalism would be compensated for by the erection of new temples for the deities of the conquered nations. For the gods were venerated; a man respected his own gods as well as the gods of others. They might have been vanquished for a time by more powerful divinities, but they were still to be treated with extreme respect and deference.

pp. 214-15

Miller says:

Nebuchadnezzar had taken these gold and silver “goblets” from the temple in Jerusalem fifty years earlier, and they had remained trophies of war in a pagan temple treasury until this night . . . Now Belshazzar brought them into this drunken orgy so that he, his nobles, his wives, and his concubines might fill them with wine and drink toasts to the pagan gods of Babylon. This, of course, was a blasphemous act against Yahweh, the God of Israel.

p. 153

Phillips & Vines say:

Belshazzar was getting cocky. In his drunken condition he decided to do something he might not have had the nerve to do when sober. He decided to defy the God of heaven.

p. 77

Walvoord says:

The implication in the clause “whiles he tasted the wine” is that Belshazzar in his right mind probably would not have committed this sacrilegious act.

p. 117
Boice says:

First, sin is not static. That is, the one who sins never remains on a plateau. The path of sin always leads downhill, as we saw also in the last chapter. In the case of Belshazzar, because he would not learn from the example and experience of his predecessor Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar sank not merely to Nebuchadnezzar's insane bestiality, which was a punishment for his arrogance, but lower still. Nebuchadnezzar sinned by boasting, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?" (Dan. 4:30). He took to himself the glory due God and was punished by God by the loss of his reason. Belshazzar went further. He blasphemed God by desecrating the vessels of God taken from the temple at Jerusalem and by praising idols in the true God's place. He was punished not merely by the loss of his reason (though his actions were a true insanity) but also by the loss of his kingdom and his life.

pp. 60-61

Blair says:

Doubtless, after his conversion, Nebuchadnezzar had respect for these vessels taken from the temple and put them in places of honor. But Belshazzar commanded that they might be used for the furtherance of their drunken orgy.

p. 99

David Jeremiah says:

Belshazzar also indulged in the worst sacrilege. He sent for the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Jerusalem temple and commanded that they be filled with wine for all to drink. In open defiance of those holy vessels, he taunted the Hebrew God with this act of desecration.

p. 100
A SURE CURE FOR PRIDE

Most of us don’t express our pride in such a boastful manner as King Nebuchadnezzar did, but it’s there just the same. In his book Forever Triumphant, F. J. Huegel wrote, “Let us presume that more Christians go on the rocks, defeated, over the nasty little thing we call ‘hurt feelings’ than over the so-called great crises which test the very fiber of the soul. I have been slighted. I have not been given the place I feel I merit, or I have been treated inconsiderately, unjustly. Self has been wounded. My opinions and feelings have not been consulted. As a result I have begun to sink. I am being defeated, not by a monster but by a mere fly. And yet it is no less defeat. A scum covers my spirit formerly free and rejoicing. I have sunk down into the so-called vessel of the soul . . . My step has become heavy, and my face now carries an unhappy, darkened look. I am plainly defeated.” Huegel then explained why that happens: “Wounded pride did it. I looked at myself and took my eyes off Jesus.”

[From InfoSearch 3.51]
v. 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.

Peterson paraphrases verse 3:

When the gold and silver chalices were brought in, the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines, drank wine from them.

Belshazzar and THREE GROUPS that he stipulated in verse 2 would participate in this. In verse 3 this is what they did:

“THE KING AND HIS NOBLES, HIS WIVES AND HIS CONCUBINES DRANK FROM THEM.”

Boice says:

Belshazzar’s final fling is an example of this stupidity. Darius was outside the walls. That very night he would dam up the river and enter the city through the space provided when the water dropped and exposed the portals through which the river entered Babylon. At the moment of this greatest of all dangers, Belshazzar was drugging himself at his party. Yet it is not only Belshazzar who has done this. Our culture is doing it as well. Some time ago a book by Neil Postman, entitled *Amusing Ourselves to Death*: *Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, appeared in American bookstores. It was about television and its pernicious effects on our country. It might well have been written about culture at large and have voiced alarm at our spiritual condition. By refusing to think, especially about eternal realities, and by filling our days with entertainment, particularly sin-oriented entertainment, we lose sight of danger and plunge into the abyss.
Leupold says:

. . . this was plainly an act of open defiance, calculated to insult the God whose Temple had stood in Jerusalem. Why should Jehovah have been singled out thus? Belshazzar had apparently had no contact with Judea or Jerusalem, which had now lain in ruins for almost seventy years. The only explanation we can offer is that, seemingly, the king had heard of the truth as it is in Jehovah, the one true God. The stubbornness of the malevolence of sin, which is not disturbed by religiousness or religions as they are commonly practiced by men, is much perturbed by the truth. The hidden depths of iniquity stir up the basest of passions when they face God and His kingdom. This fact it was that led Belshazzar to commit an act of arrogant defiance against the Most High and, as it were, to challenge Him to avenge His honor.

p. 215

Gangel says:

In other words, this as not mere revelry but brazen idolatry and defiance of the God whom Nebuchadnezzar had called “the King of heaven” (4:37). Chapter 5 illustrates the last line of 4:37: “Those who walk in pride he is able to humble.”

p. 131

J. Vernon McGee says:

This man is not only defying the enemy outside, but now under the influence of alcohol he does an audacious thing which his grandfather would never have done. When Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem, he was an old, pagan, heathen king, and he took the vessels from the temple in Jerusalem. But when he came to the knowledge of the living and true God, he had them stored away. To Belshazzar as a boy growing up in the palace, I guess they were a no-no—he had to leave those vessels alone. Now he drags them out and is going to serve his guests with them.

pp. 557-58
David Jeremiah says:

Visualize yourself in church as communion is being served. On the communion table are the little glasses in which the juice is poured, honoring the death of our Lord. Suddenly an inebriated man swerves up the center aisle, grabs a cup from the tray, throws the juice on the floor, and fills it up with a shot of whiskey. He then turns around and shouts to the congregation, “Here’s a toast to the devil!”

That is what happened that fateful night in Babylon. Is it any wonder that God said, “Enough is enough. Your number is up!”

p. 101
v. 4 As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.

Peterson paraphrases verse 4:

They drank the wine and drunkenly praised their gods made of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone.

p. 1591

Isaiah 52:11

Depart, depart, go out from there! Touch no unclean thing! Come out from it and be pure, you who carry the vessels of the Lord.

We now have the BABYLONIAN VERSION of:

WINE, WOMEN AND SONG.

As they keep on drinking "MORE WINE" their mouths are filled with slurred songs to their idols, their idols of:

“GOLD,”

“SILVER,”

“BRONZE,”

“IRON,”

“WOOD,” and

“STONE.”

They certainly don’t want to leave anyone out except THE LIVING GOD!
“Belshazzar” is mentioned THIRTY-FOUR TIMES in these four verses.

What a shame he brings to the sacred page by these defiant acts.

**J. Vernon McGee says**:

Belshazzar knew that his grandfather had come to the knowledge of God and had praised and honored Him . . . yet he deliberately defied and profaned God. Proverbs 29:1 says, “He, that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.”

p. 558
Gangel says:

Had Belshazzar spent some time reading Jeremiah, he might have had some different thoughts about his behavior that fateful October day. Well before the Persians ruled that area, Jeremiah said that Babylon would be attacked by “a nation from the north” (Jer. 50:3). Not only does the prophet devote two full and lengthy chapters to the fall of Babylon (Jer. 50-51), but the prophecy includes some fascinating specificities. Have a look at *The Message*:

> “Then I, God, step in and say,  
> I’m on your side, taking up your cause.  
> I’m your Avenger. You’ll get your revenge.  
> I’ll dry up her rivers, plug up her springs.  
> Babylon will be a pile of rubble,  
> scavenged by stray dogs and cats,  
> A dumping ground for garbage,  
> a godforsaken ghost town.’

> “The Babylonians will be like lions and their cubs,  
> ravenous, roaring for food.  
> I’ll fix them a meal, all right—a banquet, in fact.  
> They’ll drink themselves falling-down drunk.  
> Dead-drunk, they’ll sleep—and sleep and sleep . . .  
> and they’ll never wake up.” GOD’S Decree  
> (Jer. 51:36-39, *The Message*).

> “I’ll get them drunk, the whole lot of them—  
> princes, sages, governors, soldiers.  
> Dead drunk, they’ll sleep—and sleep and sleep . . .  
> And never wake up.” The King’s Decree.  
> His name? GOD-of-the-Angel-Armies!

> GOD-of-the-Angel-Armies speaks:

> “The city walls of Babylon—those massive walls!—  
> will be flattened  
> And those city gates—huge gates!—  
> will be set on fire.  
> The harder you work at this empty life,  
> the less you are.  
> Nothing comes of ambition like this  
> but ashes.”  
> (Jer. 51:57-58, *The Message*).  

pp. 131-32
Gangel says further:

We can hardly misunderstand the importance of the wine, since Daniel mentions wine or drinking in each of the first four verses. In this verse he links drinking with the pagan worship of gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone. The curse of Deuteronomy 32:15 falls upon all those who practice idolatry.

p. 132

Leupold says:

The spirit of their undertaking is characterized in a very concise way. Their drinking of wine is accompanied by praises of their own many idols. They evidently meant it all in the sense that they glorified their own gods and challenged Him whose Temple vessels they were putting to unholy use to prevent this and to punish them if He could. We again remark, how much enthusiasm the throng present had for this venture we can hardly say. We feel that Zoeckler is quite on the right track when he points to the number six as being the number of the types of man-made idols listed (“gold, and silver, bronze, iron, wood, stone”), for “six, generally speaking, is the number of the world destined for judgment and hostile to God.”

p. 217

Blair says:

Here we see a vivid picture of the fruits of the unregenerate heart. When one has no relationship to God, all restraints are removed. But regardless of the depths to which one may go, if he turns to the Lord and sincerely repents, God will forgive and lift him up. God says, “I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jeremiah 31:34). Oh, how marvelous is the mercy of the Lord in blotting out our transgressions when we come to Jesus Christ.

p. 99
Feinberg says:

The fact that they drank from the vessels is repeated to emphasize the heinousness of the deed. What was worse, in their drunken revelry they heaped praise upon their man-made, worthless gods. This was adding insult to injury! How low can man stoop, how ripe for judgment can the human heart become?

p. 65

Campbell says:

Under the influence of alcohol Belshazzar made another and very costly mistake. He commanded that the sacred vessels, carried to Babylon by his ancestor Nebuchadnezzar nearly 50 years before, be brought into the banquet hall where they would be used as drinking cups. He intended to demonstrate the superiority of the Babylonian deities over the God of the Hebrews. Perhaps remembering Nebuchadnezzar’s humiliating experience brought about by this God (Dan. 4), Belshazzar wanted to show he would not thus be intimidated, and so perpetrated this bold act of defiance. It was plainly calculated to insult the God whose temple had stood in Jerusalem. And so “they drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone” (v 4)—and challenged the God whose vessels they were using to stop them if He could! God accepted the challenge!

p. 59

Showers says:

Belshazzar could not have chosen a more degrading way to desecrate the vessels of the God who hates idolatry, drunkenness and immorality.

p. 51
Showers says further:

In light of these historical factors, it seems rather obvious that Belshazzar decided to desecrate the sacred vessels of Jehovah for one major reason—to show his utter contempt for the God of Israel and His prophecy concerning the fall of Babylon. The king was so confident of Babylon’s defenses that he decided to challenge this God. His defiling of the vessels was his way of shaking his fist at God and saying: “You have said that Babylon will fall to the Medo-Persians who are now encamped outside our gates. I am declaring to you that Babylon will not fall. Its defenses are impregnable. No one will be able to take it. My actions show you what I think of you and your prophecy.” Once again a pagan king was providing God with a splendid opportunity to demonstrate His sovereignty.

pp. 52-53

Lange says:

. . . Belshazzar proudly exalted himself above the God of Israel, and in mockery employed the vessels stolen from His sanctuary to drink wine while singing the praises of the victorious gods of Babylon. It was thus essentially an exaltation of the idols above Jehovah, who had succumbed to them in battle, and whom they had despoiled. . . .

p. 126

Dyer says:

It is easy to imagine him raising a golden goblet, exalting himself and his gods as he gloated over his grandfather’s victory seventy years earlier. As he and his nobles desecrated the articles that had been dedicated to the God of Israel, “they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone” (Daniel 5:4).

p. 118
Keil & Delitzsch say:

The wickedness lay in this, that they drank out of the holy vessels of the temple of the God of Israel to glorify . . . their heathen gods in songs of praise. In doing this they did not only place “Jehovah on the perfect level with their gods” . . . but raised them above the Lord of heaven, as Daniel . . . charged the king.

p. 180

They say further:

The six predicates of the gods are divided by the copula . . . into two classes: gold and silver—brass, iron, wood and stone, in order to represent before the eyes in an advancing degree the vanity of these gods.

p. 181

Smith says:

Perhaps, as noticed on chapter 3:29, they celebrated the superior power of their gods over the God of the Jews, from whose vessels they now drank to their heathen deities.

p. 115

Young says:

The drinking of wine is again mentioned in order to connect it with idolatry. “The wickedness lay in this, that they drank out of the holy vessels of the temple of the God of Israel to glorify their heathen gods in songs of praise” (Keil). Hævernick believes that this was a particular religious festival, but more likely it was merely a drinking bout at which songs in celebration of the idols were sung.

p. 120
Lucas says:

When the first major return of exiles took place, the vessels were returned to Jerusalem (Ezra 1:7-10). The number of vessels recorded in the inventory for the return, 5,400, shows that there were more than enough for use in Belshazzar’s banquet. The king’s sacrilege had two aspects. 1. Non-Jews were drinking wine from the holy vessels in an orgy. Montgomery (1927: 251) comments, ‘The king must have lost his sense of decency to commit what is to the Oriental view a sacrilege even with the holy things of another religion.’ 2. They used the vessels as they praised other gods. pp. 128-29

Fyall says:

This reminds the reader of the inanimate nature of idols who cannot hear or respond and thus the futility of the whole Babylonian religious system. p. 76

Gaebelein says:

Matters have gone from bad to worse in the empire. A great feast is held, which was perhaps an annual affair. What splendor was exhibited! A thousand lords and princes with their wives and concubines! Luxuries and licentiousness were seen at that feast. When it was at its height an awful blasphemy was committed by Belshazzar. He commanded that the precious vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem be brought that they might all drink out of them. Then they blasphemed God and praised their idols. It was an open blasphemy and defiance of God. p. 56
We all begin life as members of a rebellious race, fighting our own personal war against the sovereign King of the universe. For most, that resistance unfolds into a lifelong story that could be titled *No Surrender*.

Some express their resistance overtly, perhaps through a lifestyle of unbridled lust and perversion. Others are more subtle—they are upstanding citizens and community leaders; they may even be active in church work. But beneath the surface, every human being has an inborn determination to run his own life and an unwillingness to be mastered by Christ, the King of kings.
v. 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.

Peterson paraphrases verse 5:

At that very moment, the fingers of a human hand appeared and began writing on the lamp-illumined, whitewashed wall of the palace. When the king saw the disembodied hand writing away,

Isaiah 23:9 (NLT)

The LORD Almighty has done it to destroy your pride and show his contempt for all human greatness.

Isaiah 5:18-25 (NLT)

Destruction is certain for those who drag their sins behind them, tied with cords of falsehood. They even mock the Holy One of Israel and say, “Hurry up and do something! Quick, show us what you can do. We want to see what you have planned.” Destruction is certain for those who say that evil is good and good is evil; that dark is light and light is dark; that bitter is sweet and sweet is bitter. Destruction is certain for those who think they are wise and consider themselves to be clever. Destruction is certain for those who are heroes when it comes to drinking, who boast about all the liquor they can hold. They take bribes to pervert justice. They let the wicked go free while punishing the innocent. Therefore, they will all disappear like burning straw. Their roots will rot and their flowers wither, for they have rejected the law of the LORD Almighty. They have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel. That is why the anger of the LORD burns against his people. That is why he has raised his fist to crush them. The hills tremble, and the rotting bodies of his people are thrown as garbage into the streets. But even then the LORD’s anger will not be satisfied. His fist is still poised to strike!
The Bible Knowledge Commentary titles this section:

THE REVELATION TO THE KING (5:5-12)

The Bible Knowledge Commentary then says:

Suddenly the hilarity of the revelry gave way to hushed fear. Near one of the lampstands that illuminated the banquet hall, fingers of a human hand were seen writing on the plastered wall. The terrified king . . . watched as the hand . . . wrote a message. The king had evidently arisen from the chair in which he had been seated to lead the festivities and stood to watch.

Fyall says:

Once again, as with the mysterious fourth figure in the furnace, we are given no explanation of this hand. Yet it remains one of the most potent and haunting images in all of literature. Suddenly or ‘at that instant’ is a phrase which has been used already in 4:33 of the suddenness of the divine judgment on Nebuchadnezzar and is another link between Chapters 4 and 5. But more than that we have, as we have noted before, a deliberate reminder that the God of the Exile is also the God of the Exodus. The hand of God which writes the doom of Babylon on the wall of the main royal audience chamber is the finger of God which was responsible for the plagues of Egypt (Exod. 8:19) and wrote the tablets of the Law, the hand which carried out judgment on all the gods of Egypt (Exod. 12:12). Once again, as with the figure in the Furnace and in the Lion’s Den, there is not brute force but the awesome reality of the world beyond breaking into this one.

Campbell says:

The night of revelry became a night of revelation. God interrupted the boisterous banquet with a message, warning of impending doom.
Blair says:

Belshazzar’s feast was an affront to God. Rarely does God retaliate so quickly, on this occasion He did. p. 100

Our text tells us “SUDDENLY.” That’s how it happens when God is involved and God is ready to move.

“SUDDENLY THE FINGERS OF A HUMAN HAND APPEARED.”

Not only did the “FINGERS OF A HUMAN HAND APPEAR,” but those “FINGERS”:

“WROTE ON THE PLASTER OF THE WALL, NEAR THE LAMPSTAND IN THE ROYAL PALACE.”

“The KING WATCHED THE HAND AS IT WROTE.”

Evidently, “THE KING” had risen to his feet and he “WATCHED THE HAND AS IT WROTE” upon the “WALL.”

The BIG QUESTION that comes to each of us is:

WHAT IS HE WRITING ON OUR WALLS?

Leupold says:

To see the fingers and no more may have served a double purpose. On the one hand, seeing only the fingers may have served to terrify still more because the imagination would have free scope to think of all manner of beings. Again, had, let us say, an angelic agent appeared, his very presence might have drawn attention away from the thing he was delegated to write. p. 219
Gangel says:

Sometimes we ignore God’s warnings too long, and all we have left is a notification of doom.
p. 133

He says further:

The room in which Belshazzar probably sat was 56 feet wide and 173 feet long; at least archeologists have uncovered a throne room in the ruins of Nebuchadnezzar’s palace with these dimensions. The center part of the long wall was covered with some kind of white plaster, surely the divine screen for this media event. The word for lampstand appears nowhere else, but most scholars consider it a reference to some kind of large chandelier containing many candles or torches. In other words, the handwriting appeared in a part of the room that was well illuminated. Once again the God of heaven offered a PowerPoint® presentation in public. With Nebuchadnezzar a quarter century earlier, judgment came while “the words were still on his lips” (4:31). Now the heavenly hand began to write suddenly and in full view of the king.
p. 133

J. Vernon McGee says:

God now directly intervenes. He does not speak by dream or vision because this is a man whom He doesn’t intend to reach. God would not endure this impious insult to heaven, so He writes on the wall of the banqueting hall. Is it done in anger? Very frankly, I think it is, and I believe the One who wrote this is the same One who wrote in the sand when they brought a sinful woman before Him (John 8:1-11). At that time it was a message of forgiveness; here, for Belshazzar, it is a message of doom. He has ignored the God of heaven, as Daniel will soon make clear to him.
p. 558
Our text tells us:

“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.”

Walvoord says:

While the feast was in progress with its drinking of wine and shouting of praises to the gods of Babylon, suddenly there appeared the fingers of a man’s hand which wrote on the plastered wall of the palace. With only the fingers of the hand visible and producing writing upon the wall, the spectacle immediately attracted attention.

In the ruins of Nebuchadnezzar’s palace archeologists have uncovered a large throne room 56 feet wide and 173 feet long which probably was the scene of this banquet. Midway in the long wall opposite the entrance there was a niche in front of which the king may well have been seated. Interestingly, the wall behind the niche was covered with white plaster as described by Daniel, which would make an excellent background for such a writing.22

If the scene can be reconstructed, it is probable that the banquet was illuminated by torches which not only produced smoke but fitful light that would only partially illuminate the great hall. As the writing according to Daniel was written “over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king’s palace,” it may have appeared in an area of greater illumination than the rest of the room and thus also have attracted more attention.

Phillips & Vines say:

. . . there, in the midst of their revelry, something happened that caused the music to die down, the singing to cease, and the drinking to stop. Every eye was riveted on the mysterious fingers of a man’s hand writing on the wall. . . .
Wiersbe says:

“Do you not know this of old, since man was placed on earth, that the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment? Though his haughtiness mounts up to the heavens, and his head reaches to the clouds, yet he will perish forever like his own refuse” (Job 20:4-7, NKJV). Zophar’s words didn’t apply to Job but they certainly applied to Belshazzar, and they apply today to anybody who defies the will of God.

Patrick & Lowth say:

Next to murder, no sin is so remarkably punished in this world as that of sacrilege; as appears by innumerable instances taken out of the histories of all ages, of heathens and infidels, as well as Jews and Christians. For to profess a religion to be true, and yet to offer violence to the places and utensils dedicated to the service of that religion, is downright impiety, and argues a contempt of all religion.

Ironside says:

On this crowning act of impiety, their cup of iniquity being full, God’s sudden and sore judgment falls. God never strikes, when He is dealing with nations in judgment, until that moment. He could not allow the people of Israel to take possession of the land of Canaan before the days of Moses because “the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full.” And so in Babylon’s case; He lingered long, and permitted His people to be slaves to Nebuchadnezzar, his son, and his son’s son, as foretold by Jeremiah, till the wickedness of the Chaldeans had reached its height.

At last the fateful moment had struck; and at the very time that Belshazzar stood before his lords with one of the cups from Jerusalem’s destroyed temple in his hand, praising his own vile demon gods, there came forth, in the full sight of all that multitude, the fingers of a man’s hand, which wrote in letters of fire upon the plaster the words of doom, “MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.” Doubtless every noble present could decipher the strange words; but none could give their meaning or connection. When it says they could not read the words, it means they could not read them understandingly.

pp. 83-84
Haskell says:

The strongest strongholds which man can build are crushed like a
dying leaf when the hand of God is laid upon them. But this was a lesson
which the rulers of Babylon had not yet learned. The father of iniquity, who
was urging these rulers forward into deeper sin, had not yet owned the
weakness of his cause. Heaven and unfallen worlds watched the progress of
affairs in this great city, for it was the battle-ground of the two mighty forces
of good and evil. Christ and Satan here contended.
p. 69

He says further:

While Belshazzar and his lords drank and feasted, the army of Cyrus
was lowering the waters in the bed of the Euphrates, preparatory to entering
the city.
p. 70

Jamieson, Fausset & Brown say:

. . . God admonishes him, not by a dream (as Nebuchadnezzar had been
warned), or by a voice, but by “fingers coming forth,” the invisibility of Him
who moved them heightening the awful impressiveness of the scene, the hand
of the Unseen One attesting his doom before the eyes of himself and his
guilty fellow revellers.
p. 743

Berrigan says:

The king’s orgy is underway. Cups are lifted, obscene tributes paid. Then
comes an interruption, an event more terrible than the epiphany of a ghost.
Truth, reality—what to name it? This is no troubling dream. In broad daylight
a hand appears, writing on the wall. Presumably the entire court witnesses the
terror. Along with the ruler, his cohorts are shortly driven out of their vaporous
wits. The preternatural hand is undeterred, literate. And it writes.

The revelers grow illiterate on the moment. What language is this,
what message? Fear and trembling seize on all.
p. 79
David Jeremiah says:

The late A. W. Tozer wrote about what he called “the decline of apocalyptic expectation” in the contemporary church. Tozer felt that believers were forgetting the importance of Christ’s approaching return and he compared that attitude to the generation just prior to his own.

There was a feeling among gospel Christians that the end of the age was near, and many were breathless with anticipation of a new world order about to emerge.

This new order was to be preceded by a silent return of Christ to earth, not to remain, but to raise the righteous dead to immortality, and to glorify the living saints in the twinkling of an eye. These He would catch away to the marriage supper of the Lamb while the earth meanwhile was plunged into its baptism of fire and blood in the Great Tribulation. This would be relatively brief, ending dramatically with the battle of Armageddon, and the triumphant return of Christ with His Bride to reign a thousand years.¹

In recent years, however, the church has forgotten this truth. Christians, rather than being distinct from the world around them and living in expectation of their Lord’s return, have become so much like the world that sometimes you can scarcely tell the difference between the two. Many churches reflect a careless, rather than serious, attitude toward the coming of the Lord.

This is not to say that we who are believers should be walking around with our heads down in some sort of doomsday mentality. That’s not what the Bible is all about. The coming of Christ is not a negative subject; it is the brightest, most radiant star on the horizon. But it is also a teaching attended by stern biblical warnings. As God’s people, we cannot allow those truths to be shunted off to one side.

In over thirty years of gospel ministry, I have watched evangelical preachers gradually change their attitudes about declaring the Second Coming. More and more, I’m hearing that the subject is “not relevant enough” to occupy a Sunday morning message. If you’re going to talk about the return of Christ, it’s being said, let it be in a seminary classroom—or in a weekday Bible study. But please don’t spend an hour teaching “end-time” matters on Sunday mornings to people with family struggles, business failures, and a host of other emotional and physical problems. In the words of one pastor, “That is so totally irrelevant!”

Irrelevant?

I can promise you one thing with a strong degree of assurance: One minute after the Rapture, the subject won’t be “irrelevant” at all. It will be the very definition of relevant.

pp. 80-81
Ed Cole tells this story: “One night a ship’s captain saw what looked like the light of another ship heading toward him. He had the signalman blink to the other ship: ‘Change your course ten degrees south.’ The reply came back, ‘Change your course ten degrees north.’

“The ship’s captain answered, ‘I am a captain. Change your course south.’ To which the reply was, ‘I am a seaman first class. Change your course north.’

“This infuriated the captain, so he signaled back, ‘I say change your course south. I’m on a battleship!’ The reply came back, ‘And I say change your course north. I’m in a lighthouse.’

“Not to change is certain disaster.”

[Strong Men in Tough Times by Edwin Louis Cole, 1993.]

(From InfoSearch 3.51)
Signs of the Times

The May 1984 *National Geographic* showed through color photos and drawings the swift and terrible destruction that wiped out the Roman Cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum in A.D. 79. The explosion of Mount Vesuvius was so sudden, the residents were killed while in their routine: men and women were at the market, the rich in their luxurious baths, slaves at toil. They died amid volcanic ash and superheated gasses. Even family pets suffered the same quick and final fate. It takes little imagination to picture the panic of that terrible day.

The saddest part is that these people did not have to die. Scientists confirm what ancient Roman writers record—weeks of rumblings and shakings preceded the actual explosion. Even an ominous plume of smoke was clearly visible from the mountain days before the eruption. If only they had been able to read and respond to Vesuvius’s warning!

There are similar “rumblings” in our world: warfare, earthquakes, the nuclear threat, economic woes, breakdown of the family and moral standards. While not exactly new, these things do point to a coming day of Judgment (Matthew 24). People need not be caught unprepared. God warns and provides an escape to those who will heed the rumblings.

*Citation:* Michael Bogart, Lemoore, California. *Leadership*, Vol. 6, no. 4.

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In *Words We Live By*, Brian Burrell tells of an armed robber named Dennis Lee Curtis who was arrested in 1992 in Rapid City, South Dakota. Curtis apparently had scruples about his thievery. In his wallet the police found a sheet of paper on which was written the following code:

1. I will not kill anyone unless I have to.
2. I will take cash and food stamps—no checks.
3. I will rob only at night.
4. I will not wear a mask.
5. I will not rob mini-marts or 7-Eleven stores.
6. If I get chased by cops on foot, I will get away. If chased by vehicle, I will not put the lives of innocent civilians on the line.
7. I will rob only seven months out of the year.
8. I will enjoy robbing from the rich to give to the poor.

This thief had a sense of morality, but it was flawed. When he stood before the court, he was not judged by the standards he had set for himself but by the higher law of the state.

Likewise when we stand before God, we will not be judged by the code of morality we have written for ourselves but by God’s perfect law.

Citation: Craig Brian Larson, *Choice Contemporary Stories and Illustrations* (Baker, 1998), p.181; Brian Burrell, *Words We Live By*, (S&S Trade, 1997)

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A minister dies and is waiting in line at the Pearly Gates.

Ahead of him is a guy dressed in sunglasses, a loud shirt, leather jacket, and jeans.

Saint Peter says to this guy, “Who are you, so that I may know whether to admit you to the Kingdom of Heaven?”

The guy replies, “I’m Joe Cohen, taxi driver, of Noo Yawk City.”

Saint Peter consults his list. He smiles and says to the taxi driver, “Take this silken robe and golden staff and enter the Kingdom of Heaven.”

The taxi driver goes into Heaven with his robe and staff, and it’s the minister’s turn.

He stands erect and booms out, “I am Joseph Snow, pastor of Saint Mary’s for the last 43 years.”

Saint Peter consults his list. He says to the minister, “Take this cotton robe and wooden staff and enter the Kingdom of Heaven.”

“Just a minute!” says the minister. “That man was a taxi driver, and he gets a silken robe and golden staff. How can this be?”

“Heaven, we work by results,” says Saint Peter. “While you preached, people slept. While he drove, people prayed.”

Citation: Ed Rowell, Franklin, Tennessee; heard from a friend

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In this insightful comedy, an egocentric TV weatherman named Phil (Bill Murray) is assigned to cover the festivities of Groundhog Day in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania. Due to an unexpected snowstorm, Phil must spend an extra night in this little town with his producer and love interest, Rita (Andie MacDowell).

When Phil awakens the next morning, he discovers it is still February 2nd. Soon he realizes he is stuck in a 24-hour loop of Groundhog Days. No matter what he does, he wakes up every morning as if nothing had happened the day before.

Phil explores what life would be like if there were no consequences. People could do whatever they wanted. Along with some newfound friends, he lives recklessly, sparking a police chase. After leaving a swath of destruction, he’s arrested. But when Phil wakes up, it is Groundhog Day once again.

On this particular day Phil goes out to lunch with Rita. He orders most everything on the menu and lights up a cigarette.

Curious about his strange behavior, Rita asks, “Don’t you worry about cholesterol, lung cancer, love-handles?”

“I don’t worry about anything anymore,” Phil responds.

“What makes you so special?” Rita counters. “Everybody worries about something.”

Phil contends that his lack of concern over any consequences (including the wages of not flossing) is what makes him special.

Rita responds by quoting a poem by Sir Walter Scott.

The wretch concentrated all in self
Living so forth with fair renown
And doubly dying shall go down
To the vile dust from whence he sprung
Unwept, unhonored, and unsung.

Phil attempts to shrug this off, but he soon discovers that a world not governed by moral accountability is an empty one indeed.
Elapsed time: Measured from the beginning of the opening credit, this scene begins at 00:31:48 and lasts about 5½ minutes. Content: Rated PG for language.

*Citation*: *Groundhog Day*, Columbia Pictures, (1993), written and directed by Harold Ramis; submitted by Greg Asimakoupoulos and Doug Scott

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**Prophets with a Flair for the Dramatic**

The prophets of the Old Testament usually delivered God’s message by conventional means: the spoken and the written word. But that wasn’t always the case. Sometimes it was delivered with a bit of symbolic theatrics for added emphasis:

- Ahijah ripped his cloak into twelve pieces to visually demonstrate that Solomon’s empire would be divided by civil war (1 Kings 11:29-40).
- Jeremiah smashed pottery to illustrate how God was going to bring destruction to Jerusalem as punishment for the sin of its citizens (Jeremiah 19:1-13).
- Isaiah walked around naked for three years to show Judah the shame and humiliation (and chafing) it would experience from its captors (Isaiah 20:1-5).

A three-year stint of public nudity on the dusty streets of Jerusalem is a tough assignment for a prophet. But Isaiah didn’t mind. He probably knew what God was putting Hosea through in order to bring a real-life illustration to Hosea’s preaching. Compared to Hosea’s humiliation, Isaiah’s nudity was a breeze (pun intended).
A weather vane on the top of a barn is a common site. Some people could look at a weather vane and say that it changes all of the time. It may be pointing to the north, but then quickly alter and point to the west. Moments later it could shift to the south or east. Does that mean that the weather vane is unreliable? No, on the contrary, a weather vane is entirely reliable because it operates according to an unchangeable principle: It *always* points to the direction from which the wind is blowing. Always. In that sense, the weather vane is unchangeable.

We need to view God in that same context. He will always respond favorably to a person who is truly repentant. And He will always respond with some sort of judgment or correction when a person is living in outright rebellion.

The **BIG QUESTION** that I am asking myself at this point is:

**AM I GOING TO WAIT FOR GOD TO SHOW UP AND WRITE ON THE WALL BEFORE I RESPOND WITH A HEART OF OBEDIENCE?**
v. 6 His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way.

Peterson paraphrases verse 6:

he went white as a ghost, scared out of his wits. His legs went limp and his knees knocked.

p. 1591

Hebrews 10:31 (KJV)

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

You will notice FOUR THINGS about the king with regard to this writing on the wall:

1. “The king watched the hand as it wrote,”
2. “HIS FACE TURNED PALE,”
3. “HE WAS SO FRIGHTENED THAT HIS KNEES KNOCKED TOGETHER,” and
4. “HIS LEGS GAVE WAY.”

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

He became so frightened that . . . his legs gave way and he fell to the floor.

p. 1345
Campbell says:

The king was completely befuddled and terrified. A deadly pallor crept over his face as he viewed the strange writing, the wine cup fell from his shaking hands and crashed to the floor, his mind was seized with fright, and he became weak all over. With a hollow voice he cried for his wise men to whom he offered great rewards if they could give the interpretation of the writing which remained visible on the wall.
p. 60

Keil & Delitzsch say:

The alarm was heightened by a bad conscience, which roused itself and filled him with dark forebodings.
p. 182

Lange says:

... the uncomfortable and terrifying thoughts concerning the meaning of the writing, which sprang from the guilty conscience of the king.
p. 127

Feinberg says:

Belshazzar’s terror was described as vividly as Daniel could relate it. “His hip joints went slack, and his knees began knocking together.” A moment before, the drunken king had felt brave enough to hurl insults into the face of the living God; but with the flick of a hand, the Lord had reduced him to a quivering mass of terror.
p. 66
Jeremiah says:

Belshazzar must have set the all-time record for sobriety. Gone was the smirk, the defiance of God; instead he had a look of stark terror. He became so weak that he couldn’t stand up or sit down. In one brief moment, the profane king became a shivering, shaking, helpless mortal. So what did he do? He shrieked for the same old crowd—the enchanters, astrologers, and diviners. If they were at the party, they must have sobered up pretty fast too. They were true to their reputation; they couldn’t read the handwriting on the wall, nor could they interpret what it meant.


Miller says:

All sort of horrifying thoughts must have raced through the wicked king’s brain, foremost of which—inspired by his guilty conscience—was, “I have offended God: today I die.”

Belshazzar was so weak from fear that his knees began knocking together, and “his legs gave way” (lit., “the joints of his loin were loosened”). This latter expression means that his hip joints and upper legs went limp, a symptom of extreme panic.


Matthew Henry asks the question:

Why is he in such a fright? *His thoughts troubled him*: his own guilty conscience told him that he had no reason to expect any good news from Heaven. God can soon make the heart of the stoutest sinner to tremble; and there needs no more than to let loose his own thoughts upon him.


Walvoord says:

This was obviously a message from God because while the hand was writing on the plastered wall there was no arm or body connected to it. No doubt, there swept through Belshazzar’s mind some of the supernatural feats attributed to Daniel and his three companions as outlined in chapters 2 and 3 and also Nebuchadnezzar’s experience as recorded in Daniel 4.

p. 225

Parker says:

What is the matter with Belshazzar? How white he is! What a new expression in his erewhile dreamy eyes—eyes that were just yielding to the felonious slumber of intoxication! The joints of his loins are loosed, and his knees smite against one another; the man who a few minutes ago was iron is now straw. Did this happen long ago in some banquet-hall deserted? It happened last night; it will happen to-night; it will occur in vivid and monitional repetition until the end of time. Drunken men see strange sights. We try to persuade them that it is a species of nightmare.

p. 413

Goldingay says:

There is nothing humorous about the description of Belshazzar’s reaction to the portent. It is a deadly serious comprehensive description of the physical manifestations of terror (Towner), the appropriate response to the prospect of divine judgment . . .

p. 109
The Bear and the Atheist

An atheist was walking through the woods, admiring all the “accidents” that evolution had created. “What majestic trees! What powerful rivers! What beautiful animals!” he said to himself.

As he was walking alongside the river, he heard a rustling in the bushes behind him. Turning to look, he saw a 7-foot grizzly bear charge towards him. He ran away as fast as he could up the path.

He looked over his shoulder and saw the grizzly was closing. Somehow he ran even faster, so scared that tears came to his eyes. He looked again, and the bear was even closer. His heart was pounding, and he tried to run faster. He tripped and fell to the ground. He rolled over to pick himself up, but the bear was right over him, reaching for him with its left paw and raising its right paw to strike him.

At that instant the atheist cried, “Oh my God!”

Time stopped. The bear froze. The forest was silent. Even the river stopped moving.

As a bright light shone upon the man, a voice came out of the sky, “You deny my existence for all these years, teach others that I don’t exist, and even credit creation to a cosmic accident. Do you expect me to help you out of this predicament? Am I to count you as a believer?”

The atheist looked directly into the light and said, “I would feel like a hypocrite to become a Christian after all these years, but perhaps you could make the bear a Christian?”

“Very well,” said the voice.

The light went out. The river ran. The sounds of the forest resumed. Then the bear dropped his right paw, brought both paws together, bowed its head, and spoke: “Lord, for this food which I am about to receive, I am truly thankful.”

Citation: ‘Source unknown‘ submitted by David Holdaway, Stonehaven, Kincardinshire, Scotland

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Muhammad Ali Expects Judgment by Works

In a Reader’s Digest interview, Muhammad Ali states: “One day we’re all going to die, and God is going to judge us—[our] good deeds and bad deeds. If the bad outweighs the good, you go to hell. If the good outweighs the bad, you go to heaven.”

How different that view is from the gospel!

Citation: “Ali,” Reader’s Digest (December 2001), p. 93; submitted by Robert Wenz

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Actually, no one has to tell us that judgment is looming. Every sane person knows it. Years ago I saw a segment on that wonderfully creative, satirical television program, That Was The Week That Was (otherwise known as TW³). In one brief scene David Frost sat behind a desk with two doors behind his back, one marked “Heaven,” the other marked “Hell.” A man approached the desk with his hat in his hands and asked, “Which way do I go?” Frost answered, “You know.” The question and answer were repeated a number of times, then the man crumpled his hat and walked through the door marked “Hell.” No one has to tell us. We know.

p. 149-150

“It is a consoling idea,” wrote Soren Kierkegaard, “that we are always in the wrong.”

pp. 189-90
Isaiah 3:8, 9 (NLT)

Judah and Jerusalem will lie in ruins because they speak out against the LORD and refuse to obey him. They have offended his glorious presence among them. The very look on their faces gives them away and displays their guilt. They sin openly like the people of Sodom. They are not one bit ashamed. How terrible it will be for them! They have brought about their own destruction.
v. 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.”

Peterson paraphrases verse 7:

He yelled out for the enchanters, the fortunetellers, and the diviners to come. He told these Babylonian magi, “Anyone who can read this writing on the wall and tell me what it means will be famous and rich—purple robe, the great gold chain—and be third-in-command in the kingdom.”

The king’s immediate response is to get the BRAIN TRUST together. There are THREE listed here in this verse:

1. “ENCHANTERS,”
2. “ASTROLOGERS,” and
3. “DIVINERS.”

He said to these “MEN OF BABYLON,” here is what I need you to do:

1. “[READ] THIS WRITING” and
2. “[TELL] ME WHAT IT MEANS.”

He then SPELLS OUT the REWARD which is THREE-FOLD. You will be:

1. “CLOTHED IN PURPLE,”
2. “HAVE A GOLD CHAIN PLACED AROUND [YOUR] NECK,” and
3. “MADE THE THIRD HIGHEST RULER IN THE KINGDOM.”
This promise of a position in the kingdom is as high as Belshazzar can go because:

NABONIDUS is number one,

BELSHAZZAR is number two and

this would be serving RIGHT UNDER HIM.

_The Bible Knowledge Commentary_ says:

As was the custom . . . Belshazzar summoned the wise men, enchanters, astrologers, and diviners . . . and promised to reward whoever would interpret the meaning of this strange phenomenon.

The reward was great. . . . clothed in purple [equaled] . . . given royal authority . . . a gold chain [equaled] . . . great monetary value. And . . . third highest ruler in the kingdom. Since Nabonidus was king and Belshazzar his coregent, the highest office to be conferred was that of the third highest ruler. The king’s offer shows the extremity of his fear.

p. 1345
A friend encouraged author Neil Cole to tour the Rodin museum while in France. Reflecting on Rodin’s most famous work, Cole writes,

Rodin was a French impressionist sculptor. Though many do not realize his name, most are familiar with his work. He created the Thinker. What you may not realize is that the Thinker was really a study he had done to sit on the top of his greatest masterpiece—The Gates of Hell. For years we have been wondering what it is that the Thinker is thinking about. No, he’s not wondering about where he left his clothes the night before. What the Thinker is contemplating is an eternity of judgment separated from God.

Cole’s friend began to describe The Gates of Hell, which depicts innumerable beings writhing in agony on their way to judgment. As the vision of the work gripped Cole’s friend, she said, “Oh, I could just stare at The Gates of Hell forever.”

It was quiet for a moment as the significance of her words became clear. Cole writes, “All I could think of to say at that moment was, ‘Oh, I hope not.’"

*Citation: Neil Cole, Cultivating a Life for God, (ChurchSmart Resources, 1999) p. 120; submitted by Dietrich Schindler, Otterbach, Germany*

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v. 8 Then all the king’s wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or tell the king what it meant.

Peterson paraphrases verse 8:

One after the other they tried, but could make no sense of it. They could neither read what was written nor interpret it to the king.

p. 1591

Once “THE KING’S WISE MEN” gathered together, there were TWO THINGS that happened:

1. “THEY COULD NOT READ THE WRITING” and
2. “THEY COULD NOT . . . TELL THE KING WHAT IT MEANT.”

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

The wise men were unable to read or interpret the writing on the wall. This fact produced even greater fear in the king. Their inability to interpret the message made it even more ominous.

p. 1345

Feinberg says:

It would appear that they could read the actual message: “MENĒ, MENĒ, TEKĒL, UPHARSHIN.” That is clear enough Aramaic, but they could not understand the meaning or significance of the words. For example, a small child could read “H₂O” with no trouble, but he probably could not understand that it signifies water. So it was with these wise men: they could read what the words said, but they could not explain what they meant.

p. 67
Gangel says:

What a surprise! The faculty failed again. Faced with two tasks, they could perform neither.

Leupold says:

The very natural sequence of occurrences as reported at this point elicits the attacks of criticism. It is claimed that the preceding verse had already introduced the wise men and had them hear the king's demand. Now the wise men are said to be pictured as entering in v. 8. An obvious matter is overlooked by such criticism, namely, as pointed out above, that the king would lay his request before any larger group as soon as it was assembled. All that is required is to translate the participle ('allilin) used in v. 8 as a progressive—they "kept coming in." Finally, when they were all assembled, it was found that not one could offer the least bit of help.

Gowan says:

The author was thinking of three or four words . . . written in the Aramaic alphabet, since that is what he was using, and of course without vowel points, since there were no such things in those days. The words did not obviously make a sentence, which would provide the clues as to what vowels to supply; so the "reading" meant knowing how to pronounce the words, thus what their grammatical forms were. Since this was obviously a supernatural message, it would be assumed that a second step would then be necessary—the interpretation of what was expected to be a hidden meaning in those words. The Chaldeans acknowledge failure at both tasks.
v. 9 So King Belshazzar became even more terrified and his face grew more pale. His nobles were baffled.

Peterson paraphrases verse 9:

So now the king was really frightened. All the blood drained from his face. The nobles were in a panic.

p. 1591

There are THREE THINGS that are said about “BELSHAZZAR” in his RESPONSE, not only to the written message, but now the failure on the part of his brain trust to tell him what it says and what it means. The THREE THINGS we see in verse 9 are:

1. “BELSHAZZAR BECAME EVEN MORE TERRIFIED,”
2. “HIS FACE GREW MORE PALE,” and
3. “HIS NOBLES WERE BAFFLED.”

Gangel says:

However badly the king had felt a few minutes earlier, he was now more terrified and more pale. The vane and profane Belshazzar had become the latest victim of Psalm 2:4-5: “The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath.”

p. 135

Parker says:

God has so arranged the economy of his providence that he must have a few moments with us quite alone. Sweetest mother cannot speak for us then; tenderest friend cannot come between us and God at that moment: there must be a secret interview with the supernatural.

p. 414
Parker says further:

Do not suppose you can exclude God by noise, by wine-drinking, by high feasting, and by committing yourselves to revels that warm the blood and goad the passions,—“Thou God seest me.” Sometimes we see part of his hand, and we see what it is doing; at others we see all his hand, and can recognise what it is doing, and when we have looked upon the action for a little while we say, “Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.” The hand of the Lord is in heaven, on earth, and it grips the bridle that holds the devil back. “The Lord reigneth”; in that doctrine let us find assurance, consolation, stimulus, invincible defence.

p. 414

McGee says:

You can imagine the change which took place in that banquet room. A few moments before they all had been laughing and drunk. Now they are sober and perplexed and troubled.

p. 559

Young says:

The failure of the wise men threw the whole company into confusion. The king was deeply disturbed, and the magnates were upset and tumultuous.

p. 122

Baldwin says:

By appropriating the sacred treasures he had brought upon himself a divine response, a word written for him alone, which was a privilege he did not appreciate.

p. 121
Dyer says:

Harry Ironside was traveling to a funeral, and a little boy was riding in the car with him. The boy asked Dr. Ironside to explain death. Just as the little boy posed the question, a big truck passed by and its shadow passed across the car. Ironside, the great communicator and illustrator, said, “Son, for the believer death is like the shadow that hit the car. But for the nonbeliever death is like the truck.” You see, when the shadow of death brushes past the believer, it is just a passing glance . . . just a fading moment as the believer is ushered from time into eternity. But for the nonbeliever there is the sudden finality of a Christless eternity with no hope, no help, just the eternal horror of the lake of fire.

"EXUBERANT GLADNESS"

A man for years had cheated himself out of the joy of forgiveness. He had felt guilty about the part he played in a college prank which took the life of a classmate. Though he had confessed his wrong to God, he continued to be so torn up on the inside that he couldn’t keep a job or maintain a good relationship with his wife. But one day the mother of the boy who had died stopped in to see him. She was astounded that he had been carrying this load of guilt. She assured him that she has forgiven him long ago and that none of her relatives held any ill feeling toward him. Furthermore, she reminded him that God had erased this unfortunate escapade from the record. Then she gently rebuked him, telling him it was wrong for him to be burdened with remorse. When he finally came to accept the pardon being extended to him, he felt a new sense of freedom, was reunited with his wife, and settled down in a good job.

(From InfoSearch 3.5D)
**Woman Tells Man He’s Going to Hell**

A drunken man got on the bus late one night, staggered up the aisle, and sat next to a woman who was clutching a Bible.

She looked the wayward drunk up and down and said, “I’ve got news for you, mister. You’re going straight to hell!”

The man jumped up out of his seat and shouted, “Oh, man, I’m on the wrong bus *again*!”

*Citation:* Keith Todd, www.sermonfodder.com

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**Spurgeon On Facial Expressions**

“When you speak of heaven, let your face light up. When you speak of hell—well, then your everyday face will do.”

—Charles Haddon Spurgeon, speaking to his students

*Citation:* JoHannah Reardon, Sycamore, Illinois

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I’m dying. Sometimes I forget that.

Don’t misunderstand: I am not, at present, suffering from a terminal illness or a mortal wound. I have no virus breeding, thick and septic, in my bloodstream, no genetic disease swarming, swift and capricious, in my flesh. I am not, to my knowledge, dying soon.

But I am, as the apostle Paul puts it, “outwardly wasting away” (see 2 Corinthians 4:16). That’s what I sometimes forget: my mortality, my frailty, my life’s brevity. I will be the exception, I think, the one who evades death at each turn, slips its every snare, snatches hold of Elijah’s chariot or Enoch’s robe and, whisked into the wild blue yonder, remains unscathed by the grim reaper’s scythe.

But that’s laughable: I’m dying, and you’re dying, and that’s that.

Hemingway Found Pleasure Meaningless

Ernest Hemingway, born in 1899, was the epitome of the twentieth-century man. At age 25 he sipped champagne in Paris, and later had well-publicized game hunts in Africa and hunted grizzly bears in America’s northwest. At the age of sixty-one, after having it all—wine, women, song, a distinguished literary career, Sunday afternoon bullfights in Spain—Hemingway chose to end his life, leaving a note saying, “Life is one [expletive] thing after another.”

Ecclesiastes says this is what seeking after ultimate meaning through pleasure is like. The writer wants us to wake up to this fact before we’re sixty-one years old and realize too late that our lives have had no meaning and fulfillment.


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v. 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!

Peterson paraphrases verse 10:

The queen heard of the hysteria among the king and his nobles and came to the banquet hall. She said, “Long live the king! Don’t be upset. Don’t sit around looking like ghosts.

p. 1591

“THE QUEEN” hears all the ruckus, comes in and greets the king:

“O KING, LIVE FOREVER!”

She then has TWO NEGATIVE COMMANDS:

1. “DON’T BE ALARMED!”
2. “DON’T LOOK SO PALE!”

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

Then all the guests who like the king had seen the writing on the wall were thrown into utter confusion (his nobles were baffled). The sound of confusion in the banquet hall came to the ears of the queen. Evidently she was not a wife of Belshazzar for his wives were with him in the hall . . . She was the king’s mother, or perhaps even his grandmother. She evidently had previous contact with Daniel . . . So she counseled Belshazzar to summon Daniel and let him interpret the writing on the plaster.

p. 1345
Gangel says:

Archer assumes she was “the king’s mother, who was in all probability a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar” (Archer, p. 72).

That strikes me as the best choice, and we might go a step further and identify her as Nitocris, known in secular history as an ambitious and resourceful queen. Clearly she had unusual authority and esteem at court because she came into the banquet hall on her own initiative. After the traditional greeting, she spoke like any mother might: Don’t be alarmed! Don’t look so pale!

Miller says:

This queen was not Belshazzar’s wife, for as Young observes: “The text explicitly states that the wives of the king were already present.” Yet she must have been a highly prestigious individual to enter the banquet hall uninvited, and when she arrived, she seemed to take charge. For these reasons most commentators since the time of Josephus (first century A.D.) have identified her as the queen-mother, either the wife of Nebuchadnezzar or the wife of Nabonidus. If the wife of Nebuchadnezzar, she probably was the grandmother of Belshazzar, . . .

Campbell says:

While the entire crowd from king to lords, wives, concubines, and wise men stood perplexed and frightened, another person entered the banquet hall—the queen mother. It is thought that she was Nitocris, daughter of Nebuchadnezzar, wife of Nabonidus and mother of Belshazzar.

With a glance, she surveyed the scene and then addressed her son the king. Her advice is twofold. First she counseled him to “pull himself together” (v. 10). Then she told him of Daniel and urged that he be called to explain the handwriting on the wall.
Gaebelein says:

At this point the Queen, the aged widow of Nebuchadnezzar, appeared on the scene and called attention to an old man, who played such an important part during the reign of her husband.

p. 21
v. 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.

Peterson paraphrases verse 11:

There is a man in your kingdom who is full of the divine Holy Spirit. During your father’s time he was well known for his intellectual brilliance and spiritual wisdom. He was so good that your father, King Nebuchadnezzar, made him the head of all the magicians, enchanters, fortunetellers, and diviners.

p. 1591

What an incredible statement this queen makes with regard to DANIEL and his REPUTATION.

He was “A MAN . . . WHO HAS THE SPIRIT OF THE HOLY GODS IN HIM.”

He was a man who “WAS FOUND TO HAVE”:

“INSIGHT,”

“INTELLIGENCE,” and

“WISDOM”

“LIKE THAT OF THE GODS.”

He was “APPOINTED . . . CHIEF OF THE MAGICIANS, ENCHANTERS, ASTROLOGERS AND DIVINERS.”

WOW WHAT A TRIBUTE!
Jamieson, Fausset & Brown say:

Daniel was probably, according to Oriental custom, deprived of the office to which Nebuchadnezzar had promoted him, as “master of the magicians” . . . at the king’s death, Belshazzar might easily be ignorant of his services.

p. 743

Lucas says:

Various reasons have been given to explain why the queen has to intervene before Daniel is summoned. 1. His age (about eighty by now) meant that he had effectively retired from the royal service, maybe because the young king preferred the advice of younger men anyway (cf. the behaviour of Rehoboam in 1 Kgs. 12:8). 2. Belshazzar deliberately ignored him, knowing the kind of message he might get from him (cf. the attitude of Ahab to Micaiah ben Imlah in 1 Kgs. 22:8). 3. The motif of the neglected or forgotten wise man is a feature of court tales. Moreover, the implication of incompetence and frivolity on Belshazzar’s part, in that he is unaware of what resources he does have, may be intended.

p. 130
v. 12 This man Daniel, whom the king called Belteshazzar, 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.”

Peterson paraphrases verse 12:

There was no one quite like him. He could do anything—interpret dreams, solve mysteries, explain puzzles. His name is Daniel, but he was renamed Belteshazzar by the king. Have Daniel called in. He’ll tell you what is going on here.”

p. 1591

In this FINAL VERSE we have the QUEEN making her RECOMMENDATION:

“CALL FOR DANIEL, AND HE WILL TELL YOU WHAT THE WRITING MEANS.”

She pays another great tribute to him in SIX STATEMENTS she makes about him. “THIS MAN DANIEL, WHOM THE KING CALLED BELTESHAZZAR, WAS FOUND TO HAVE”:

1. “A KEEN MIND,”
2. “KNOWLEDGE,”
3. “UNDERSTANDING,”
4. “INTERPRET DREAMS,”
5. “THE ABILITY TO . . . EXPLAIN RIDDLES,” and
6. “THE ABILITY TO . . . SOLVE DIFFICULT PROBLEMS.”
She is basically telling him:

“I know the guy who will meet your needs. Just get him on the phone as soon as you can.”

Campbell says:

The queen mother, in describing Daniel’s rare gifts, used the same phrases as had Nebuchadnezzar. (Compare 5:11-12 with 4:8-9, 18.) No doubt she had not only heard her father speak of Daniel in this way but had also witnessed firsthand the prophet’s abilities to interpret dreams, solve riddles, and answer knotty problems.

p. 60

Miller says:

Belshazzar did not seem to be personally acquainted with Daniel. One reason is that it had been twenty-three years since Nebuchadnezzar’s death, and Daniel did not have the exalted position in the new regime that he had enjoyed earlier. Leupold remarks that “especially when usurpers arose, wholesale dismissal of the men in office was the rule.”76 Daniel probably had semiretired from public life after Nebuchadnezzar’s death (he was almost sixty years of age), and now he was about eighty. Belshazzar certainly had a different circle of friends. Furthermore, Babylon was a large city, and the king might not have known the old man, Daniel. The king also could simply have forgotten Daniel, or the liquor could have clouded his memory.

pp. 160-61
Leupold says:

The listing of Daniel’s gifts is now most detailed. First there is mentioned the all-inclusive “pre-eminent capacity,” . . . “an excellent spirit”; . . . “Knowledge” appears in this list. The remaining terms indicate what his rare attainments can achieve: “interpretation of dreams and solving riddles and unravelling knotty matters.” In his day Daniel had apparently engaged in all these mental tasks and had been known to excel in them. The queen prefers to call him Daniel, remembering it seems, 4:8. She avers confidently that Daniel will supply the needed interpretation. “Knotty matters,” . . . literally, “knots,” should not and need not be translated “magic knots.” That was not Daniel’s province.

p. 226

Showers says:

The queen referred to in this passage may have been the widow of Nebuchadnezzar whom Nabonidus married when he became king. In ancient times it was an Oriental custom for a new king to marry widows of former kings in order to make his claim to the throne more legitimate.20 Such a woman would have been known as queen mother and would have been highly respected.

Having heard about the confusion in the banquet hall, the queen mother entered and told the king about Daniel. It would appear that Daniel had been out of royal service for several years, due to several changes of administration since Nebuchadnezzar’s death. The very fact that the queen mother knew so much about Daniel’s supernatural abilities and dealings with Nebuchadnezzar would seem to indicate that this woman had had a close relationship with that king. In light of Daniel’s past record of interpreting dreams and solving problems, the queen mother urged that he be summoned to read and interpret the writing.

pp. 54-55
Jeremiah says:

It seems evident by her words that Daniel was not then at the core of the Babylonian government, certainly not under Belshazzar as he had been under Nebuchadnezzar. He must have been assigned to some lower echelon. It was quite probable when Belshazzar came into power as nothing more than a drunken, spoiled brat, he surmised that having Daniel around wouldn’t be very advantageous to his kingdom. However, the queen mother knew the influence Daniel had on her father and that he was still alive and well somewhere in the area. Although Daniel was eighty years old, he was the only hope in the kingdom for interpreting what was written on the wall that night.

pp. 105-6

“So the dream just keeps getting bigger and better, doesn’t it?”

He shook his head and smiled, looking up at the ceiling. “I just pray that Laura and Matthew will be able to grow up and discover what the Lord has for them to do because I want them to be content and blessed in their work like I am.”

I smiled. Rick had always been content with his job. He absolutely loved flying and working with people.

He looked at me. “I don’t want to let this crew down, Evey.”

“You won’t, Rick. I know that you’ll lead with nothing but integrity and character.”

“Pray for me, Evey. Pray that I will be a good leader because I don’t want to let them or NASA or the Lord down. He put me in the role of commander for a reason, and I just want to lead in a way that will bring glory to Him in all that I do. I don’t want people to see me. I want them to see how God has worked in my life.”

I put my arm around him, and we talked for several minutes until Rick fell asleep. Before I fell asleep I lay my hand on his chest and prayed, as it says in the Psalms, that he would lead the crew with integrity of heart.

p. 109
WHAT AN INCREDIBLE LEADER DANIEL MUST HAVE BEEN!

Just reflecting on the words again paraphrased by Peterson:

There was no one quite like him. He could do anything—interpret dreams, solve mysteries, explain puzzles. His name is Daniel, but he was renamed Belteshazzar by the king. Have Daniel called in. He'll tell you what is going on here.”

p. 1591

No Excuses for Doing Nothing

In response to those who make excuses why they cannot serve the Lord, Rick Warren writes:

Abraham was old, Jacob was insecure, Leah was unattractive, Joseph was abused, Moses stuttered, Gideon was poor, Samson was codependent, Rahab was immoral, David had an affair and all kinds of family problems, Elijah was suicidal, Jeremiah was depressed, Jonah was reluctant, Naomi was a widow, John the Baptist was eccentric to say the least, Peter was impulsive and hot-tempered, Martha worried a lot, the Samaritan woman had several failed marriages, Zacchaeus was unpopular, Thomas had doubts, Paul had poor health, and Timothy was timid. That is quite a variety of misfits, but God used each of them in his service. He will use you too if you stop making excuses.

Citation: Rick Warren, “The Purpose Driven Life,” Zondervan (October 2002), p. 233: submitted by David A. Slagle, Wilmore, Kentucky

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CONCLUSION:

What are some of the lessons we can learn from this particular study?

LESSON #1: In times of crisis, we need to train ourselves to be still and to hear what the Lord is trying to say.

LESSON #2: Under the control of alcohol we can do some really dumb things.

LESSON #3: There are things that we have the courage to do when we are intoxicated that we would never even think of doing when we were sober.

LESSON #4: “You are the LORD’s holy people. Purify yourselves, you who carry home the vessels of the Lord” (Isaiah 52:11b NLT).

LESSON #5: Prophecy is being fulfilled in this passage in that we are witnessing the fall of the kingdom of Babylon, the head of gold in the image from Daniel 2.

LESSON #6: God, at times, is very sudden and quick in administering consequences to deliberate acts of disobedience.

LESSON #7: “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31 KJV).

LESSON #8: If God were writing on your wall, what would He be writing at this moment?

LESSON #9: The king’s response is four-fold: (1) “[he] watched the hand as it wrote”; (2) “His face turned pale”; (3) “he was so frightened that his knees knocked together”; and (4) “his legs gave way” (verse 6).
LESSON #10: This is the third time in the book of Daniel that we have seen the inability of the Babylonian brain trust in trying to interpret spiritual things.

LESSON #11: Daniel has been a tremendous witness with his “insight,” “intelligence and wisdom” that has been given to him by the Lord (verse 11).

LESSON #12: The tribute to Daniel is six-fold: (1) “a keen mind”; (2) “knowledge”; (3) “understanding”; (4) “ability to interpret dreams”; (5) “explain riddles”; and (6) “solve difficult problems” (verse 12).

LESSON #13: Are we going to wait for God to show up and start writing on the wall before we respond with a heart of obedience?
Facing God's Court Should Be Our Biggest Concern

Hanging out at a bagel shop one day I asked a couple of non-Christian friends, “What’s the most important thing I can pray for you?”

The woman was taken back. “Health, I guess,” she said.

“Health? That’s not the most important thing,” I said. “Sooner or later your health is going to go, no matter who prays for you. There must be something more important than that.”

She was stumped. “What’s more important than that?”

“What about your relationship with God?”

“I never thought about that.”

Then her husband said, “You mean God is going to haul us into court or something?”

Now I was surprised. “Yeah,” I said, “I guess you could say that.”

Citation: Lee Eclov, Vernon Hills, Illinois

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Would That Be in Reference?

As we returned from Vacation Bible School one summer day, my young daughter Melissa asked if we could stop at the library. When I asked her why, she explained, “This morning my teacher told me that the only way we get to heaven is if our name is written in the Lamb’s Book of Life. I just want to make sure that my name is in there!”

Citation: Nora Newport, Jupiter, FL. “Heart to Heart,” Today's Christian Woman.

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Prayer for the Sundown of Life

It’s sundown, Lord. The shadows of my life stretch back into the dimness of the years long spent. I fear not death, for that grim foe betrays himself at last, thrusting me forever into life: life with you, unsoiled and free.

But I do fear. I fear the dark specter may come too soon—or do I mean too late? That I should end before I finish or finish, but not well. That I should stain your honor, shame your name, grieve your loving heart. Few, they tell me, finish well . . . Lord, let me get home before dark.

The darkness of a spirit grown mean and small, fruit shriveled on the vine, bitter to the taste of my companions, burden to be borne by those brave few who love me still?

No, Lord, let the fruit grow lush and sweet, a joy to all who taste: Spirit-sign of God at work, stronger, fuller. Brighter at the end. Lord, let me get home before dark.

The darkness of tattered gifts, rust-locked, half-spent, or ill-spent, A life that once was used of God now set aside? Grief for glories gone or fretting for a task God never gave. Mourning in the hollow chambers of memory, Gazing on the faded banners of victories long gone? Cannot I run well until the end? Lord, let me get home before dark.

The outer me decays—I do not fret or ask reprieve. The ebbing strength but weans me from mother earth and grows me up for heaven.

I do not cling to shadows cast by mortality. I do not patch the scaffold lent to build the real, eternal me. I do not clutch about me my cocoon, vainly struggling to hold hostage a free spirit pressing to be born.

But will I reach the gate in lingering pain—body distorted, grotesque? Or will it be a mind wandering untethered among light fantasies or grim terrors?

Of your grace, Father, I humbly ask . . . Let me get home before dark.

Citation: “Let Me Get Home Before Dark,” by Robertson McQuilkin, president emeritus of Columbia International University; submitted by Lee Eclov, Vernon Hills, Illinois

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Grandfather’s Last Words Gave Jesus Christ

One fall afternoon, my grandfather was at home with my grandmother and heard a knock on the door. The visitor was a neighbor lady who said to my grandfather, “I was out feeding the horses, and I felt like God was prompting me to come and say thank you for the difference you’ve made in my life.”

She sat down and began to tell stories about times when my grandfather had been merciful to her as a widow and cared for the cows and horses and done all of kinds of practical things. She thanked him for being so real. She went through this litany of good deeds, including bringing peace in relationships with some of her children. She finished with, “I just felt like God wanted me to tell you that.”

My grandfather paused and looked at her and said, “It was the Lord Jesus Christ who did it.”

There was another pause, and my grandmother struck up a conversation with this lady. A few seconds later they heard a cough and saw my grandfather slumped over. He was with Jesus.

My grandfather’s last words were, “It was the Lord Jesus Christ who did it.”

Citation: Dale Durie, from the sermon Mission Possible (6·1·03)

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Pretended self-sufficiency eventually leads to self-righteousness, and arrogance forces its rule of vanity as we grow to believe our own lies. But when we fall before Jesus, humbly and honesty, there is nothing—personal weakness, inadequacy, failure, sinfulness—from which He cannot cleanse or deliver us.

p. 46
Permit me to encourage you to aim high. Decide to finish strong. And then love, trust, and obey God, and ask Him to help you complete the race, looking unto Jesus.

p. 102

Chaos reigns within,
Reflect, repent and reboot,
Order shall return!

—A COMPUTER ERROR
HAIKU POEM

I believe a word that forcefully captures the essence of Jesus’ work of propitiation is the word exhausted. Jesus exhausted the wrath of God. It was not merely deflected and prevented from reaching us: it was exhausted. Jesus bore the full, unmitigated brunt of it. God’s wrath against sin was unleashed in all its fury on His beloved Son. He held nothing back.

The prophet Isaiah foretold this when he wrote, “yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:4-5, emphasis added).

Note the italicized words: stricken, smitten, afflicted, pierced, crushed, punishment, wounds. They describe the pouring out of God’s wrath on His Son. During those awful hours when Jesus hung on the cross, the cup of God’s wrath was completely turned upside down. Christ exhausted the cup of God’s wrath. For all who trust in Him there is nothing more in the cup. It is empty.

pp. 56-57
William Carey was the great missionary pioneer to India. When he was on his deathbed, he was visited by a young man named Alexander Duff who greatly admired the famous missionary. After a long visit, Carey asked Duff to pray with him. Following the prayer, when Duff turned to leave, he heard Carey’s feeble voice calling him back.

“Mr. Duff,” said Carey, “you have been speaking about ‘Dr. Carey, Dr. Carey.’ When I am gone, say nothing about Dr. Carey. Speak about Dr. Carey’s Savior.”

*Citation: Lee Eclov, Vernon Hills, Illinois; source: F. W. Boreham, “William Carey’s Life Text,” Wholesomewords.org*

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A WEEK LATER, chuck attended David Bloom’s memorial service at St. Patrick’s Cathedral in downtown Manhattan. Leaders from the media; from city, state, and national governments; and from the television industry, as well as prominent citizens and entertainers, family, and friends, packed the service. Most who had come to pay their respects had no knowledge of David’s faith in Jesus. But during the memorial, the e-mails he had written from Iraq to his wife, Melanie, were read. One after another, for the entire distinguished assembly to hear, those e-mails powerfully and poignantly described his faith in Jesus Christ. As Chuck Colson sat among the rows of mourners, he was struck by the realization, God, now I understand one reason why! You’ve received so much glory in David’s death!

The last e-mail, which Melanie reportedly received from David just hours before his death, was published in a national magazine and bore this testimony:

You can’t begin to fathom, cannot begin to even glimpse the enormity of the changes I have and am continuing to undergo. God takes you to the depths of your being, until you’re at rock bottom, and then, if you turn to Him with utter and blind faith and resolve in your heart and mind to walk only with Him and towards Him, picks you up with your bootstraps and leads you home.²

² “A Final Goodbye,” People magazine, 5 May 2003, 166.

Her last days were spent in the hospital. Room 318. The local ministers call it the death chamber because it is reserved for those in extremis, in the last harrowing or oblivious moments of life. But for Marlene, it was sanctuary. A strange peace was in the place. Despite the massiveness of her cancer, she was without pain. She lay propped up against many pillows, tubes for oxygen and medicine streaming into her. Her family and some close friends were there, often silent—most words had worn out—though sometimes they sang one of her favorite hymns.

She had one last prayer: to see her newest grandchild before she died. Marlene’s daughter Cindy—already with six children—was due, and tottered under the weight of it. But the baby slept on, serene inside his mother, and Marlene’s life now was water cupped in the hand, running swiftly out. Then,
that morning, the water broke. Not Marlene’s. Cindy’s. Her husband, Bob, brought her to the hospital and, one floor beneath where her mother lay dying, Cindy gave birth to little Eli. The nurses in attendance, at Cindy’s urging, quickly swaddled the baby, placed mother and child in a wheelchair, and let Bob wheel them up a floor, to room 318. Marlene cradled Eli in her thin arms, and in her thin voice welcomed him to this world.

*Now, sovereign Lord, dismiss Your servant in peace.*

Somewhere in those last days, Marlene’s friend Eugene (I tell his story on page 83) leaned close to her. He took her papery, willowy hand—her cold, cold hand—in his, and held it tight. Too tight. Marlene could barely turn her head, but she looked toward him. And then she spoke in a voice surprising in its clarity and strength. “It’s all right, Gene. You can let go. Don’t you understand? I’ve lived my entire life for this moment.”

But one thing wasn’t right.

Marlene had a regret. She brooded with a huge worry, wrestled with a taunting fear. It was about her husband, Al. She wasn’t sure how he would manage without her. They had, for better or for worse, in sickness and in health, in riches and in want, been one flesh; her leaving was a rendering of that, a tearing of him in half. She had always sorted him out, kept him disentangled from the sheer messiness of his own complex life. She felt her death a kind of betrayal or abandonment of him.

But her vow to him was “until death doth part us,” and death would wait no longer. Al sat beside her. He held her hand. He didn’t notice its coldness. He read [to] her from Psalm 121: “I lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.”

“Marlene,” he said, “thank you for forty-five years of marriage.”

He paused only a moment, and then spoke the words she longed to hear: “Run into the arms of Jesus.”

Joy flooded her. In that single instant, youth came back to her: a brightness, a freshness, a wonder-struck expectancy that swept away her haggardness and pallor. Her body grew light. She sat up straight, jaunty, like a child waking after a good sound sleep. *I’ve lived my entire life for this moment.*

And she was gone.

Heaven-bent.

pp. 234-6