

# SPEAKING IN BABYLON

Devotional | February 26, 2023

GRACE  
FELLOWSHIP

**Discuss:** When has God had to teach you a lesson the hard way?

**Key Text:** Read *Daniel 5:1-30*

The story is told about a man who had not been feeling well. He went to see his doctor who asked, "What's wrong?" The man said, "Well, lately I've been feeling dizzy and I'm seeing white spots." The doctor examined him and put him through some tests. A few days later, the doctor called the ailing man back and said, "Sir, I hate to tell you this, but you've got a rare disease and we think you have only about 3 months to live." The man quit his job and set off to do all the things he'd hoped to do. He went on a cruise, traveled the world, and bought a new sports car. One day he was driving by a famous clothing shop and decided to go in and buy a tailor-made suit. The tailor measured the arm length: "33 inches," next he measured his waist: "32," then was his pant length: "34." Lastly, the tailor measured his neck and said, "I'm making you a 16 ½ inch collar." The man said, "No, I wear a 14-inch collar." The tailor measured his neck again very carefully. "No, sir," he said. "Look, you wear a 16 ½ inch collar." The man was very adamant. "No, sir. I'm sure I wear a 14-inch collar," he told the tailor. "I've worn that size my whole adult life. I want you to make me a 14-inch collar." The tailor said, "Fine. I'll make you a 14-inch collar, but it will be so tight it will make you dizzy, and you'll see white spots."

People can easily become so stubbornly set in their ways that they refuse to change even when they are hurting! In today's text, Daniel 5:1-30, we meet a man like this, a man who was unwilling to change even though God confronted him directly about his sin. His name is Belshazzar. The events in Daniel 5 occur about 20 years after King Nebuchadnezzar's death. After Nebuchadnezzar died, several obscure kings reigned in Babylon until Belshazzar took the throne around 533 B.C. His name meant "Bel (a Babylonian deity) protects." Belshazzar ruled only for a short while and would be the last king before Persia overthrew Babylon.

Daniel Chapter 5 focuses on three major events:

- 1. King Belshazzar hosts a great feast during which he takes gold and silver vessels Nebuchadnezzar had looted from the Jerusalem temple and defiles them by drinking wine from them while praising the Babylonian gods (5:1-4).**

When Babylon overthrew Jerusalem, items that were considered by the Jews to be holy and sacred were looted from Solomon's temple. King Nebuchadnezzar had honored God during the last years of his life, but King Belshazzar defied God by defiling the holy vessels from Solomon's temple (5:1-4). Although Belshazzar was the new king, he committed the same old sin of pride. As Belshazzar partied, his city was under threat from Darius, King of Persia, but Belshazzar arrogantly believed his defenses would hold.

**Discuss:** In what sense can the sin of pride be the root of other sins? What are some biblical examples of this? What are some modern-day examples?

**2. Seeing a human hand with no arm writing a message on the wall, a terrified Belshazzar promises great rewards to anyone who can interpret the mysterious message (5:5-9).**

Belshazzar had used his hands to defile God's holy vessels from Solomon's temple. Now God would use His own hand to declare judgment on Belshazzar! The king was so terrified his knees shook and his face turned color (5:5-6).

**Discuss:** Why do you think God chose to use visible fingers as His means for communicating with Belshazzar?

**Discuss:** The finger of God is used in Scripture to symbolize God interacting with His creation. Note the various examples of the finger of God in these passages: Exodus 8:19; 31:18; Psalm 8:3-4.

**Discuss:** Belshazzar was terrified by this encounter with God through God's writing on the wall. We followers of God are called to fear the Lord, but we need not feel terror in our relationship with Him. What do these verses teach us about an appropriate fear of God: 1 Samuel 12:14, 24; Acts 10:35; 1 Peter 1:17; 2:17?

**3. Daniel interprets the message, but Belshazzar rejects the interpretation, defies God, and is killed that night by Darius who takes over the city (5:10-31).**

The queen mother advises Belshazzar to call for Daniel. The king does so and offers to rewards to Daniel if he can interpret the writing. Daniel indicates that he is not interested in the rewards, but he will interpret the message (5:10-17). Daniel contrasts the lessons in humility Nebuchadnezzar learned during his reign with the lessons Belshazzar arrogantly spurned during his reign (5:18-23). Daniel then interprets the 3-fold message for Belshazzar "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, AND PARSIN" (5:24-25):

1) "MENE, MENE" – Belshazzar's reign is coming to an end (5:26),

2) "TEKEL" – Belshazzar has been weighed in the balances and found wanting (5:27),

3) "PARSIN / PERES" – Belshazzar's kingdom will be divided and given to the Medes and Persians (5:28).

Belshazzar bestows a gold chain and a purple robe to Daniel and promotes him to the third highest position in Babylon (5:29), but that very night Darius the Mede enters Babylon, kills Belshazzar, and takes rulership over the city (5:30-31). Interestingly, the modern expression "the handwriting on the wall," meaning "a warning of inevitable misfortune" comes from this event recorded in Daniel 5.

**Discuss:** What is the most important spiritual lesson you learned from today's lesson?

**For Further Study:**

Free online commentary on the Book of Daniel at [www.enduringword.com](http://www.enduringword.com)

What is the meaning of "mene mene tekkel upharsin"? at [www.gotquestions.org](http://www.gotquestions.org)

"Does God Give People Prophetic Dreams Today?" article at [www.gotquestions.org](http://www.gotquestions.org)