

# A King Destroyed by Pride

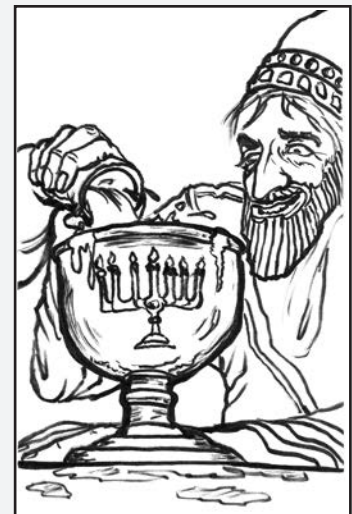


## SABBATH—FEBRUARY 1

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Daniel 5:1-31; Psalm 96:5; Colossians 1:15-17; Romans 1:16-32; Revelation 14:8.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “ ‘He changes the times and seasons of the year. He takes away the power of kings. And he gives their power to new kings. He gives wisdom to people so they become wise. And he helps people learn and know things’ ” (Daniel 2:21, ICB).

**IN DANIEL 5,** we see a powerful example of human pride. The story ends in a surprising and awful way. We saw that Nebuchadnezzar takes a long time to learn his lesson. But at least he learns it. Sadly, his grandson, Belshazzar, never does. King Belshazzar takes the gold and silver cups from God's temple. The king fills them with wine at a wild party. He gives the cups to his guests to drink from. What Belshazzar does is very wrong. It is an attack on God Himself. Belshazzar behaves the same as the little horn power (read Daniel 8). The little horn attacks God's temple in heaven. So, God removes King Belshazzar's kingdom and gives it to another king. God will do the same thing to the enemies who hurt His people in the end times. The story in Daniel 5 about King Belshazzar happens in 539 B.C. On that night, the Medo-Persian army takes control of Babylon. This helps us remember the statue in Daniel 2. The 1st kingdom of gold is now replaced by the 2nd kingdom of silver. Gold is a word picture for Babylon. Silver is a word picture for Media-Persia. Everything happens just as God says it will. Again, we see that God controls everything that happens on earth.



**What the king does is very wrong. It is an attack on God Himself.**

## BELSHAZZAR'S WILD PARTY (Daniel 5:1–4)

Read Daniel 5:1–4. Then read Daniel 1:1, 2. What is Belshazzar doing in Daniel 5 that is so bad? How does Belshazzar show us what is in his heart? Compare his behavior with the woman in Revelation 17:4–6. What is the same about Belshazzar and this woman?

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King Nebuchadnezzar steals the gold and silver cups from God's temple in Jerusalem. But the king shows some respect for God's treasures. The king puts the cups in his god's temple. But his grandson, Belshazzar, does not respect God. Belshazzar orders someone to bring cups to his wild party and fill them with wine. Then the king tells his guests to drink the wine from the cups.

"As they drank the wine, they praised their gods. The statues of those gods were made out of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood or stone" (Daniel 5:4, NIV). Do you see that their gods are made from six things? The number six was important to Babylonians. They counted things in groups of ten, all the way up to the number 60. 60 was their top number. Then they started over again if they wanted to count higher. So, the number six was special in Babylon. As we said, their gods are made from six different things. The number six shows us that the Babylonians thought their religion was perfect. Do you see that their gods are made from almost the same things as the statue in Daniel 2? Only one thing is different. Babylon's gods are made of wood, not clay. Also, the Babylonians praise their stone gods last. In Daniel 2, stone is a word picture for God's power. It shows us that God will judge the kingdoms on this earth (read Daniel 2:44, 45). That includes Babylon.

Belshazzar's wild party shows us what will happen in the end times. In Revelation 17, we see end-time Babylon as a woman. She behaves the same as Belshazzar. She holds a gold cup filled with wine. She offers it to the people on the earth. The wine is a word picture for her false teachings and false worship. The wine causes people to sin (Revelation 17:4–6). The woman behaves as if she does not care that God will judge her soon. And He will judge her.



The wine is a word picture for Babylon's false teachings and false worship.

## THE GUEST THAT NO ONE INVITED (Daniel 5:5–8)

Read Daniel 5:5–8. What happens in this chapter? Why does King Belshazzar do what he does? How is this story the same as the story in Daniel 2? Why is this information important for us to know? (To help you answer this question, read Psalm 96:5 and Colossians 1:15–17.)

What is the first thing Belshazzar does? He does the same thing that Nebuchadnezzar does in the past (Daniel 2:2; Daniel 4:7). Belshazzar sends for his wise men. He asks them to explain the handwriting on the wall. The king offers the wise men many gifts and honors. He offers: (1) purple clothes. Royal people wore purple clothes in Bible times (Esther 8:15). (2) The king also offers the gift of a gold chain. The gold chain is a sign of power (Genesis 41:42). The person who wears it will be the 3rd most important person in the kingdom. The 1st leader of Babylon is King Nabonidus, Belshazzar's father. So, Belshazzar is the 2nd leader in Babylon. Yes, he offers his wise men many gifts. But no one can explain the handwriting.

The king looks in the wrong place for help. Babylon's wise men cannot explain the message. True, it is written in their own language, Aramaic. But the wise men cannot understand its meaning. Isaiah helps us understand why. God will “‘destroy the wisdom of those [people] who think they are so wise. I will do away with the cleverness [knowledge] of those [people] who think they are so smart’ ” (Isaiah 29:14, NIV). Paul writes Isaiah's words in one of his letters. Then Paul says: “Where is the man who is wise? Where is the man who thinks he knows a lot? Where is the man who thinks he has all the answers? God has made the wisdom of this world [the people on the earth] look foolish” (1 Corinthians 1:20, 21, NIV).

Some truths are too important for humans to figure out on their own. That is why God must show these truths to us.

**Think about the gifts the king offers his wise men. But what happens next to Babylon? What does that tell us about why we need to put God first in everything we do?**



The wise men cannot understand or explain the words. Read Daniel 5:25, NKJV.

## THE QUEEN ENTERS (Daniel 5:9–12)

Read about the queen in Daniel 5:9–12. What does the queen say about Daniel? Why should Belshazzar already know this information? But the king acts as if he does not know who Daniel is! What does that say to us about the king?

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Everyone at the king's feast is confused by the message on the wall. Then the queen enters the room. She gives advice to the king. She helps him remember about Daniel. She tells him that Daniel is famous for his skills. He can solve mysteries. Daniel can understand dreams too. He showed his skills during King Nebuchadnezzar's time. Too bad Belshazzar is not as smart as Nebuchadnezzar. He does not think about asking Daniel for help. So, it is necessary for the queen to help Belshazzar. He does not know what to do next at all. The queen says that Daniel is the only person in the kingdom who can read the message on the wall. The king already should have known this. Then the queen tells the king more about Daniel's skills. Daniel is filled with God's Spirit. Daniel is very wise. He understands dreams and solves mysteries. He was the top wise man during Nebuchadnezzar's time (Daniel 5:11, 12).

So, if all this information is correct, why does Belshazzar not remember Daniel? The Bible does not give us a clear answer to this question. But Daniel is old by this time. He is around 80 years old. So, maybe he has already stopped working. It also is possible that the king wanted to replace Daniel with a younger wise man. Also, the king did not want to follow Daniel's God. So, that may be another reason the king wanted to replace Daniel. Daniel works for the king for at least three years (Daniel 8:1, 27). Then he retires. We can only guess why Daniel stops working. But whatever the reason, it is strange that the king forgets about Daniel so soon.



The queen says that Daniel is the only person in the kingdom who can read the message on the wall.

Read Romans 1:16–32. What are the important rules in these verses? How are these rules shown in Belshazzar's story? How are these rules shown in life around us today?

**THE KING IS JUDGED NOT GOOD ENOUGH**  
(Daniel 5:13–28)

Read Daniel 5:13–28. In these verses, Daniel tells the king that he will lose his kingdom. Why does Daniel say this to the king?

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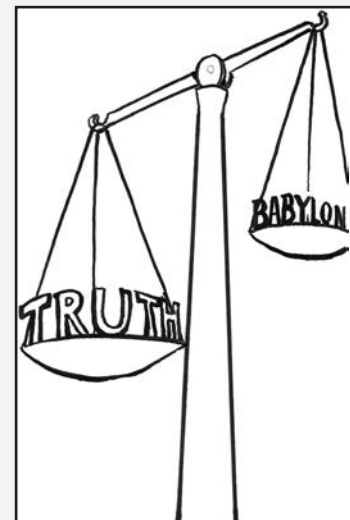


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The king is in deep trouble. So, he is forced to ask Daniel for help. Daniel will help him. But Daniel tells the king to keep his gifts. Daniel's words show us the honor in his heart. He understands the message. So, he knows that soon the king's reward will not be worth much at all.

Then Daniel judges the king. The king is guilty of three crimes. (1) Belshazzar is guilty because he did not learn any lessons from Nebuchadnezzar's experience. How do we know that? Because Belshazzar never turns away from sin. He has a heart filled with pride. He does not turn to God the same way that his grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar, does. (2) Belshazzar uses the gold and silver cups from God's temple. The king fills them with wine. Then he and his friends drink the wine and praise their gods. (3) The king fails to give glory and praise to God. God is the One " 'who has the power [control] over your life and everything you do' " (Daniel 5:23, ERV). Next, Daniel explains the message. It is written in only three verbs from the Aramaic language. The first verb is written twice. The king and his wise men should understand the basic meaning of these words: "**MENE**": "counted"; "**TEKEL**": "weighed"; and "**UPHARSIN**": "divided." But what do they all mean?

We must remember what happens next in history. Then we will understand better the meaning of the words. The Medo-Persian army is at Babylon's gates. The wise men may know that the message is a warning. It shows that something awful is about to happen. But no one dares to tell the king. Only Daniel is brave enough to tell the king. He also is the only one there who can solve the mystery. He explains to Belshazzar: " '*Mene*: God has counted the days until your kingdom will end. *Tekel*: You have been weighed on the scales and found not good enough. *Upharsin*: Your kingdom is being taken from you. It will be divided among the Medes and Persians' " (Daniel 5:26–28, NKJV).



“ '*Tekel*: You have been weighed on the scales and found not good enough.' ”



## THE END OF BABYLON (Daniel 5:29–31)

Read about the end of Belshazzar’s Babylon in Daniel 5:29–31. Then read about end-time Babylon in Revelation 14:8; Revelation 16:19; and Revelation 18:2. What does the end of Belshazzar’s Babylon teach us about end-time Babylon?

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King Belshazzar keeps his promise to Daniel. The king gives Daniel gifts. Yes, Daniel gives the king bad news. But the gifts show us that the king accepts Daniel’s explanation. By doing so, the king shows that he understands that God is in control. Remember how Daniel did not want the gifts before? Now he accepts them. Why does Daniel change his mind? Maybe Daniel wanted to show the king that he was not out to gain anything for himself. Anyway, the gifts are not worth much. Daniel knows that he will be 3rd ruler in the kingdom for only a few hours. So, maybe Daniel accepts the king’s gifts to be polite.

Babylon ends just as Daniel says. It happens fast. While the king throws a wild party, the Persians take the city. They win the war without a fight! How do they do that? The history writer Herodotus tells us. You will remember that the Euphrates River flowed down the middle of Babylon. So, the Persians dig a long ditch nearby. They cause the Euphrates River to flow into the ditch. Then the Persian army marches down the empty river into Babylon. That night, Belshazzar is killed. His father King Nabonidus already has left the city. But later he gives himself up to the new leaders. In this way, the most powerful kingdom in history comes to an end. Babylon, the gold head, is gone.

“God gave Belshazzar many chances to know Him and follow His plan for his life. Belshazzar saw God remove the power of his grandfather’s mind. Then his grandfather was sent away to live with wild animals in the field. But Belshazzar loved to have fun. He gave glory to himself. He did not learn any lessons from his grandfather’s experience at all. He wasted the chances that God gave him to learn about the truth.”—Ellen G. White, *Bible Echo*, April 25, 1898, adapted.



By giving Daniel gifts, the king shows that he understands that God is in control.

**ADDITIONAL THOUGHT:** In Bible times, kings gave big feasts in their palaces. Kings loved to throw big parties to show off all their riches and power. We do not know everything about Belshazzar’s feast. But we do know that it happens when the Medo-Persian army is about to go to war against Babylon. Babylon has strong walls. There is lot of food inside the city. There is enough food to feed everyone in the city for many years. The Euphrates River flows down the middle of the city. So, the city has plenty of water. That is why King Belshazzar throws a party. Yes, the Persian army is all around the city. But the king is not worried about that. He orders a big celebration. Soon, his feast turns into a wild party. Sadly, the king shows the awful pride in his heart. But this story also shows us that God is more powerful than human pride. God sends Daniel to talk to the king. Daniel tells the king that God gave him many chances to learn an important lesson: God is the One “ ‘who has the power [control] over your life and everything you do’ ” (Daniel 5:23, ERV).

“History continues to teach us lessons today. God gives every country and each person a part in His big plan. Today God gives men and kingdoms tests. The God who tests our hearts never makes mistakes. All people make choices that show the future life they choose. God is in control of everything. He will cause His plan to happen.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 536, adapted.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 How does culture, or the art, music, sports, ideas, and the entertainment around us, make our faith weak? What should we as a church do about it?
- 2 What does Belshazzar’s story teach us about salvation? Yes, salvation is about what we know. But why is our being saved really about what we do with our knowledge? (Read Daniel 5:22.)
- 3 What important spiritual rules does Daniel 5:23 teach us? Why does this verse warn us not to fight against God? What does this verse teach about God as the One who made us and takes care of us in life?
- 4 Belshazzar does not understand the message (Daniel 5:6). But he is scared anyway. What does that tell us about living with a guilty heart?



**“All people make choices that show the future life they choose.”**