

# Daniel: The Key to Interpretation

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*Daniel 5:13-31*

## **TEXT: (English Standard Version)**

“Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king answered and said to Daniel, ‘You are that Daniel, one of the exiles of Judah, whom the king my father brought from Judah. I have heard of you that the spirit of the gods is in you, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you. Now the wise men, the enchanters, have been brought in before me to read this writing and make known to me its interpretation, but they could not show the interpretation of the matter. But I have heard that you can give interpretations and solve problems. Now if you can read the writing and make known to me its interpretation, you shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around your neck and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.’

“Then Daniel answered and said before the king, ‘Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another. Nevertheless, I will read the writing to the king and make known to him the interpretation. O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father kingship and greatness and glory and majesty. And because of the greatness that he gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whom he would, he killed, and whom he would, he kept alive; whom he would, he raised up, and whom he would, he humbled. But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit was hardened so that he dealt proudly, he was brought down from his kingly throne, and his glory was taken from him. He was driven from among the children of mankind, and his mind was made like that of a beast, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. He was fed grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, until he knew that the Most High God rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he will. And you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this, but you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven. And the vessels of his house have been brought in before you, and you and your lords, your wives, and your concubines have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see or hear or know, but the God in whose hand is your breath, and whose are all your ways, you have not honored.

“Then from his presence the hand was sent, and this writing was inscribed. And this is the writing that was inscribed: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, and PARSIN. This is the interpretation of the matter: MENE, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; TEKEL, you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting; PERES, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.’

“Then Belshazzar gave the command, and Daniel was clothed with purple, a chain of gold was put around his neck, and a proclamation was made about him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

“That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.”

## **NOTES:**

- A. When Daniel is brought before the king, the king says, “You are that Daniel.”
  1. The KJV puts this in the form of a question—“Art thou that Daniel?”
    - a. There is nothing in the original that suggests we should take this as a question.
    - b. If it is a question, it is certainly a rhetorical question, for Belshazzar goes right ahead with what he intended to tell Daniel.
  2. It really seems as though the king is saying, “So, you’re the Daniel I’ve heard so much about.”
- B. Daniel tells the king that he can keep his reward.
  1. He will read the handwriting without any promise of a reward.
  2. Why would Daniel be willing to interpret the handwriting “free of charge”?
  3. Do we sometimes want recognition for our service, recognition that should go to God?
- C. Daniel next goes directly to the proud heart of Belshazzar.
  1. Once more, we find reference to God as “the Most High God.” Such a description would surely begin to humble Belshazzar who has just displayed such arrogance.
  2. Daniel also points out that it wasn’t Nebuchadnezzar’s wisdom or military strength that brought him greatness, but God gave greatness to Nebuchadnezzar.
    - a. Notice also that Daniel points out that God gave Nebuchadnezzar complete control of the world—“Whom he would, he killed, and whom he would, he kept alive; whom he would, he raised up, and whom he would, he humbled” (v 19).
    - b. However, when Nebuchadnezzar became proud, “he was brought down from his kingly throne” (v 20), just as Belshazzar was about to be.
- D. There certainly seems to be a lesson here about passing on character to our children.

1. It is uncertain whether or not Nebuchadnezzar was a biological ancestor of Belshazzar.
    - a. The term “father” used throughout this text could mean “predecessor.”
    - b. However, there is some evidence that Belshazzar’s father married Nebuchadnezzar’s widow.
      - 1) The queen mother who comes into the feasts seems to be Nebuchadnezzar’s widow.
      - 2) If that is the case, it’s possible that Belshazzar was, in a sense, a step-son of Nebuchadnezzar.
  2. Whether or not Belshazzar was biologically Nebuchadnezzar’s son, he certainly attempted to emulate the great Babylonian king.
    - a. How many American Presidents attempt to copy what a “hero” of their party did?
    - b. The same thing could certainly be going on here with Belshazzar.
  3. The point is that Belshazzar learned to be prideful from watching Nebuchadnezzar & others often pick up character traits by watching us.
- E. Belshazzar knew all this, but he did not humble his heart before God.
1. Why would a **pagan** king need to humble his heart before God?
  2. Are even those who aren’t the people of God accountable to God?
- F. Even the universe & history reveal to us some things about God (Acts 14:15-18; 17:22-31; Rom 1:18-23; Ps 19:1-6).
- G. From God’s presence came a hand to write.
1. This indicates the supernatural nature of the hand that wrote.
  2. The hand obviously had to be supernatural, for it wrote things that no mortal could have been able to know.
- H. The message:
1. “Mene” is a passive participle of “menah.”
    - a. The verb means “to number.” It means not only to count something but to fix the number of something.
    - b. The idea is that God has fixed the days of the kingdom of Belshazzar.
  2. “Tekel” is a passive participle & means “to weigh.” Belshazzar has been weighed in God’s scales & found seriously lacking.
  3. “Peres” means “to break” or “to divide.”
    - a. There may also be a pun with the word Persian with the use of this word.
    - b. The idea is that the kingdom has been divided & given to the Medes & Persians.
- I. Belshazzar was killed that very night.
- J. Darius the Mede, at about 62 years of age, received the kingdom.