DISCOVERING DANIEL

5
LESSON

WORKBOOK STUDY COMPANION · LESSON 5

The End *of an Empire*

DANIEL 5

Scripture written out in the NASB95, every question answered in one sentence, cross references, verse-by-verse commentary from three trusted teachers — and for each question, a point of critical thinking and a key question to carry into the week.

Amir Tsarfati
DISCOVERING DANIEL

John MacArthur
GRACE TO YOU

David Guzik
ENDURING WORD

PREPARED FOR ED & PAUL SMITH · BIBLE STUDY

01 CAPTURE THE SCENE

What do I see?

Using my Bible, working through Daniel 5 verse by verse.

1 Who was at Belshazzar's feast, and what were the people doing that showed contempt for God (see Daniel 5:1-4)?

P. 101

Daniel 5:1 NASB95

Belshazzar the king held a great feast for a thousand of his nobles, and he was drinking wine in the presence of the thousand.

Daniel 5:3-4 NASB95

Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God which was in Jerusalem; and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. They drank the wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.

IN MY WORDS

The king, his thousand nobles, his wives, and his concubines were drinking wine out of the sacred gold vessels stolen from God's temple while they toasted their idols of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

CROSS REFERENCE **1 Corinthians 10:21** "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons."

Amir Tsarfati DISCOVERING DANIEL

Tsarfati sets the scene the text assumes but does not state: the Medo-Persian army was already outside the walls, and Belshazzar answered the siege with a party—defiance dressed up as confidence.

David Guzik ENDURING WORD

Guzik notes this was not private indulgence but public blasphemy; drinking from the temple vessels while praising handmade gods was a deliberate insult aimed straight at the God of Israel.

CRITICAL THINKING

The sin was not merely drunkenness; it was the theology of the toast. Every other god in the room was one they had made—gold they had shaped, stone they had carved—so the vessels of the one God who had made them became props in the celebration of gods who could not. Contempt for God usually shows up first as forgetting who made whom.

KEY QUESTION

What has God given me for holy use that I have quietly repurposed for my own entertainment?

2 What suddenly appeared, and how did the king react (verses 5-6)?

P. 102

Daniel 5:5-6 NASB95

Suddenly the fingers of a man's hand emerged and began writing opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, and the king saw the back of the hand that did the writing. Then the king's face grew pale and his thoughts alarmed him, and his hip joints went slack and his knees began knocking together.

IN MY WORDS

The fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster wall in full lamplight, and the king went pale, his thoughts terrified him, his hips went weak, and his knees knocked together.

CROSS REFERENCE **Hebrews 10:31** "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

David Guzik ENDURING WORD

Guzik points out the hand wrote opposite the lampstand—the best-lit spot in the hall—so no one could dismiss it as a trick of the shadows; God made sure the whole room saw it.

CRITICAL THINKING

A moment earlier Belshazzar was mocking a God he thought was safely distant, and a single disembodied hand undid him from the knees up. It takes very little of God to break a proud man—not a legion, not a voice from the sky, just five fingers. The bravado of blasphemy is always thinner than it looks.

KEY QUESTION

How much of my confidence would survive one unmistakable reminder that God is actually watching?

3 Whom did the king call upon to interpret the writing, and what was the result (verses 7-9)?

P. 103

Daniel 5:7 NASB95

The king called aloud to bring in the conjurers, the Chaldeans and the diviners. The king spoke and said to the wise men of Babylon, "Any man who can read this inscription and explain its interpretation to me shall be clothed with purple and have a necklace of gold around his neck, and have authority as third ruler in the kingdom."

Daniel 5:8-9 NASB95

Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the inscription or make known its interpretation to the king. Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, his face grew even paler, and his nobles were perplexed.

IN MY WORDS

He called in the conjurers, Chaldeans, and diviners and promised purple, a gold necklace, and third place in the kingdom to whoever could read it—but not one of them could read the writing or interpret it, and the king grew even more terrified.

CROSS REFERENCE **1 Corinthians 1:20** "Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?"

John MacArthur GRACE TO YOU

MacArthur observes that Babylon's entire apparatus of occult wisdom—the same experts who had failed Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 2—was again exposed as useless the instant it faced the living God; the world's wisdom always stalls at the one question that matters.

CRITICAL THINKING

They could see the letters and still could not read them. The problem was not eyesight but revelation—the message was in front of them and remained sealed. This is the permanent limitation of human wisdom apart from God: it can catalog the evidence perfectly and still miss the meaning entirely.

KEY QUESTION

Where am I staring at something God has plainly written and asking everyone except Him to explain it?

4 What did the queen suggest that the king do, and why (verses 10-12)?

P. 104

Daniel 5:11-12 NASB95

There is a man in your kingdom in whom is a spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of your father, illumination, insight and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods were found in him… because an extraordinary spirit, knowledge and insight, interpretation of dreams, explanation of enigmas and solving of difficult problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar. Let Daniel now be summoned and he will declare the interpretation.

IN MY WORDS

The queen—almost certainly the queen mother—told Belshazzar to send for Daniel, because from Nebuchadnezzar's day Daniel was known to have the Spirit of God in him and a proven gift for interpreting dreams, solving riddles, and untangling hard problems.

CROSS REFERENCE **Daniel 2:48** Nebuchadnezzar had made Daniel "ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men"—a reputation the palace had since forgotten.

David Guzik ENDURING WORD

Guzik notes it took someone who remembered the old king to rescue the young one; the queen mother had lived through Daniel's earlier ministry and knew the very man the current court had let fade into the background.

CRITICAL THINKING

Everyone in that hall was younger in the faith than the crisis required, except one person who remembered. There is a quiet ministry in simply having been around long enough to say, "I have seen God do this before—go get the man who knows Him." Institutional memory of God's faithfulness is worth more in a crisis than a room full of experts.

KEY QUESTION

Whose memory of God's past faithfulness am I positioned to carry for the people around me?

5 How did the king greet Daniel, and what did he promise if Daniel could read the writing (verses 13-16)?

P. 105

Daniel 5:13 NASB95

Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king spoke and said to Daniel, "Are you that Daniel who is one of the exiles from Judah, whom my father the king brought from Judah?"

Daniel 5:16 NASB95

But I personally have heard about you, that you are able to give interpretations and solve difficult problems. Now if you are able to read the inscription and make its interpretation known to me, you will be clothed with purple and wear a necklace of gold around your neck, and you will have authority as the third ruler in the kingdom.

IN MY WORDS

He greeted Daniel almost dismissively—"Are you that Daniel, one of the exiles?"—and then dangled the same reward he had offered his failed magicians: purple, a gold necklace, and third rank in the kingdom.

CROSS REFERENCE **Proverbs 29:25** "The fear of man brings a snare, but he who trusts in the LORD will be exalted."

John MacArthur GRACE TO YOU

MacArthur notes the king reduced Daniel to his refugee status—"one of the exiles from Judah"—the pride still working even in panic; a proud man will patronize the very person he desperately needs.

CRITICAL THINKING

Belshazzar's greeting reveals what his fear could not fully hide: he still saw Daniel as a captive foreigner, not as a prophet of the God who was at that moment condemning him. Desperation had driven him to summon Daniel, but it had not humbled him enough to honor him. Fear can make a man ask for help without ever making him repent.

KEY QUESTION

Do I seek God's servants for their gift while still refusing to bow to their God?

6 What was Daniel's response to the king's promise of reward (verse 17)?

P. 106

Daniel 5:17 NASB95

Then Daniel answered and said before the king, “Keep your gifts for yourself or give your rewards to someone else; however, I will read the inscription to the king and make the interpretation known to him.”

IN MY WORDS

Daniel refused the gifts outright—“keep them for yourself”—and said he would read and interpret the writing anyway, with no price attached.

CROSS REFERENCE **2 Kings 5:16** Elisha to Naaman: “As the LORD lives, before whom I stand, I will take nothing.”—God's word is not for sale.

Amir Tsarfati DISCOVERING DANIEL

Tsarfati hears in this the freedom of a man who serves the Most High: Daniel could not be bought because he did not need what Belshazzar was offering, and third place in a kingdom about to fall was worth nothing to a man who answered to the King of heaven.

CRITICAL THINKING

The rewards Daniel waved off would be worthless within hours—purple robes on a corpse's empire. Daniel refused them not only because they might compromise the message but because he could already see they were counterfeit. Nothing frees a person from the pull of a bribe like actually believing the kingdom offering it is finished.

KEY QUESTION

What rewards am I still chasing that will not survive the night?

7 Briefly, what did Daniel then say about King Nebuchadnezzar (verses 18-21)?

P. 107

Daniel 5:18-20 NASB95

O king, the Most High God granted sovereignty, grandeur, glory and majesty to Nebuchadnezzar your father… But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit became so proud that he behaved arrogantly, he was deposed from his royal throne and his glory was taken away from him.

Daniel 5:21 NASB95

He was also driven away from mankind, and his heart was made like that of beasts… until he recognized that the Most High God is ruler over the realm of mankind and that He sets over it whomever He wishes.

IN MY WORDS

Daniel reminded Belshazzar that God gave Nebuchadnezzar his greatness, but when his heart grew proud God brought him down—driving him out to live like an animal until he learned that the Most High rules over the kingdoms of men.

CROSS REFERENCE **Proverbs 16:18** "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling."

John MacArthur GRACE TO YOU

MacArthur points out that Daniel preached history before he preached judgment: Belshazzar had a case study in his own family of exactly what pride costs, and had learned nothing from it.

Amir Tsarfati DISCOVERING DANIEL

Tsarfati notes the refrain of the whole book beating through Daniel's words—the Most High rules over the realm of mankind and gives it to whomever He wishes—the truth Nebuchadnezzar finally accepted and Belshazzar refused to.

CRITICAL THINKING

Daniel's sermon was essentially, "You had a front-row seat to this lesson and slept through it." The most dangerous ignorance is not the kind that never had a chance to learn, but the kind that watched someone else pay full tuition and still declined the course. Belshazzar's guilt was not that he lacked evidence; it was that he had the family archive and ignored it.

KEY QUESTION

What lesson has God already taught someone close to me that I am refusing to learn secondhand?

8 What did Daniel condemn Belshazzar for (verses 22-23)?

P. 108

Daniel 5:22-23 NASB95

Yet you, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this, but you have exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of His house before you… and you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which do not see, hear or understand. But the God in whose hand are your life-breath and all your ways, you have not glorified.

IN MY WORDS

Daniel condemned him for refusing to humble himself even though he knew Nebuchadnezzar's story, for exalting himself against the Lord of heaven by desecrating His vessels and praising dead idols, and for failing to glorify the God who held his very breath in His hand.

CROSS REFERENCE **Romans 1:21** "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks."

David Guzik ENDURING WORD

Guzik highlights the hinge phrase—"even though you knew all this." Belshazzar did not sin in ignorance; he sinned against light, which is a heavier thing.

Amir Tsarfati DISCOVERING DANIEL

Tsarfati draws out the sharpest line: the God "in whose hand are your life-breath and all your ways, you have not glorified"—Belshazzar owed his next heartbeat to the very God he was mocking.

CRITICAL THINKING

The indictment climaxes not with the blasphemy but with the ingratitude: the God he refused to glorify was the one holding his breath in His hand at that exact moment. Every second Belshazzar spent insulting God was a second God was actively keeping him alive. The deepest charge against him was not what he did to the vessels but what he withheld from the God who sustained him.

KEY QUESTION

Am I glorifying the God in whose hand my very next breath is held?

9 What did the words on the wall say (verses 24-28)?

P. 109

Daniel 5:25-28 NASB95

"Now this is the inscription that was written out: 'MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.' This is the interpretation of the message: 'MENE'—God has numbered your kingdom and put an end to it. 'TEKEL'—you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient. 'PERES'—your kingdom has been divided and given over to the Medes and Persians."

IN MY WORDS

The words were MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN—God has numbered the days of your kingdom and ended it; you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient; and your kingdom is divided and handed over to the Medes and Persians.

CROSS REFERENCE **1 Samuel 2:3** "for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and with Him actions are weighed."

David Guzik ENDURING WORD

Guzik explains the words were the names of weights and coins—numbered, numbered, weighed, and divided—so the wise men may have read the letters yet missed that they were a verdict, a divine accounting rendered against the king.

John MacArthur GRACE TO YOU

MacArthur notes the terrifying economy of it: no lengthy charge, just four words of settled judgment—God had already done the counting and the weighing, and only the sentence remained to be read.

CRITICAL THINKING

TEKEL is the most searching word on the wall—"weighed and found deficient." Belshazzar was not measured against other kings, who were also wicked; he was set on God's scale and came up short of God's standard. A man can outweigh every rival he compares himself to and still register as nothing on the only balance that counts.

KEY QUESTION

If I were weighed tonight on God's scale rather than against the people around me, what would the needle say?

10 What happened later that night (verses 30-31)?

P. 110

Daniel 5:30-31 NASB95

That same night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain. So Darius the Mede received the kingdom at about the age of sixty-two.

IN MY WORDS

That very night Belshazzar was killed and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom—the sentence on the wall was carried out before the sun came up.

CROSS REFERENCE **Luke 12:20** "You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?"

Amir Tsarfati DISCOVERING DANIEL

Tsarfati notes the precision of fulfilled prophecy—Babylon the head of gold gives way to Medo-Persia the chest of silver from the chapter 2 statue, exactly as God had shown Nebuchadnezzar decades before.

John MacArthur GRACE TO YOU

MacArthur underscores the speed: there was no interval for second thoughts or a change of policy—between the reading and the reckoning was a single night.

CRITICAL THINKING

The gap between the warning and the judgment was a matter of hours, and Belshazzar spent even those hours unrepentant. God's patience had a last page, and Belshazzar was living on it without knowing it. The frightening thing about an “appointed time” is that it never announces which night it is.

KEY QUESTION

If tonight were the night my account came due, is anything left unsettled between me and God?

02 ANALYZE THE MESSAGE

What does it say and mean?

Using both my Bible and my copy of Discovering Daniel.

1 Where had the gold and silver vessels that King Belshazzar used in his feast come from (see Daniel 5:2-3)?

P. 102

Daniel 5:2 NASB95

When Belshazzar tasted the wine, he gave orders to bring the gold and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them.

IN MY WORDS

They came from the temple of God in Jerusalem, plundered by Nebuchadnezzar when he conquered Judah roughly seventy years earlier and stored away as spoils of war.

CROSS REFERENCE **Daniel 1:2** "The Lord gave Jehoiakim… into his hand… and he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and he brought the vessels into the treasury of his god."

David Guzik ENDURING WORD

Guzik notes these vessels had been set apart for the worship of the living God; to drink from them at an idol feast was to take what was holy and drag it deliberately into the profane.

CRITICAL THINKING

Nebuchadnezzar took the vessels but never dared to drink from them—he stored them in a temple treasury with a kind of superstitious respect. It was the grandson, further from the God of Israel and more sure of himself, who crossed the line his conqueror grandfather would not. Distance from God tends to grow bolder, not more careful, with each generation.

KEY QUESTION

What did the generation before me still treat as holy that I am tempted to treat as ordinary?

2 How did God react to His sacred vessels being used in such a flippant manner (see page 104 in Discovering Daniel)?

P. 104

Daniel 5:5 NASB95

Suddenly the fingers of a man's hand emerged and began writing opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, and the king saw the back of the hand that did the writing.

IN MY WORDS

God reacted immediately and personally—the moment they toasted their idols with His holy vessels, His own hand appeared on the wall and wrote the sentence of judgment.

CROSS REFERENCE **Galatians 6:7** "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap."

Amir Tsarfati DISCOVERING DANIEL

Tsarfati frames it as the tipping point of the night: Belshazzar had crossed from indulgence into open mockery of God, and God answered the blasphemy on the spot—no messenger, no delay, His hand against the wall of the king's own palace.

CRITICAL THINKING

The word to notice is “suddenly.” There was no thunderclap of warning, no prophet at the door first—God let the toast finish and then wrote. His patience with Babylon had lasted decades, but the response to this particular act was instant. Long forbearance and sudden judgment are not opposites; they are the two ends of the same rope.

KEY QUESTION

Have I mistaken God's long patience for God's indifference?

3 As we read the account of what happened in the banquet hall, what clues are we given about the fear and desperation felt by Belshazzar and the partygoers (see verses 6-9)?

P. 106

Daniel 5:6 NASB95

Then the king's face grew pale and his thoughts alarmed him, and his hip joints went slack and his knees began knocking together.

Daniel 5:9 NASB95

Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, his face grew even paler, and his nobles were perplexed.

IN MY WORDS

The clues are physical and public—a face drained white and then whiter, thoughts in turmoil, hips gone weak, knees literally knocking, a king shouting for the occultists, and a whole company of nobles left baffled and afraid.

CROSS REFERENCE **Isaiah 21:3-4** “my mind reels, horror overwhelms me”—the same collapse of the confident when God's judgment draws near.

John MacArthur GRACE TO YOU

MacArthur observes the collapse was total and involuntary; the man who had felt secure enough to mock God could not even keep his own knees from betraying him. Guilt exposed strips composure faster than any army could.

CRITICAL THINKING

Minutes earlier this was the most powerful man in the room, and now his body is broadcasting terror he cannot govern. The feast was an attempt to project control while the enemy stood at the gates, and one hand on the wall demolished the performance. Bravado is only ever a costume; fear is what is underneath when God pulls it off.

KEY QUESTION

What am I using noise, activity, or bravado to keep from feeling?

4 What does the fact Belshazzar had to be reminded about Daniel's past exploits tell you about Belshazzar?

P. 107

Daniel 5:11 NASB95

There is a man in your kingdom in whom is a spirit of the holy gods… And King Nebuchadnezzar, your father, your father the king, appointed him chief of the magicians, conjurers, Chaldeans and diviners.

IN MY WORDS

It tells me he was spiritually careless and self-absorbed—he had let the godliest, wisest man in his kingdom fade into the background and had ignored the very lessons of God's dealings under his own grandfather.

CROSS REFERENCE **Judges 2:10** "there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel."

David Guzik ENDURING WORD

Guzik notes Daniel was likely in his eighties and pushed to the margins of a court that no longer had time for the God he served; a man does not forget a prophet like Daniel by accident but by choosing other counsel.

CRITICAL THINKING

Daniel had not left; Belshazzar had simply stopped consulting him. The most important voice in the kingdom was still available the whole time—it just was not wanted until the wall lit up. We rarely lose access to godly wisdom in a dramatic break; we let it go quiet by never asking, and then are surprised we have to be reminded it exists.

KEY QUESTION

Whose God-given wisdom have I let go silent in my life simply by never asking for it?

5 What does Daniel's rejection of the king's offer of rewards tell you about Daniel's motives and priorities?

P. 108

Daniel 5:17 NASB95

Then Daniel answered and said before the king, "Keep your gifts for yourself or give your rewards to someone else; however, I will read the inscription to the king and make the interpretation known to him."

IN MY WORDS

It tells me Daniel served God and not gain—his priority was to deliver God's truth faithfully, not to profit from it, and he refused to let a reward make it look as though the message had been bought or softened.

CROSS REFERENCE **Matthew 6:24** "No one can serve two masters… You cannot serve God and wealth."

John MacArthur GRACE TO YOU

MacArthur notes the integrity of a man who would not take payment for God's word, especially payment that might tempt him to shade the message; Daniel's freedom from the reward was the guarantee of his honesty.

CRITICAL THINKING

Refusing the reward before speaking was itself part of the sermon. Had Daniel accepted purple and gold and then pronounced doom, the message would have been unimpeachable anyway—but by refusing first, he made unmistakable that no earthly incentive was steering a single word. The messenger who wants nothing from you is the one you can trust to tell you everything.

KEY QUESTION

Is there any reward shaping what I am willing to say to the people I should be telling the truth?

6 What does the meaning of the four words MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN—as well as the swiftness of the judgment that followed—tell us about how God felt toward Belshazzar?

P. 109

Daniel 5:26-28 NASB95

"'MENE'—God has numbered your kingdom and put an end to it. 'TEKEL'—you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient. 'PERES'—your kingdom has been divided and given over to the Medes and Persians."

IN MY WORDS

It tells me God's patience with Belshazzar had run completely out—the words announce a finished, final verdict already reached, and its execution that same night shows settled judgment rather than a warning meant to bring him to repentance.

CROSS REFERENCE **Proverbs 29:1** "A man who hardens his neck after much reproof will suddenly be broken beyond remedy."

Amir Tsarfati DISCOVERING DANIEL

Tsarfati stresses the finality: "numbered… and put an end to it" is not a threat to be averted but a sentence already passed. Belshazzar had been given the light of his grandfather's example and refused it, and the time for warnings was over.

CRITICAL THINKING

There is no "unless" anywhere in the writing. Nebuchadnezzar's earlier judgment came with a road back—humble yourself and be restored—but Belshazzar's came as a closed accounting: numbered, weighed, divided, done. God's mercy is vast, but it is not infinite in the sense of never concluding; the same God who waits a lifetime can also write a final line.

KEY QUESTION

Am I presuming on a mercy that has, for others before me, come to a last page?

7 Why do you think Daniel was willing to speak so boldly against King Belshazzar, even though that could mean a death sentence?

P. 110

Daniel 5:23 NASB95

But the God in whose hand are your life-breath and all your ways, you have not glorified.

IN MY WORDS

Because after a lifetime with God, Daniel feared the Lord far more than he feared the king, had nothing left to gain or protect at his age, and knew that his life was in God's hand and not Belshazzar's.

CROSS REFERENCE **Acts 5:29** "We must obey God rather than men."

David Guzik ENDURING WORD

Guzik notes an old prophet has learned that the God who kept him through Nebuchadnezzar, through the lions still ahead, and through seventy years of exile was not going to be outmatched by a doomed king's threat; boldness like this is the fruit of a long obedience.

Amir Tsarfati DISCOVERING DANIEL

Tsarfati points to the phrase Daniel had just used—the God in whose hand is Belshazzar's own breath—as the reason Daniel could not be intimidated: the king holding the death sentence did not even hold his own next breath.

CRITICAL THINKING

Daniel's boldness was not recklessness; it was arithmetic. He had spent a lifetime learning that the God who numbers a king's days also numbers a prophet's, and no tyrant can shorten a life God is not finished using. The man who truly believes his times are in God's hand becomes almost impossible to threaten.

KEY QUESTION

What could someone actually take from me that God has not already secured?

8 For what three reasons did the king sit there and take Daniel's words (see page 110 in Discovering Daniel)?

P. 110

Daniel 5:22 NASB95

Yet you, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this.

IN MY WORDS

He took it because he was desperate and out of every other option, because Daniel's God had just proved undeniably real by writing on his wall, and because his own conscience knew every word of the charge was true—he had no answer to give.

CROSS REFERENCE **John 3:20** "For everyone who does evil hates the Light… so that his deeds will not be exposed."—yet Belshazzar could not look away.

Amir Tsarfati DISCOVERING DANIEL

Tsarfati's reading of the scene is that Belshazzar had run out of alternatives; the wise men had failed, the writing still stood on the wall, and the only voice that could interpret it was the one condemning him—so he sat and listened because there was nothing else left to do.

CRITICAL THINKING

A king with armies and executioners sat still under the rebuke of an unpaid old exile, and the reason was that the truth had cornered him. Conviction can pin a powerful man to his chair when no soldier could. But sitting still under the truth is not the same as bowing to it—Belshazzar heard every word and still did not humble his heart.

KEY QUESTION

When the truth corners me, do I merely sit and absorb it, or do I actually bend?

03 COMPARE THIS PASSAGE WITH THE REST OF SCRIPTURE

How is it supported elsewhere in the Bible?

Babylon fell because it never grasped how vulnerable it had become—four times Scripture shows God's patience running out.

1 The Flood (Genesis 6-7).

P. 111

Genesis 6:5 NASB95

Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

a. What does Genesis 6:5 tell us mankind was like during the days of Noah?

IN MY WORDS

It tells me humanity was thoroughly corrupt—that every intent of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually, wickedness with no relief in it.

CROSS REFERENCE **Genesis 6:5** "every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."

b. What did God resolve to do (see verse 7)?

IN MY WORDS

He resolved to blot out man and the living creatures from the face of the earth, grieved that He had made them.

CROSS REFERENCE **Genesis 6:7** "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land… for I am sorry that I have made them."

c. Did anyone outside of Noah's family come to repentance and join them on the ark (see Genesis 7:7)?

IN MY WORDS

No—only Noah, his wife, his sons, and his sons' wives entered the ark; a hundred and twenty years of warning brought not one outsider to repentance.

CROSS REFERENCE **2 Peter 2:5** God "did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah… with seven others."—eight souls, no more.

David Guzik ENDURING WORD

Guzik notes the flood generation had Noah's preaching and the slow, public building of the ark as a standing sermon for decades; judgment came not because they lacked warning but because they despised it.

CRITICAL THINKING

The most sobering line is the count: eight people. Noah preached for around a hundred and twenty years and persuaded no one outside his own household. Faithfulness is not measured by the size of the response—Noah was completely obedient and almost completely unheeded, and God still called him righteous.

KEY QUESTION

Would I keep obeying God at length if, like Noah, I saw almost no one respond?

2 Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18-19).

Genesis 19:12-13 NASB95

Then the two men said to Lot, “Whom else have you here? A son-in-law, and your sons, and your daughters, and whomever you have in the city, bring them out of the place; for we are about to destroy this place, because their outcry has become so great before the LORD that the LORD has sent us to destroy it.”

a. What did God say about Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18:20?

IN MY WORDS

He said the outcry over Sodom and Gomorrah was very great and their sin exceedingly grave.

CROSS REFERENCE **Genesis 18:20** “The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave.”

b. In Genesis 19:12-13, what warning was given to Lot and his family about Sodom and Gomorrah, and why?

IN MY WORDS

The angels warned Lot to get everyone he had out of the city because they were about to destroy it, since its outcry had become so great before the LORD that He had sent them to destroy it.

CROSS REFERENCE **Genesis 19:13** “we are about to destroy this place, because their outcry has become so great before the LORD.”

c. What judgment did God pour out upon the two cities and the surrounding area (see verse 24)?

IN MY WORDS

The LORD rained down burning sulfur and fire out of heaven upon Sodom, Gomorrah, and the whole plain.

CROSS REFERENCE **Genesis 19:24** “Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven.”

John MacArthur GRACE TO YOU

MacArthur notes God's justice is never blind or arbitrary—the sin had reached a point where the outcry itself demanded response; even here God rescued the one righteous household first, for the Judge of all the earth deals justly.

CRITICAL THINKING

Even in this judgment God moved to get Lot out before the fire fell—mercy operating inside the very act of wrath. But notice how Lot's warning was received: his sons-in-law thought he was joking. Familiarity with a doomed city had dulled them so completely that a warning of fire sounded like a punch line.

KEY QUESTION

Is there a warning from God that I have started treating as a joke because I have lived alongside the danger too long?

3 Babylon the Great—Revelation 18.

Revelation 18:2-3 NASB95

And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit… For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality.”

a. How does an angel describe the sins of Babylon the Great, the political and economic system of the Antichrist (see verses 2-3)?

IN MY WORDS

The angel declares her fallen and become a dwelling of demons, saying all the nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her immorality and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from her sensual luxury.

CROSS REFERENCE **Revelation 18:2** "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons."

b. What did another voice say about the sins of Babylon (see verse 5)?

IN MY WORDS

Another voice from heaven said her sins had piled up as high as heaven and that God had remembered her iniquities.

CROSS REFERENCE **Revelation 18:5** "for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities."

c. How quickly are we told that Babylon's judgment will take place (see verse 8)?

IN MY WORDS

In a single day—her plagues of death, mourning, and famine come, and she is burned up with fire, because the Lord God who judges her is strong.

CROSS REFERENCE **Revelation 18:8** "For this reason in one day her plagues will come… and she will be burned up with fire."

Amir Tsarfati DISCOVERING DANIEL

Tsarfati links the two Babylons directly—the literal city that fell in one night under Belshazzar is the preview of the final world system of the Antichrist, which Revelation says falls just as suddenly and just as completely.

CRITICAL THINKING

Historical Babylon fell in one night; end-times Babylon falls in one day. The pattern is deliberate—God is showing that the collapse of Belshazzar's empire was a rehearsal for the collapse of every God-defying system that will ever rise. What happened on the wall in Daniel 5 is a trailer for the last chapter of world history.

KEY QUESTION

Am I investing my life in a system God has already announced He will bring down in a day?

4 The World in Our Day (2 Timothy 3:1-5). In 2 Timothy 3:1-5, the apostle Paul warned what mankind would be like as we approach the end times.

P. 114

2 Timothy 3:1-5 NASB95

But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.

IN MY WORDS

Paul's list of the last days reads like a description of Belshazzar's banquet and of our own culture—people who love themselves, money, and pleasure more than God, keeping an outward form of religion while denying its power—which means God's patience is once again running toward its limit.

CROSS REFERENCE **2 Chronicles 36:16** "they continually mocked the messengers of God… until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, until there was no remedy."

David Guzik ENDURING WORD

Guzik reminds us this is not primarily about pagans but about a form of godliness that has denied its power—religion kept as a costume; the same self-satisfied blindness that toasted idols with holy cups can wear a churchgoing face.

CRITICAL THINKING

The chilling phrase is not any single vice but "holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power." Belshazzar did not deny that gods existed—he had a whole pantheon and used sacred vessels to honor them. The last-days danger Paul names is not open atheism but hollow religion, which is exactly what filled that banquet hall.

KEY QUESTION

Do I hold a form of godliness while quietly denying its power in how I actually live?

04 EXECUTE

How does this affect my life?

Bringing Daniel 5 home to my own walk.

1 What are some ways that we as Christians test the patience of God?

P. 115

Romans 2:4 NASB95

Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?

IN MY WORDS

We test His patience by presuming on His grace as a license to keep sinning, by delaying obedience we already know He wants, by treating conviction as optional, and by mistaking His slowness to judge for approval of how we live.

CROSS REFERENCE **2 Peter 3:9** "The Lord is not slow about His promise… but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish."

John MacArthur GRACE TO YOU

MacArthur warns that God's kindness is meant to lead us to repentance, not to embolden us in sin; to read His patience as permission is to repeat Belshazzar's exact error.

CRITICAL THINKING

Belshazzar's sin was not that he had never heard of God but that he had banked on God staying quiet. Every believer runs the same risk in miniature: the longer God waits before dealing with a known sin, the easier it becomes to assume He does not mind. Patience misread becomes presumption, and presumption is what wrote on the wall.

KEY QUESTION

Where have I started reading God's patience with a particular sin as His permission for it?

2 What question does the apostle Paul ask in Romans 6:1? And how does he answer in verse 2?

P. 115

Romans 6:1-2 NASB95

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?

IN MY WORDS

Paul asks whether we should keep sinning so grace can increase, and answers with an emphatic "May it never be!"—for we who have died to sin cannot go on living in it.

CROSS REFERENCE **Galatians 2:20** "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me."

David Guzik ENDURING WORD

Guzik notes Paul's answer is not that continuing in sin is forbidden so much as that it is absurd—a person who has genuinely died to sin cannot comfortably go on living in the very thing they died to.

CRITICAL THINKING

Paul does not answer the question with a rule; he answers it with an identity. The reason a believer does not go on sinning that grace may abound is not fear of punishment but the strangeness of a dead man returning to his grave. Grace does not merely forgive the old life—it ends it, and you cannot keep living somewhere you have already died.

KEY QUESTION

Am I trying to keep living in something I claim to have died to?

3 What exhortations are we given in the following passages?

P. 116

a. 2 Corinthians 13:5

IN MY WORDS

I am to test and examine myself to see whether I am actually in the faith, rather than assuming it.

CROSS REFERENCE **2 Corinthians 13:5** "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves!"

b. 2 Peter 1:10-11

IN MY WORDS

I am to be all the more diligent to make my calling and election sure, because practicing these things keeps me from stumbling and secures a rich welcome into Christ's eternal kingdom.

CROSS REFERENCE **2 Peter 1:10** "be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you… you will never stumble."

c. 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22

IN MY WORDS

I am to examine everything carefully, hold fast to what is good, and abstain from every form of evil.

CROSS REFERENCE **1 Thessalonians 5:21-22** "examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil."

John MacArthur GRACE TO YOU

MacArthur notes that self-examination is not morbid introspection but Christian realism; the same Scriptures that assure the believer also command him to check that the assurance rests on genuine faith.

CRITICAL THINKING

Each of these commands puts the scale in my own hands before God ever has to pick it up. Belshazzar was weighed against his will and by surprise; the believer is told to do the weighing now, deliberately, while there is still time to respond. Self-examination is simply refusing to let TEKEL be the first time I am measured.

KEY QUESTION

When did I last honestly examine myself instead of just assuming I am fine?

4 Why do you think frequent self-introspection is so important for us as believers?

P. 116

Psalm 139:23-24 NASB95

Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.

IN MY WORDS

Because sin grows quietly and the heart drifts without announcing it, so regular self-examination catches small compromises before they harden and keeps me honest, humble, and dependent on grace instead of coasting on assumptions.

CROSS REFERENCE **1 Corinthians 11:28** "But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup."

David Guzik ENDURING WORD

Guzik points out the psalmist does not merely examine himself; he invites God to do the searching, knowing our own audits are too gentle on us—real introspection ends by asking God to show us what we cannot see.

CRITICAL THINKING

The reason frequent examination matters is that decline is silent. Belshazzar did not wake up one morning intending to blaspheme; he arrived there by a thousand small unexamined steps away from his grandfather's God. A heart checked often stays close; a heart never checked does not stay still—it wanders, and only notices when the wall lights up.

KEY QUESTION

What small drift would a search of my heart today turn up before it becomes a wall-writing?

5 What is God's will for us, according to 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5?

P. 117

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 NASB95

For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God.

IN MY WORDS

God's will is my sanctification—that I be set apart to Him in holiness, abstaining from sexual immorality and governing my body in purity and honor rather than in the passions of those who do not know Him.

CROSS REFERENCE **1 Peter 1:15-16** "like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior… 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'"

John MacArthur GRACE TO YOU

MacArthur notes Paul defines God's will not first as a decision to discern but as a character to pursue; before I ever ask what God wants me to do, Scripture says what God wants me to be—holy.

CRITICAL THINKING

We often agonize over God's will as if it were a hidden location, when the first thing Scripture calls His will is a condition: sanctification. Belshazzar wanted an interpretation of the writing; God wanted a changed man. Before God tells me where to go, He tells me who to become—and the second question is usually the one I am actually avoiding.

KEY QUESTION

Am I chasing God's will for my decisions while dodging His clearly stated will for my purity?

6 What call are we given in Romans 12:1-2?

P. 117

Romans 12:1-2 NASB95

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

IN MY WORDS

We are called to present our whole selves to God as a living, holy sacrifice, refusing to be conformed to this world and instead being transformed by the renewing of our minds so we can prove and live out His good, acceptable, and perfect will.

CROSS REFERENCE **Galatians 6:14** "the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

Amir Tsarfati DISCOVERING DANIEL

Tsarfati draws the contrast with Babylon: the banquet hall was the world's pattern in full display—self, pleasure, and idolatry—while Romans calls the believer to be transformed out of that mold and set wholly on the altar of the living God.

CRITICAL THINKING

The two dangers are conformity and transformation, and they pull in opposite directions on the same person. Belshazzar was fully conformed—poured into the mold of his culture until he fit it perfectly and could no longer see God at all. The renewing of the mind is the only thing that keeps a believer from being quietly pressed into the same shape as the room he lives in.

KEY QUESTION

In what area am I being quietly conformed to the world's mold instead of transformed out of it?

7 Why do you think God so greatly desires for us to pursue purity and Christlikeness?

P. 118

2 Corinthians 3:18 NASB95

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

IN MY WORDS

Because He made us to reflect His own character, purity is where we are most free and most useful to Him, and Christlikeness is both the goal of our salvation and the truest evidence that we belong to Him.

CROSS REFERENCE **Romans 8:29** "He predestined [us] to become conformed to the image of His Son."

David Guzik ENDURING WORD

Guzik notes God's desire for our holiness is not the demand of a killjoy but the love of a Father restoring His children to what they were made to be—the image of Christ, which is where our deepest good and His glory finally meet.

CRITICAL THINKING

God's pursuit of our purity is not Him withholding pleasure but Him refusing to let us settle for Belshazzar's version of it. The banquet promised joy and delivered terror; holiness looks costly and delivers freedom. God wants our Christlikeness because He wants us actually whole—and because a life conformed to Christ is the one argument the watching world still cannot answer.

KEY QUESTION

Do I see God's call to holiness as Him taking something from me, or restoring me to what I was made for?

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Belshazzar had an appointed time. According to Psalm 139:16, every one of our days was written in God's book before there was yet one of them — He is the One who numbers our days and decides how much time we are given to do His will. The tragedy of Daniel 5 is not merely that a king died, but that the window closed while he was still toasting idols with the cups of the living God. He had a lifetime of warning in his own family and spent his last night mocking the God who held his breath.

The word that ought to arrest me is TEKEL — "you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient." Belshazzar was not weighed against Nebuchadnezzar or against the other kings of the earth; he was set on God's own scale. And that is the scale I will one day stand on too. For the believer, the judgment is not about salvation — Christ has already borne the wrath, and there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). But 1 Corinthians 3 says our work will still be tried by fire to see what it was made of: gold and silver and precious stones, or wood, hay, and straw.

So the question Daniel 5 leaves me with is not only "Is my account settled?" but "What am I building with the days I have left?" Belshazzar had time and squandered it on a party. Paul says to make the most of our time, because the days are evil (Ephesians 5:16). The handwriting on the wall was God numbering a wasted life — and every life He numbers, He also means to be spent on things that will last when the fire has tested them.

> *"TEKEL — you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient."*
>
> **Daniel 5:27**

Most of us will never see a hand write on a wall. But every one of us has an appointed number of days, and a God in whose hand our very breath is held. The lesson of Belshazzar is that the reckoning is nearer and more personal than we let ourselves believe, and that no amount of noise, wealth, or religion will move the needle on God's scale. Settle the account now through Christ, who alone tips the balance — and then spend what is left of the numbered days building the gold, and not the straw.

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