

The Writing's on the Wall

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[0:00] Daniel chapter 5, page 742. Daniel chapter 5. We're going to read the whole chapter.
Daniel chapter 5.

Daniel chapter 5.

The king called loudly to bring in the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers. The king declared to the wise men of Babylon, Whoever reads this writing and shows me its interpretation shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold round his neck and shall be the third ruler of the kingdom.

then all the king's wise men came in but they could not read the writing or make known to the king the interpretation then king belshazzar was greatly alarmed and his color changed and his lords were perplexed the queen because of the words of the king and his lords came into the banqueting hall and the queen declared oh king live forever let not your thoughts alarm you or your color change but as a man in your kingdom in whom is the spirit of the holy gods in the days of your father light and understanding and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods were found in him and king nebuchadnezzar your father your father the king made him chief of the musicians enchanters chaldeans and astrologers because an excellent spirit knowledge and understanding to interpret dreams explain riddles and solve problems were found in this daniel whom the king named belshazzar now let daniel be called and he will show the interpretation 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 my king the 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 to make known to me its interpretation but they could not show the interpretation of the matter but i've 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 oh 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 it over 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 you have brought in before you and you and your lord 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 many many tekels and parsins this is the interpretation of the matter many god has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end tekels you have been weighed in the balances and found

wanting perez or parsins your kingdom is divided and given to the medes and persians then belshazzar gave the command and daniel was clothed with purple chain of gold was put round 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 62 years old amen may god bless his word the english language we all know is heavily shaped by the bible for example in daniel chapter 5 and verse 6 we read of a terrified king that his knees knocked together knocking knees has become an english expression linked to being extremely afraid we talk about someone's knees knocking before they have to make a speech but most famously from daniel 5 we have the english expression the writings on the wall the writings on the wall it's a picture of impending doom and disaster when the writings on the wall something bad's going to happen there's nothing you can do to stop it so a relationship has soured beyond the point of no return you know it's doomed and you say of it the writings on the wall the book of daniel for some reason is filled with these expressions for example the fiery furnace the lion's den among many others but it's not its impact upon the english language which makes the book of daniel so important to us it's what it tells us about god and the way god works human kings come and go nebuchadnezzar disappears from the scene at the end of daniel chapter 4 to be replaced by his son or perhaps even grandson belshazzar in daniel chapter 5 human kings come and go but god remains the same and the way he works remains the same heaven still rules and god is still with his people in their exile in babylon daniel 5 is a chapter really like no other if you put yourself in belshazzar of babylon's shoes it sends a shiver down your spine it's not every day you see a ghostly hand writing on a wall it reminds us that christianity is a fundamentally supernatural religion far more supernatural than spiritualism paganism and other kinds of hocus pocus people talk about today what is the resurrection of jesus from the dead if it's not the greatest demonstration of the supernatural well daniel 5 begins with a celebration and ends with an assassination it begins with a festivity and ends with a fatality it's priceless drama it's better than anything written by shakespeare however it's not about drama remember it's about god it's about the way god works we want to see five things from this chapter like no other first of all a party like no other then a message like no other a prophet like no other a foolishness like no other

[9:57] and a judgment like no other as we're going to see the writing was on the wall for king belshazzar because of his sin idolatry and rejection of god the writing's on the wall for everyone who turns their back on god whether we live in 5th century 5th century bc babylon or 21st century a.d glasgow so first of all here we have a party like no other a party like no other we don't know what prompted the occasion of belshazzar's party perhaps he didn't need an excuse whatever he made a feast for a thousand of his lords important political officials senior military men he was enjoying the party so much he decided to bring out the best silver and gold vessels from which to drink a few years ago i read that the type of mug from which you drink coffee can change the taste of the coffee and maybe the same is true for wine also i don't know maybe the kind of vessel you drink it from makes it taste better or worse or perhaps there was a more sinister reason a drunken belshazzar wanted to boast about the power of the empire he wanted to show off so he decided to play with fire and as we read in verse 3 he brought in the golden vessels that had been taken out from the temple the house of god in jerusalem and the king and his lords his wives and his concubines drank from them so the party's in full swing and a drunken belshazzar has decided to do something not even his father nebuchadnezzar would have done nebuchadnezzar respected the religions of the people he had subdued he refrained from anything that might have precipitated a rebellion against babylon belshazzar didn't possess half his father's wisdom by using the most precious symbols of israel's heritage he was dicing with death the possibility that the jews in his empire would rise up against him but as with many tyrants he didn't care about the consequences of his actions his power his prestige and his pleasure were more important to him than anything else he could not have insulted the jews any more if he had tried he profaned their holiest of things these vessels were ancient they were consecrated by the hands of the great kings and priests of israel some of them may have dated back to the days of the tabernacle in the wilderness forged from gold and silver taken from the egyptians during the days of the exodus they were holy they were set apart for the service of god himself sanctified by him and devoted to him and now they're being used for a drunken orgy in babylon to make matters worse rather than salute the god from whom these vessels were taken in verse 4 we read they drank wine and praised the gods of gold and silver bronze iron and wood and stone they used these sacred vessels devoted to the service of god worshipping them as idols they took holy items and disfigured dishonored and degraded them and by extension mocked the god to whose service they had been devoted like those soldiers who spat on and beat jesus with rods they spat on the one true and living god

now here's a pattern we see repeated in the bible powerful men partying and mocking god king headed through a party and it led to john the baptist being beheaded but god will not be mocked when a person is driven to stupor by power drink intelligence status money whatever it leads to the mocking god the drive toward the mockery of the christian faith in scotland initially came from people who were puffed up with pride because of their political power and their academic brilliance they dishonored holy scripture they degraded the holy church they disfigured the holy image of god in humanity as do many still today we must be careful that in our drunkenness and whatever that stupor consists god is not mocked lest it leads to the collective knees of our society knocking together and god writing on the walls for us the most chilling experience i ever had in the ministry was when two former members of our church who had left the faith phoned me late one evening from a pub their intention was to tease me and to laugh at me now i felt sorry for them very sorry for them for neither had turned out to be happy successful or good men the drink they had consumed made them do something foolishly stupid not content with leaving the faith in which they'd been brought up they mocked it theirs was a party like no other at one of the pubs in town i pray that in days to come they may both repent and turn to the faith they once abandoned but both they and our society as a whole so a party like no other second here we have a message like no other a message like no other the babylonian babylon society was very superstitious there are some elements of that society which have come down to us today for example the horoscope you'll get in the daily paper are a direct lift from the magicians of babylon that's a babylonian magical trick but for all it was superstitious it was not supernatural anything mystical about babylonian society was man-made it's the kind of spookiness you get from watching tv shows like ghost hunters it's all smoke it's all mirrors so the babylonians no less than we would be were shocked when something genuinely supernatural took place right in front of their eyes put yourself in the room right a room the size of maybe the st vincent street sanctuary hear the drunken laughter witness the events of verse 5 immediately the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace opposite the lampstand the god who was being mocked sent the message fingers of a human hand be they physical or ghostly appeared out of thin air from nowhere these aren't words from a man's mouth a hand has appeared and it's writing on the wall of the king's palace king belshazzar i'm sure had hundreds of guards to protect his palace from invading soldiers but he couldn't protect it from god because we can't hide from god no matter how we try to insulate ourselves from him he will always fight us in his pride the king of babylon thought he could mock god but now he learns different the light writes opposite the lampstand the lampstand throwing light on the hand itself so that everyone in that room however many thousands there were could see it god's not working in secret god's not working in private this this messenger like no other delivers a message like no other right in the palace of the king of babylon put yourself there there are thousands of people there and you're one of them you're having a great time and suddenly out of thin air you see the fingers of a human hand writing on a wall the hairs on the back of your neck stand up and your knees begin to knock we read in verse 6 the king's color changes all color drains from his face as does when we get a fright his thoughts alarm him his limbs give way and his knees are knocking he was the big man but he's not so big now he was the tough guy but he's not so tough now because you see god's got a way of humbling the great and the mighty god's got a way of bringing tough guys down there is no one too big for god to humble and terrify with the supernatural power he humbled belshazzar not by sending an army with tanks into babylon but with a human hand writing on a wall perhaps there's someone in your life you know who you think of as being too tough and hard to accept the gospel of jesus christ oh they're just too tough they'll never accept it be assured the writing's on the wall for them and god through his spirit and word can speak to them and bring them down he humbled the centurion at the foot of the cross he humbled the philippian jailer both hard men our job is to share the gospel with these hard men and let god do his supernaturally heart-changing work in them just as he has in us no one's too great no one's too hard no one's too tough for god and if you doubt me ask of belshazzar here's a message like no other third we have a prophet like no other a prophet like no other well king belshazzar's response was to turn to the magicians of babylon when his mind turned against him he consulted the doctors of his day the magicians but none of them could interpret the writing it's not that they didn't understand what was written many many tekem and parson are aramaic words the words spoken by the exiled jews the words which jesus would have spoken because he spoke aramaic the babylonians could easily translate it into the language of babylon but they did not know what it meant not all the greatness of their magic could understand it

the king least of all but he knew it was a message for him and when he learned that his magicians couldn't interpret it he grew even more terrified throughout the book of daniel the so-called wise men of society have been shown not to be quite so wise after all they can't interpret nebuchadnezzar's dream they can't interpret the writing on a wall belshazzar's queen or queen mother came to him and she told him that in his father's day there was a man and I quote from verse 11 in whom is the spirit of the gods the days of your father light and understanding and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods were found in him king nebuchadnezzar made him chief of the magicians enchanters chaldeans and astrologers because an excellent spirit knowledge and understanding to interpret dreams explain riddles and solve problems were found in this daniel in the years since nebuchadnezzar's reign everyone had forgotten about daniel but now the queen tells her husband or son about him that in all of babylon there is no one whose wisdom is greater for daniel possesses the wisdom of the gods even the babylonians recognized that daniel was the greatest prophet in all of babylon far greater than their own magicians and astrologers and enchanters in the mind of the babylonians daniel was a prophet like no other and as we've consistently seen through this whole series in the book of daniel daniel is following joseph in a list of the prophets in exile who speak truth to worldly power who interpret the dreams of pharaohs and emperors rising to high position in the empires into which they have been exiled but these prophets like joseph and daniel we've seen this they're but shadows of the greatest of all prophets the lord jesus christ who makes god known by his righteous life and his sacrificial death never has there been never will there be a more perfect prophet than we see in jesus for on that cross we see the loving heart of god opened up to a world lost in sin and rebellion for all its supernatural storyline this passage points as clearly to jesus as does every other story in the old testament the tragedy was that daniel had been forgotten in babylon just as jesus has been forgotten in scotland today our society is forgotten about the greatest of all prophets the jesus who said he who's seen me has seen my father and i am the way the truth and the life no one comes to the father except by me our role as a church is to be like the queen of babylon reminding our friends and our family and neighbors that beyond and above the fake news of this world jesus is a prophet like no other and that is what we call evangelism without jesus there's only the darkness of ignorance but in him and through him is the light of divine truth okay fourthly we have a foolishness like no other a foolishness like no other for all that belshazzar was a powerful man he was also a very foolish man he called for daniel and after polite introductions daniel lays it on the table he recalls the days of nebuchadnezzar oh king the most high god gave nebuchadnezzar your father kingship and greatness and glory and majesty daniel reminds belshazzar that he was not a self-made man but that greatness is god's gift belshazzar needs to know this his position as emperor is entirely a gift of the most high god he's got nothing that god has not first given him he must not be puffed up with self-importance and pride then in verse 20 we read but when his that's nebuchadnezzar belshazzar's father's heart was lifted up and his spirit was hardened that he dealt proudly he was brought down from his kingly throne and his glory was taken from him daniel's telling the story we saw this last week of how god humbled him he could neither by driving him away from civilized society god took away his sanity and made him into a beast god brought the king down from his throne so much so the king chewed grass like a cow and all this happened until we read in verse 21 he knew that the most high god rules the kingdom of mankind and sets it over whom he will as the great north african bishop saint augustine said nebuchadnezzar was treated to a severe mercy in that he was brought to repentance and faith a severe mercy now belshazzar knew all this he was nebuchadnezzar's son so of course he knew the story of his father's insanity and he saw the change that had taken place in his father's life however in verses 22 and 23 daniel says foolish belshazzar did not learn the lessons of his father foolish man who for all his power did not learn that he is just a man and that life and breath are in the hand of god foolish man by his sinful mockery of god belshazzar's dicing with death and has lost belshazzar thought he was the great man as had his father nebuchadnezzar but unlike his father belshazzar did not humble himself before god he remained the proud man he had always been he became even prouder until finally he mocked the holy vessels of god's house there's a phrase which i'm sure evan knows better than i do those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat its mistakes those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat its mistakes belshazzar failed to learn the lesson of history the history of his own father so he repeated its mistakes he lifted himself proudly up against god but ironically belshazzar's foolishness was a picture of the foolishness of israel in its faithless rejection of god which had led to their captivity in

babylon in the first place but more importantly belshazer's foolishness was a picture of the faithless rejection of jesus the messiah by the nation of israel israel failed to learn the lessons of its fathers for whom then is god's greater judgment reserved belshazer or israel what about those of us who were brought up in christian families those of us who have heard the good news of jesus since our earliest days but have not yet accepted jesus as savior and lord we have foolishly failed to learn the lessons of previous generations wisdom is to learn foolishness is to ignore belshazer's was a foolishness like no other we've seen a party like no other a message like no other a prophet like no other a foolishness like no other finally a judgment like no other many

[30:03] many tickle parson as i said earlier these are aramaic words jesus would have used these words familiar to the babylonians given it was the language spoken by the jews many is the aramaic word for numbered and daniel interpreted it to mean god has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end tekel is the aramaic word for weighed and daniel interpreted it to mean you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting parson is the aramaic word for divided and daniel interprets it to mean your kingdom is divided and given to the medes and the persians well no wonder belshazzar's face goes pale and his knees not together god has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end you have been weighed in the balances and found one thing your kingdom is divided and given to the medes and the persians heaven rules and because of your evil king belshazzar i have brought the babylonian empire to an end it will now be handed over to the medes and the persians your days belshazzar are over you are subject to a judgment like no other the writing is on the wall for you something bad is going to happen to you and there's nothing you can do to stop it your evil blasphemy is caught up with you belshazzar i'm judging you belshazzar and now not just you but your whole kingdom will be destroyed what belshazzar's father nebuchadnezzar did at jerusalem by destroying it shall now be meted out upon him his son rather belshazzar and worse beside god's at work in babylon judging his enemies saving his people saving daniel and those faithful to god destroying belshazzar and those oppressing the jews that very night that belshazzar saw writing on the wall belshazzar was killed or we might say assassinated he was assassinated what began in a grand hall with a banquet ends in a cemetery with a funeral heaven rules not the greatest power in the world we need to realize this in our own day and generation the days of those who shake their fists at god by persecuting oppressing christians have been numbered god has placed them in the balance and found them wanting all they lived for shall be taken from them it's a judgment like no other the writing is on the wall for them the bad news for us is that in our natural state all of us have been weighed in the balance of god and all of us because of our sinful natures have been found wanting we've all fallen short of the glory of god our sin has separated us from him we are liable to god's judgment that's the bad news we're like the shazer all of us the good news for us is that jesus christ the prophet like no other has taken our sin in his body on the cross us that he has borne the judgment due to us like belshazzar he was judged assassinated killed but unlike belshazzar it wasn't for his sins he was

being judged it was for ours from the moment he was born in bethlehem the writing was on the wall for jesus for he had come to be the sacrifice for our sin and guilt through faith in him our sins are forgiven and rather than our lives being taken from us like it was belshazzar god gives us eternal life you see the cross at the end of the day was a judgment like no other because jesus was being condemned for us while we go free in him we have a great gospel to proclaim we have great news to tell our sins are gone we've been set free belshazzar's fate isn't ours his was death but ours is life in christ daniel 5 may be a relatively a rather gruesome story but it reveals a glorious truth heaven rules evil is judged and through the death of king jesus we can be forgiven and have eternal life isn't this a gospel in which we believe isn't this a gospel to love isn't this a gospel to share because ultimately it's all about jesus when we think of daniel 5 although the name jesus isn't written here of course we're thinking of how jesus bore our punishment many many tekel parson written by a hand over our lives we have been weighed in the scales and found wanting our sins have separated us from god we've all fallen short of the glory of god but jesus the greatest prophet priest and king took our sins upon himself upon the cross he was assassinated by the jews and the romans by us on account of our sins so that we could have eternal life so what we're celebrating here as we partake of the bread and the wine is what jesus did for us by taking upon himself the judgment that was due to us for our sin so that we could have life in him he took our death that we might live in him and as we take the bread and as we take the wine together we're proclaiming i want to believe in jesus and i want to follow him if that's the resolution of your heart and your mind the bread and the wine are

for you the writings on the wall jesus gave himself for us you you