

Daniel 5

- After our break for the 2016 conference, we return to Daniel tonight moving one step farther down our chiasm
 - Last time we studied chapter 4, the story of Nebuchadnezzar
 - That chapter and the one we study tonight form the nadir of our chiasm
 - Chapters 4-5 gives us the “point” of a story embedded within the structure chapters 2-7
 - Both chapters focus on the same general idea
 - But each looks at that idea from an opposite perspective
 - In the chiasm, we’ve studied steps A and B so far:

A - The prophecy concerning four Gentile empires that dominate Israel and the world

B - God delivers Daniel’s friends from Gentile persecution

C - God humbles the Gentile king (Nebuchadnezzar) to demonstrate His sovereignty

C' - God deposes the Gentile king (Belshazzar) to demonstrate His sovereignty

B' - God delivers Daniel from Gentile persecution

A' - The prophecy concerning four Gentile empires that dominate Israel and the world

- Last chapter centered on king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon
 - He was the appointed ruler of the world
 - And he was the conquerer of God’s people
 - The destroyer of the temple and wall of Jerusalem
- Nevertheless, he was also a man subjected to the authority of God like every other man
 - He was ruling only because the Lord placed him in that position
 - The Lord had revealed this to the king, yet the king allowed his pride to get the better of him
- The Lord gave Nebuchadnezzar a dream to explain how God would humble the king

- And sure enough, one day the king began boasting that his power and wisdom were responsible for his success
- So the Lord stripped the king of his power, comfort, dignity and humanity for a total of seven years
- Leading to the king's repentance and, some would argue, his salvation
- The message of that chapter was directed at both the Jew and the Gentile
 - Simply put, God is large and in charge
 - He gives and takes away
 - And He does all He does for His glory
 - For Israel the message was respect and submit to the Lord's decision to place them in captivity in Babylon
 - For the Gentiles appointed over Israel, the message was they rule God's people only for a time and only to serve God's purposes
 - Chapter 4's storyline finds its compliment in chapter 5
 - A king with great power humbled by the Lord
 - But the antagonist changes from Nebuchadnezzar to another Babylonian king, Belshazzar
 - From the first Babylonian king in the Age of the Gentiles to the final Babylonian king
 - And the story changes from one of repentance leading to redemption to one of judgment leading to destruction
 - Therefore the central idea for this step in our chiasm is flipped on its head
 - Where chapter 4 supported the kingdom of Babylon over Israel
 - Now chapter 5 reduces that great kingdom to rubble
 - In both cases the Lord demonstrates His sovereign choice and power
 - And as with chapters 2 & 4, a king receives a cryptic message from God, which the prophet Daniel alone can interpret

[Dan. 5:1](#) Belshazzar the king held a great feast for a thousand of his nobles, and he was drinking wine in the presence of the thousand.

[Dan. 5:2](#) 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.

[Dan. 5:3](#) 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.

[Dan. 5:4](#) They drank the wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.

- Belshazzar is not Nebuchadnezzar's successor
 - In fact, he's not even king at all, though the text uses that title to reflect he was in charge at this time
 - Belshazzar is the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar
 - Nebuchadnezzar had a son, named Evil-Merodach
 - Coincidentally, that is also the name of our new poodle
 - His son ruled for barely 2 years
 - Following his death, Nebuchadnezzar's son-in-law Neriglissar reigned for another 4 years before he died
 - Finally, a second son-in-law, Nabonidus, reigned until the end of the Babylonian empire
 - Nabonidus had a habit of staying away from the capital city of Babylon for prolonged periods
 - In fact, during the final ten years of the kingdom, Nabonidus never set foot in the city
 - In his absence, he appointed his son, Belshazzar, as regent or ruler of Babylon
 - Technically, Belshazzar was second in command
 - But in the king's absence (since there were no radios, phones etc.), the nation needed a man in the capital who could make decisions

- So though he was not the king, he acted as king
- Glance down to v.29 and you'll notice that as Belshazzar moved to reward Daniel for his interpretation, he offers Daniel the position of third ruler
 - That title indicates that Belshazzar was not the king but rather the second in power
 - So the best he could do is grant Daniel third ruler
- The backdrop for chapter 5 is the end of the Babylonian kingdom
 - The year is 539 BC
 - It's been about 67 years since Daniel entered Babylon in captivity
 - That means he is probably about 80 years old at this point
 - He's served Nebuchadnezzar until his death
 - Then he served Evil, Neriglissar, Nabonis and now Belshazzar
 - All the while, the people of Israel remain in captivity
 - By 539 BC the Medes and Persians had united against their common enemy, Babylon
 - The two nations had been winning victories against the Babylonians and were descending upon the capital city
 - But even with the city under attack, the population of the city including the king had virtually no care whatsoever
 - The city of Babylon hadn't been captured in over 1,000 years
 - The city of Babylon was a fortress unlike anything that has ever existed in the ancient world, before or since
 - The Greek historian, Herodotus, described the city and its walls
 - He reported the city covered about 14 sq. miles
 - And surrounding the city was a wall so massive it's hard to even imagine
 - The wall was 87 ft thick, wide enough for four chariots to drive side-by-side on top of the wall

- And even more amazing, the wall was 350 ft high
- That is half the height of the Tower of Americas in downtown San Antonio!
- In the wall were 100 gates and hundreds of watchtowers that rose another 100 feet above the walls
- And the provisions within the wall were equally impressive
 - The city was said to have stored up twenty years worth of food and wine to survive an extended siege
 - Furthermore, the city straddled the Euphrates river, so it had a continuous source of fresh water
 - Where the walls of the city reached the Euphrates, they turned and paralleled the banks of the river on each side
 - The walls along the riverbanks had gates that opened allowing residents to gain access to the water and to move between the two halves of the city
 - In a time of attack, this gates could be closed and the walls defended
 - The river was deep so armies attacking by water stood no chance against the impossibly high walls topped by soldiers sending down barrages of arrows
 - Babylon's impenetrability gave its residents a false sense of security,
 - So even as the power Medes and Persians converged on the city in 539 BC, Belshazzar was oblivious to the dangers
 - In v.1 we're told he is presiding over a great feast
 - It says he is entertaining a thousand nobles from the kingdom
 - The reported size of his dinner party may sound like an exaggeration, but there are good reasons to believe the number is accurate
 - Ancient kings in Persia, by comparison, reportedly dined with as many as 15,000 guests daily (who had to do those dishes?)
 - Secondly, the many nobles in attendance had sought refuge in Babylon to escape the advancing Medes and Persians

- Babylon has become a sanctuary
- Rather than war planning or devising an escape, however, these leaders of the kingdom are gathered eating and drinking and being merry
 - The king's willingness to disregard the war outside the walls tells us how sure he was of Babylon's strength
 - He assumed the walls couldn't be breached
 - He trusted in his power and the historical strength of the city to withstand any attack
 - And his behavior is a reflection of his cavalier attitude
 - His self-assurance reminds us of the story of Nebuchadnezzar in the previous chapter
 - Nebuchadnezzar foolishly assumed he had gained his power by means of his own might
 - And now his grandson was assuming he could never lose that power
 - Yet both men knew that it was the God of Israel Who had given to Babylon and then only for a time
- At a point in the night's celebration, the king (probably under the influence of the wine) makes a foolish decision by calling for the golden vessels from the Jewish temple
 - These gold and silver vessels were the basins, cups and the like prescribed in the Law to be used for temple service
 - The Lord permitted Nebuchadnezzar to capture these items when he looted the temple and the city
 - Notice in v.2, Nebuchadnezzar is called Belshazzar's "father" though he was his grandfather
 - The Chaldean language has no word for "grandfather" (and remember this chapter was written in Aramaic)
 - So they merely referred to all male ancestors as "fathers"
 - Belshazzar's brilliant idea was to use these precious implements of Jewish worship to serve his court women

- He directs that his wives and concubines will drink from these vessels
- It appears these vessels were held as trophies of war until this point
- We might imagine them sitting in a display case in the palace somewhere
- But on this occasion, as a great enemy bears down on the city, Belshazzar decides he should remind his entourage of great victories past
 - He is encouraging optimism on the occasion of a great enemy bearing down on the city
 - In effect, the king is telling his nobles remember we've defeated great gods and great people in the past
 - And we'll do it again now
- As they drink from vessels intended to honor the God of Israel, they dedicate their drinks to the praise of false gods made of human hands
 - This is blasphemy and idolatry of the highest order, and it tested the Lord's patience
 - So the Lord stepped in on this evening to make clear His displeasure with the king
 - And in typical form, the Lord speaks in a way that necessitated Daniel's involvement
 - Before we look at the way God communicated to Belshazzar, we need to recognize the importance God places on speaking through the Jewish people
 - God brings His word to the world through Israel
 - In fact, everything we have from God came through the Jewish people
 - The covenants, the word, the Messiah
 - Though the Lord may speak to Gentiles from time to time, even then He does so in the context of working with Israel

- In this case, Daniel is God's prophet, so the Lord constructed His message to Belshazzar so that it requires a Jew to explain it
 - And in this case the Lord used a particularly unique way of speaking to the king
 - Rather than a dream, the Lord presented the king with a vision unlike anything else in scripture

Dan. 5:5 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.

Dan. 5:6 Then the king's face grew pale and his thoughts alarmed him, and his hip joints went slack and his knees began knocking together.

Dan. 5:7 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."

Dan. 5:8 Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the inscription or make known its interpretation to the king.

Dan. 5:9 Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, his face grew even paler, and his nobles were perplexed.

- So the Lord gets the king's attention in a dramatic way
 - It's entertaining to imagine what a floating hand with fingers looked like
 - Was the hand cut off
 - Did it look bloody or did it just fade out at the wrist?
 - Whatever it's appearance, it's attention-grabbing and frightening
 - God writes with the finger on a plaster wall
 - Since no writing instrument is mentioned, we assume the fingers carved the message directly into the plaster
 - It reminds us of God's finger writing the Ten Commandments on the stone tablets?
 - This would seem to connect the king's sin to the Law

- The Law specified the holy purpose of those vessels and now the king is engaged in idolatry
- In archeological digs of Nebuchadnezzar's palace, a large throne room was discovered
 - It was shaped as a rectangle and was large enough to accommodate hundreds of people
 - At the midpoint of one of the longer walls was alcove setback for the king's throne
 - And the wall behind the throne was covered in white plaster
- Daniel says the hand wrote opposite the lampstand, which probably stood on one side of the throne chair
 - The writing then was on the opposite side of the throne chair from the lampstand
 - No one the king noticed the writing...the writing hand floated immediately behind and to the side of the king's throne
- In v.6, we see the effect of the vision on the king
 - He's scared out of his wits and certainly we understand that reaction
 - It's one thing to see something like this as a special effect on a TV show or at the movies
 - But imagine how fearful you would be to see it happening before you in reality
 - His sudden fear contrast with his merriment a moment earlier
 - His contentment in the face of the Medes and Persians was a result of a false faith in himself and a forgetting of God
 - Like Nebuchadnezzar, his pride produced spiritual amnesia
 - In that way Belshazzar represents all unsaved mankind upon whom God's wrath will ultimately fall
 - The world is always a heartbeat away from a great and terrible judgment but they don't acknowledge it
 - They live Solomon's advice to eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die, yet without a thought for what comes next

- They think things are fine...until they they discover quite suddenly things are not as they hoped
- The writing on the wall was in Aramaic yet no one knew what it meant
 - Still, the mysterious and dramatic way it appeared compelled the king to discover its meaning
 - So like his grandfather before him, Belshazzar called for all the magicians to interpret the message
 - He offers them great riches if they provide an interpretation
 - Notice also he offers the winner a position of third in the kingdom, as we discussed earlier
 - And for the third time, the Babylonian magicians strike out
 - Though the writing was in Aramaic, no one gave an interpretation
 - It seems the Lord is intent on humiliated Babylon's wisemen
 - The message is clear: the Lord speaks through His people and reveals mysteries to whom He chooses
- As the king begins to realize he has no one to explain the mystery, he gets even more worried
 - But he doesn't think to call upon Daniel
 - Apparently, this king has lost touch with his grandfather's experiences with Daniel
 - Given his age, Daniel may have been "retired" in the sense that he no longer held a position of authority in the kingdom
 - But Belshazzar's ignorance of the Lord's prophet is further evidence of Babylon leaders giving no regard for God's past revelations
 - So like his grandfather before him, it requires that someone else, someone acquainted with Daniel, make the introduction
 - In this case, it's a woman who brings the king's attention to Daniel's unique gift

[Dan. 5:10](#) The queen entered the banquet hall because of the words of the king and his nobles; the queen spoke and said, “O king, live forever! Do not let your thoughts alarm you or your face be pale.

[Dan. 5:11](#) “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. And King Nebuchadnezzar, your father, your father the king, appointed him chief of the magicians, conjurers, Chaldeans and diviners.

[Dan. 5:12](#) “This was 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.”

- Just as Belshazzar is not the real king, this woman is unlikely to be the true queen for a couple of reasons
 - First, the wife of a king would be unlikely to speak up in this manner in the court and during a tense situation like this
 - Women did not play a role in court matters
 - And the king had many wives, so it would have been out of order for one to interject in this way
 - Secondly, this woman has a keen awareness of Daniel’s abilities, which would have been unlikely if the king himself didn’t know Daniel
 - Therefore it’s more likely this woman is Belshazzar’s mother, Nebuchadnezzar’s daughter
 - Growing up in the court, she would have heard the stories of Daniel’s exploits from her father’s servants
 - And as the king’s mother, she would have had much greater license to speak up and to advise the king
- The queen mother is made aware of the commotion in the banquet hall and arrives to see her son vexed over the situation
 - She tells the king not to be afraid because there is one who can solve this problem
 - She must have recognized the similarities between this situation and the stories of her father’s encounters with Yahweh

- And since her father's experience had always turned out well in the end, she tells Belshazzar not to worry either
- Then she introduces the king to Daniel
 - Notice she describes Daniel in ways similar to her father's words
 - He has the spirit of the holy gods
 - And in the days of his father, Nebuchadnezzar, he demonstrated insight, wisdom and illumination
 - And finally, she explains that Nebuchadnezzar once appointed him the chief magician
 - He could solve any puzzle, she says, because of that spirit in him
- While her description is glowing and largely accurate, we can also see that she has no regard for the God of Israel
 - She speaks of nameless gods and spirits in Daniel, terms that reflect a pagan's view
 - So despite her memory of her father's experiences, she has not known the true God
 - So even if we assume her father came to true faith and turned from pagan idolatry, his faith wasn't shared with his family
 - Perhaps this is the best argument someone could make in casting doubt on Nebuchadnezzar's "conversion"
- And now briefly, the king meets Daniel

[Dan. 5:13](#) 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?"

[Dan. 5:14](#) "Now I have heard about you that a spirit of the gods is in you, and that illumination, insight and extraordinary wisdom have been found in you.

[Dan. 5:15](#) "Just now the wise men and the conjurers were brought in before me that they might read this inscription and make its interpretation known to me, but they could not declare the interpretation of the message.

[Dan. 5:16](#) "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."

- The king meets Daniel and repeats what Belshazzar's mother reported
 - The king knows Daniel as an exile from Judah and someone with great spiritual power
 - And the king acknowledges his dependence on Daniel's abilities
 - Since the king's counselors couldn't produce the reading, Daniel is now the king's only hope
 - And so the king makes an appeal to this exile
 - When you stop to consider the situation, it's really extraordinary
 - The most power position on earth is at the mercy of a slave
 - Only the Lord could produce such an upside down situation
 - Even more remarkable is his offer to elevate this slave to #3 in the kingdom should he give the interpretation
 - The king could have threatened Daniel with death for not complying
 - Instead, he chooses to bargain with the slave
 - Finally, Daniel's response is even more remarkable

Dan. 5:17 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.

- It's apparent that Daniel is in a completely different place now at this point in his life as compared to when he made his appearance before Nebuchadnezzar
 - In his earlier encounter, Daniel was barely 17 years and had been in captivity only a few years
 - He may have understood the Lord had ordained Israel's captivity, but still he had no idea how long it would last
 - He was in awe of the king's power, yet hopeful that he might please the king and win favor for his people
 - And he was gaining power and status in the nation, which gave him great freedom and comfort

- But after living most of his life in Babylon as an exile and watching generations of Jews die in captivity, I wonder if Daniel's attitude has changed
 - He sounds more cynical maybe even a little discouraged
 - He's no longer a man of responsibility and has been largely forgotten within the nation
 - He knows the Lord is in control of these things, so I assume his cynicism is directed toward the Lord
- So now that he is finally brought before the king, late in his life and perhaps with hope for release fading, he speaks with a noticeably different tone
 - Compare his words here to his actions in chapter 2
 - In chapter 2, he first spoke boldly and with discretion to the king's captain seeking an explanation for the king's concern
 - He then prayed with his three friends
 - When he answered the king, he credited the Lord in heaven for having answers to give the king
 - And he made requests of the king as a consequence of having pleased him
 - Now in this encounter, you can imagine a an old, gray-bearded, stooped man shuffling into the king's presence, perhaps without much enthusiasm
 - He hears the story and the king's offers but give them no regard
 - He refuses the king's offers of riches in a manner bordering on insolent
 - And he make no attempt to negotiate a reward
 - He just gets down to business
 - Daniel knows this message has come from God and that he's still serving the Lord in this matter
 - But he seems a little less enthusiastic over the opportunity
 - It's understandable, and it will come to explain Daniel's thinking in chapter 9

- Finally, we can't forget that as Daniel entered the dining hall, he must have noticed the sacred temple implements being used as serving dishes
 - This alone must have enraged and discouraged Daniel
 - Despite the Lord's work through Daniel, the circumstances for Israel seem to have gone from bad to worse
- Let's look at Daniel's interpretation, including a description of the words written on the wall

Dan. 5:18 "O king, the Most High God granted sovereignty, grandeur, glory and majesty to Nebuchadnezzar your father.

Dan. 5:19 "Because of the grandeur which He bestowed on him, all the peoples, nations and men of every language feared and trembled before him; whomever he wished he killed and whomever he wished he spared alive; and whomever he wished he elevated and whomever he wished he humbled.

Dan. 5:20 "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.

Dan. 5:21 "He was also driven away from mankind, and his heart was made like that of beasts, and his dwelling place was with the wild donkeys. He was given grass to eat like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until he recognized that the Most High God is ruler over the realm of mankind and that He sets over it whomever He wishes.

Dan. 5:22 "Yet you, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this,

Dan. 5:23 but you have exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines have been drinking wine from them; 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.

Dan. 5:24 "Then the hand was sent from Him and this inscription was written out.

Dan. 5:25 "Now this is the inscription that was written out: 'MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.'

Dan. 5:26 "This is the interpretation of the message: 'MENE' – God has numbered your kingdom and put an end to it.

Dan. 5:27 "'TEKEL' – you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient.

Dan. 5:28 "'PERES' – your kingdom has been divided and given over to the Medes and Persians."

- In vs.18-21, Daniel gives Belshazzar a little family history lesson, one he should have known already
 - Daniel explains that his grandfather was also a powerful king, made so by the God of Israel
 - Yet once Nebuchadnezzar acted arrogantly toward the Lord just as Belshazzar was acting now
 - So the Lord acted in a day to bring Nebuchadnezzar through a sad, humbling experience
 - Of course, this was the experience we studied in the previous chapter
 - God ordained the king's experience living like an animal for seven years to humble him and make a point about where real power lies
 - Belshazzar's grandfather thought he was inherently powerful
 - But the truth was he was nothing apart from God's choice to use him
 - And as easily as that power came to Nebuchadnezzar, the Lord could withdraw it just as easily
- There are two important words in this passage
 - The first of these words appears in the middle of v.21...the word "until"
 - Daniel says the Lord subjected Nebuchadnezzar to living as an animal until he recognized the God Most High was the true ruler
 - In a word, the Lord was seeking repentance in the king's heart
 - He wanted Nebuchadnezzar to acknowledge Him as the One true power
 - The second important word appears at the beginning of v.22, the word "yet"
 - Belshazzar did not learn the lesson of his family's history
 - Though it appears he has forgotten these experiences, Daniel testifies that the king did, in fact, know about them
 - He had it even easier than his grandfather

- He could have learned the lesson without living as an animal for seven years
- At the end of v.21, the Lord proclaims through Daniel that He alone determines who will rule over mankind
 - He says God is ruler over the realm of mankind and He sets over it whomever He wishes
 - Belshazzar didn't have his throne because of something inside himself...it was merely God's choice
- This was true in Daniel's day, but it's still true today
 - Every person placed in authority over mankind anywhere on earth is there by God's choice
 - There are no "good" rulers, since every human being is sinful
 - Some seem better to us than others, but God installs everyone so we must accept each one as God's will
 - We don't have to like what they say or do, and we might even work within the law to replace them
 - But they will rule for as long as the Lord desires
- Because Belshazzar has not learned the lesson of his grandfather, he acted to dishonor the implements
 - So in v.23 Daniel points out that the king has determined to give honor to false gods that cannot receive it while denying honor to the true God
 - The pagan idols of silver, gold and the like were empty vessels incapable of bringing Babylon glory
 - While the vessels of the temple intended to be filled by the Lord's glory have become cups of God's wrath for Babylon
 - Notice at the end of the verse Daniel reminds the king that his very life is in the hands of the Creator God, the One he is so callously offending
 - Can you imagine a condemned man standing in the gallows with a noose around his neck
 - In his final moments, he begins mocking his executioner whose hands rest on the trap door release

- This is the situation for Belshazzar
- He is mocking the the God Who allows the king to keep breathing
- Spiritual amnesia
- Notice to this point, Daniel has yet to address the handwriting interpretation at all
 - He’s just giving background for *why* the Lord brought the revelation
 - This would suggest that Daniel has recognized the meaning of the message immediately
 - Or perhaps the Lord had given Daniel this insight at an earlier point
 - Or perhaps Daniel has been waiting for an opportunity to say these things to the king for sometime
 - In any case, he’s delivered the background for the occasion of the revelation, and now he’s ready to reveal the meaning of the writing
 - First, Daniel reads the king the inscription
 - The words were mene, mene, tekem, upharsin
 - These words appear to be Aramaic words, though there is some mystery involved here
 - First, the Aramaic meaning of the words are various weights or measures of value
 - Mene means the same as mina in Hebrew
 - Tekem comes from the same root word as the Hebrew shekel
 - And upharsin means half a shekel
 - A mina was worth 50 shekels
 - So the phrase was similar to us saying “Dollar, dollar, nickel penny”
 - You can see why the magicians wouldn’t even know where to begin in offering an interpretation

- But for that same reason, it's hard to see how Daniel came to understand the writing
 - Daniel says that mene (or mina) means God has numbered Belshazzar's kingdom and brought it to an end
 - Neither ancient Hebrew nor Aramaic has written vowels
 - So it seems Daniel took the word mena but used different vowels to turn the word into menah, which is Aramaic for numbered
 - We don't know what led him to do this, but we take his interpretation at face value
 - Likewise, he changed tekem to tekem and uparsin into peras
 - Tekem means weighed
 - And peras means divided
 - Putting all three words together, the phrase changes from mina, mina, shekel, half-shekel to numbered, numbered, weighed, divided
- Daniel explains that this message is one of judgment for both the king and the nation of Babylon
 - Daniel says the nation's days were numbered, that is it would rule only for a time
 - Furthermore, the nation and its leader have been found deficient in God's sight
 - So the kingdom was going to be given to the Medes and Persians instead
 - Belshazzar has offended the God of Israel in the worst possible way and he and his nation will pay the price
 - Daniel interprets the repetition of the first word to mean that Babylon's end coming immediately
 - God uses repetition to mean emphasis or certainty or swiftness
 - In this case, it means the nation's end was coming that very night even as the king and the people felt secure

- We remember that the Lord promised in Nebuchadnezzar's dream that the nation of Babylon would only rule for a time
 - And then another nation would rise to displace Babylon
 - The time for that displacement has come, and the Lord has just cause for the changing of the guard
 - Belshazzar's arrogance has given God just cause to destroy the nation He placed in authority over the world
- This is an interesting example of the intersection of God's will and man's responsibility for his actions
 - God's words to the king indicate his behavior was responsible for the timing of the nations fall
 - And yet we know the Medes and Persians were destined to defeat the Babylonians
 - In attempting to reconcile these two contradictory ideas, the best we can say is God preordained the end
 - But Belshazzar's sin was the tool the Lord used to bring about that end
 - The Lord found the nation of Babylon deficient because of Belshazzar, but it was deficient in another, larger sense as well
 - This nation could never serve God's purpose in ruling the earth in righteousness
 - Therefore, it was deficient in comparison to the coming Kingdom
 - Though Babylon had authority over the whole earth, it's merely a precursor to the Kingdom of God that comes in the future
 - The Lord gave a powerful Gentile nation the opportunity to rule the entire earth simply to demonstrate that only God can rule the world in righteousness
- We might think that this interpretation would bother the king or at least distract him a little, but he seems to go on with little regard for Daniel's words
 - He proceeds to reward Daniel as promised even though Daniel refused it

Dan. 5:29 Then Belshazzar gave orders, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a necklace of gold around his neck, and issued a proclamation concerning him that he now had authority as the third ruler in the kingdom.

Dan. 5:30 That same night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain.

- Daniel received the honor and gifts the king promised, even though Daniel had tried to refused them
 - If the king insists, it's an offer you can't refuse
 - Daniel is now third ruler in the kingdom
 - And he will hold this distinction for a few hours
 - Why was the king so insistent on granting these honors to Daniel, especially in light of his interpretation?
 - Either he's oblivious, drunk, an idiot or all three
 - Or he's a calculating politician
 - Perhaps the king thought Daniel possessed the power to change the future outcome of his prophecy
 - If so, then the king was binding Daniel's future to the future of the kingdom
 - Because before the night was over, the Persians had entered the city and conquered the nation, killing the king
 - When a conquering nation arrives, it's a bad thing to be part of the old government
 - By elevating Daniel to third in charge, the king might have thought that Daniel would have been motivated by self-preservation to ensure the ongoing protection of the nation
 - Of course, you can't out maneuver God,
 - So the Lord protected Daniel and the Jewish people even as He allowed the Medes and Persians to conquer the Babylonians that night
- The story of how the Medes and Persians worked together to conquer the unconquerable city that night is worthy of Homer's Iliad

- Multiple ancient historians including Herodotus, Xenophon, Berossus, and the Babylonian Chronicles all describe the incredible events of that evening
 - On the night of October 12, 539 B.C., the Persian army completed work north of Babylon on a dam across the Euphrates river
 - They diverted the flow of the river to a nearby lake, greatly reducing the amount of water flowing toward the city of Babylon
 - Within a few hours, the river level was barely thigh-high, low enough for Persians soldiers to wade up the riverbed running through the city
- The watchmen on the wall towers above the city would have been scanning the horizon for large troop ships coming up the Euphrates or ground forces marching to the walls
 - They never noticed columns of men quietly wading through the drying riverbed below under the cover of darkness
 - Therefore, sensing no threat from the water, the Babylonians left the city walls and gates facing the river undefended
 - The Persian troops simply scaled the walls from the riverbanks, opened the gates to the city and entered the city without a fight
- Herodotus says that the city was so vast, that even after the outer parts of the city had been taken by the Persians, the residents in the center of the city still had no idea the city had fallen
 - He says the Babylonians in the center of the city were engaged in a festival, dancing and reveling until the invaders overtook them
 - We might imagine that the king's palace was located in the center of the city
 - And therefore, as he celebrated that night, the troops were already inside the walls
 - And as Daniel pronounced the king's downfall, the troops were at the doors of the palace
- As this king was executed and this nation fell swiftly, a new king took power, a man named Darius, the Mede