

Here is a very important insight into the judgment of God against those who persist in sin. The very fact that God allows men and women to pursue a wrong course, especially when they know better, reveals that He honors our free choice. God will do everything He can to persuade us to turn from sin and its results; everything, that is, except force the will. Our Savior knows that the wages of sin is death (see Romans 6:23). Compassionately He pleads, "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?" (Ezekiel 33:11).

If we do not turn from evil, God honors our choice. The Source of all life and breath gives us up to that which we have persistently chosen (see Acts 17:28; Romans 1:24, 26). "We would have healed Babylon," are the inspired words of Jeremiah, "but she was not healed" (see Jeremiah 51:9). God would not only have healed Babylon, but He would heal all of mankind, if we were willing. For God is not "willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

The sins of the whole world were laid upon Jesus Christ at Calvary. He took upon His guiltless soul the weight of every sin, that we might take upon us the righteousness belonging solely to Him (see 2 Corinthians 5:21). Not one soul need be found wanting in the balance of God's righteous judgment.

Don't be misled by God's use of balances here. Salvation is not a matter of our good deeds outweighing our bad ones. In the Christian faith, salvation is offered solely based upon the merits of Jesus Christ. So why does God use this illustration?

"In dealing with men God always uses a language which appeals forcibly to their understanding. This is illustrated in the handwriting on the wall. It is a common belief among idolaters that the gods weigh deeds in balances, and that if the good deeds outweigh the evil, the individual enters into his reward; if the opposite result is obtained, punishment follows. The language, therefore, was familiar to King Belshazzar. . . .

"To the one who knows God, the attitude of the Lord toward the sinner is very different, and still the symbol of the weights and balances is applicable. That this subject might be understood, God had sent an explanation by the prophet Ezekiel. When a man sins and dies without repentance, he is cut off from God, because his iniquities separate between him and God, and he cannot be saved. If a man loves Christ and accepts Him and His righteousness, Christ's character is written opposite the name of that man in the books of heaven, and so long as a love of the truth is cherished, the man hides in Christ and is known by the character of Christ" (*The Story of Daniel the Prophet*, pp. 72-73, S.N. Haskell).

### Cyrus Fulfills Prophecy

As Daniel finished his interpretation, Belshazzar, true to his word, made him third ruler in the kingdom. And, true to God's word, the kingdom was taken from Belshazzar that night. "Then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom. In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain. And Darius the Median took the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old" (Daniel 5:29-31).

It is here that we find one of the most amazing fulfillment's of Bible prophecy ever recorded. The sixty-two-year-old Darius, the aged king of the Medes, conquered Babylon in behalf of Cyrus the "King of Lands" (see *God Cares*, vol. 1, pp. 104-105). Cyrus made his triumphal entry about two and one-half weeks later. The Media-Persian army diverted the flow of the river Euphrates so that they could find passage under the city through the unlocked gates of Babylon. It was on the very night of Belshazzar's feast that the Media-Persian army marched down the river bed into the city, taking the over-confident Chaldeans totally by surprise. All of this history is recorded, over one hundred years before it happened, in these prophetic verses of Isaiah:

"Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the

two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the Lord, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel. For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me" (Isaiah 45:1-4).

Amazing! There is nothing that can be compared to God's Word and the prophecies He has recorded.

### What Happened to Daniel?

As we shall see in our next study, Daniel was not killed in the capture of Babylon, even though he was its "third" ruler. The question naturally arises, "Why did the conquering army not destroy Daniel, who was the third ruler in the kingdom, at this critical moment?" The answer is simple. When the kingdom was taken and Belshazzar slain, Nabonadius, the first ruler, was at the head of an army and surrounded by the enemy in another part of the kingdom. This left Daniel sole ruler in Babylon. He, knowing that over one hundred years before, Isaiah had prophesied that Cyrus should take the kingdom, was ready to welcome him whom God had said should build the house of the Lord at Jerusalem.

"There is also good reason to believe that Daniel and Cyrus were not strangers. When excluded from the council of Belshazzar, Daniel had spent a portion of his time at Shushan, the capital of Elam. Elam had revolted from Babylon, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Jeremiah.

"Daniel may have formed an acquaintance with Cyrus, and showed to him, as the high priest did to Alexander on a certain occasion, the prophecy that pertained to himself, and also revealed to him the way God had said he should enter Babylon. It is evident from the wording of the decree given in the first chapter of Ezra, that Cyrus was familiar with these prophecies" (see Ezra 1:1-5; *The Story of Daniel the Prophet*, p. 76, S.N. Haskell).

### Conclusion

Through Daniel and Isaiah God has given us some tremendous prophetic insights that found their fulfillment in Daniel's time. In all of this, God's purpose is our salvation. Notice the claims He made through Isaiah in relation to Bible prophecy:

"Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them" (Isaiah 42:9).

"Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure" (Isaiah 46:9-10).

"I have declared the former things from the beginning; and they went forth out of My mouth, and I showed them; I did them suddenly, and they came to pass. Because I knew that thou art obstinate, and thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass. I have even from the beginning declared it to thee; before it came to pass I showed it thee: lest thou shouldest say, Mine idol hath done them, and my graven image, and my molten image, hath commanded them" (Isaiah 48:3-5).

Now consider the words of Jesus as He spoke of things to come:

"And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe" (John 14:29).

These scriptures make it clear that the whole point of Bible prophecy is that we would believe in the one true God as our Friend and Savior. God knows our hearts are hard, that we are obstinate. He uses prophecy to help melt these hearts. Through these tremendous revelations He encourages us to leave the idols of this world, be they man or metal, living or material, and trust in Christ alone as our Redeemer. Won't you give your heart to Him who longs to save you?

# The Unsealing of Daniel

Study Number 6



The Bible predicts the future with unerring accuracy, and its prophecies are not merely general. They are packed with specific details. This is one of the truly amazing things about Bible prophecy. The prophetic story line of Daniel 5 is no exception.

Many so-called prophets today are highly acclaimed for predictions that are almost obvious. The newspapers in the checkout aisle of your local grocery stores carry the new year's insights of these mystic seers. "There's going to be an earthquake in California. A great economic calamity will hit Wall Street. A terrible war will occur in the Middle East. Some important leader will be assassinated." They utter their prophecies with great authority. Of course, some of these predictions do take place. But saying there will be an earthquake in California is like prophesying that you'll have food for breakfast tomorrow morning. Even with these near-obvious predictions, the accuracy rate of modern day prophets is incredibly low. Yet people are still impressed.

Bible prophecies are of a completely different nature. Yes, some are general, but they are 100 percent accurate and many are highly detailed. On one occasion, God even named an individual, generations before he was born, outlining the mission he would accomplish in human history.

Daniel 5 contains one of these detailed predictions. As we study it, you will find its accuracy and fulfillment stunning.

### Handwriting on the Wall

"The handwriting's on the wall." This is an old cliché originating from the fifth chapter of Daniel. We may find its meaning in the context of its original setting, that is, a drunken feast in the palace of a king.

"Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand. Belshazzar, while he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem; that the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, might drink therein. Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God which was at Jerusalem; and the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, drank in them. They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone. In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints

## Atonement Rejected

of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another. The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. And the king spake, and said to the wise men of Babylon, Whosoever shall read this writing, and show me the interpretation thereof, shall be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about his neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom” (Daniel 5:1-7).

All of us would most likely be a little troubled if we saw fingers of a bodiless hand writing on a wall. God had to be dramatic in order to get Belshazzar’s attention, because up to this point nothing else had—not Nebuchadnezzar’s history, not Daniel’s witness, not even the fact that Babylon was now completely surrounded by the army of Media-Persia.

Belshazzar knew the Media-Persian army was outside his walls, laying siege to Babylon. But he also believed the walls of his city were impregnable. And with the river Euphrates running right through the city and the hanging gardens in its midst, Babylon had food enough for many years. The king thought he had “peace and safety” (see 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3).

Like too many in the world today, the king of Babylon found himself partying without thought for tomorrow or accountability to God for his actions. In the midst of his revelry he commanded that the golden cups, taken from God’s temple by Nebuchadnezzar, be brought, that his subjects might drink wine to the gods of metal, stone and wood. Suddenly he was confronted with eternal realities when a bodiless hand traced ominous letters on the wall of the banquet hall, leaving words that he could not understand. In the mysterious handwriting he sensed the judgment of an all-seeing, all-knowing God. Now everything around him was lost to his fear. Nothing promised comfort or pleasure, assurance or hope. The only desire of this terrified king was to comprehend the meaning of this mysterious message that seemed to speak doom to his benumbed senses.

The king’s state of mind at that moment was foreseen and recorded by the prophet Isaiah:

“Therefore are my loins filled with pain: pangs have taken hold upon me, as the pangs of a woman that travaileth: I was bowed down at the hearing of it; I was dismayed at the seeing of it. My heart panted, fearfulness affrighted me: the night of my pleasure hath he turned into fear unto me. Prepare the table, watch in the watchtower, eat, drink: arise, ye princes, and anoint the shield” (Isaiah 21:3-5).

Notice the detail with which Isaiah wrote of this experience over a century before it happened:

- The king’s loins were filled with pain
- He was aghast at seeing this mysterious hand
- His night of pleasure turned into fear
- And too late, he ordered his princes who were eating and drinking to anoint the shield

We noted in a previous study, Isaiah had written of his people’s captivity, predicting the fate even of Daniel and his three friends (see Isaiah 39:6-7).

This is only part of what God revealed through this faithful prophet concerning Babylon’s fall. Isaiah’s messages correctly prophesied of Judah, Babylon, and Cyrus, the king of Persia, whose mother was not even a twinkle in his grandmother’s eye when Isaiah was alive. These faithful predictions show the Bible to be a reliable book, one that accurately foretells the future, setting God’s Word aside from man’s word and truth aside from deception.

The enemy of souls is at work to get us off track so we will not accept God and His great plan of salvation for humanity. From the very beginning, God’s Word has warned us of false messages delivered by so-called prophets. In His love He has given us a clear guide to discern the difference between truth and error.

“If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder,” the Lord warned through Moses, “And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the

Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Ye shall walk after the Lord your God, and fear Him, and keep His commandments, and obey His voice, and ye shall serve Him, and cleave unto Him” (Deuteronomy 13:1-4).

Messages of truth, delivered by God’s prophets are clearly connected to obedience to His commandments. False prophets sometimes have visions and dreams that actually come to pass. This is allowed by God to test our commitment to truth. Any dream, vision, or prophecy that leads us away from obedience to God and His commandments is false.

## Called to Read the Writing

At this point, recorded for the third time in the book of Daniel, came the call for Babylon’s wise men to try to bring understanding to the words of God. And again it was impossible (see Daniel 5:8). This amply demonstrates that the wisdom of the world is utterly helpless when it comes to the Eternal. Humanity cannot solve the most significant troubles facing our world. We need heavenly help.

“Now the queen, by reason of the words of the king and his lords, came into the banquet house: and the queen spake and said, O king, live forever: let not thy thoughts trouble thee, nor let thy countenance be changed: There is a man in thy kingdom, in whom is the spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of thy father light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, was found in him; whom the king Nebuchadnezzar thy father, the king, I say, thy father, made master of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers; forasmuch as an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, interpreting of dreams, and showing of hard sentences, and dissolving of doubts, were found in the same Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar: now let Daniel be called, and he will show the interpretation. Then was Daniel brought in before the king. And the king spake and said unto Daniel, Art thou that Daniel, which art of the children of the captivity of Judah, whom the king my father brought out of Jewry? I have even heard of thee, that the spirit of the gods is in thee, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom is found in thee. And



now the wise men, the astrologers, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing, and make known unto me the interpretation thereof: but they could not show the interpretation of the thing: And I have heard of thee, that thou canst make interpretations, and dissolve doubts: now if thou canst read the writing, and make known to me the interpretation thereof, thou shalt be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about thy neck, and shalt be the third ruler in the kingdom. Then Daniel answered and said before the king, Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation” (Daniel 5:10-17).

Like Elisha, when offered money for healing, Daniel refuses the king’s gifts, and in so doing gives credit to God for his abilities (see 2 Kings 5:15-16).

## Accountability for Light

Daniel began by faithfully recounting the record of God’s dealing with Nebuchadnezzar:

“O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honor: and for the majesty that He gave him, all people, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him: whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down. But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him: and he was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses: they fed him with

grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that He appointeth over it whomsoever He will. And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this; but hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of His house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified” (Daniel 5:18-23).

The key phrase here is, “though thou knewest all this.” The New Testament says, “Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent” (Acts 17:29-30).

God winks at our ignorance as He did with Nebuchadnezzar. But Belshazzar could not plead ignorance for praising the gods of wood and stone. He knew of Nebuchadnezzar’s experience. He understood the course he pursued was wrong. Yet he refused to acknowledge God as Nebuchadnezzar had. “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (James 4:17). Knowledge of truth brings responsibility. All violation of what is right is sin, but God holds us accountable when His most earnest efforts to enlighten and redirect us fail. This was the case with Belshazzar. The God of heaven was calling this king to account for his sin.

Let no one conclude from this that it is better to remain ignorant of eternal truth. Condemnation will fall upon those who have refused to come to the light for fear of being reproved for their evil deeds. “And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God” (John 3:19-21).

Not one of us need remain away from Christ. Anyone, no matter how great a sinner, may come to Christ just as he is. Jesus says, “Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37). God does not condemn us for being sinners. Christ came to save sinners. “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance,” the apostle Paul declares, “that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief” (1 Timothy 1:15). We are condemned because as sinners we refuse to come to Christ, because we cling to the darkness rather than turning to the Light.

While Isaiah prophesied doom for those who rejected God’s atoning love, he also expounded upon the theme of salvation. “Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else” (Isaiah 45:22). The “ends of the earth” are those who may be the farthest from Christ. The worst of sinners can look to Him and live. If you have lived a life of hate, hurt and bitterness, feeling that God is far from you, then you are the “ends of the earth.” God says, “Look unto Me and I will save you.” Look, dear friend, to Jesus Christ who gave His life for you. “And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21).

## Weighed and Found Wanting

“Then was the part of the hand sent from him; and this writing was written. And this is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. TEKEL; thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. PERES; thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians” (Daniel 5:24-28).

In Aramaic *Mene* means “counted” or “numbered.” *Tekel* means “weighed.” *Upharsin* is Aramaic and actually translates “and Parsin” (see Daniel 5:24, RSV, NIV). *Parsin* is the plural for *peres*, which in the singular means “divided.” The plural is also the spelling for *Persians*. (see *God Cares*, vol. 1, p. 78, C. Mervyn Maxwell).