

(Dan. 5:1-4) - Daniel, whose name means “God is my Judge,” was one of the many Jewish noblemen who had been taken to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. By God’s sovereign providence and wisdom, Daniel was given the gift of interpreting dreams, and having interpreted dreams of the king, he was put in high position as one of the king’s advisers. At this time, Nebuchadnezzar’s son (or grandson) Belshazzar was king, and Babylon was under siege by the Medes and Persians. Believing the city to be invincible, Belshazzar was lifted up with pride and gave a great feast for himself and his nobles. His greatest sin was to show disrespect to Israel’s God by commanding the vessels, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Temple of Jerusalem after he had the Temple destroyed, to be brought to his feast so that they could use them to drink their wine. These vessels were holy vessels, sanctified and set apart by God, to be used only in the worship and service of the true and living God by the priests of Israel. Belshazzar had seen what the Lord had done to humble Nebuchadnezzar (*Dan. 4:28-37*), but he still disrespected the God of Israel and used these vessels to give tribute to his idols.

(Dan. 5:5-9) - There appeared “*the fingers of a man’s hand,*” and it wrote a message on the wall. This frightened the king so much (*5:6*), and he cried out for his advisers to interpret the words for him (*5:7*). He promised riches and high position to any who could interpret the writing, but none of them could understand what had been written. This made the king angry. This is a testimony to the natural ignorance of sinners in our spiritual death and depravity. We cannot savingly understand the Word of God, especially in the Gospel message of salvation by God’s grace based on the righteousness of Christ (*Rom. 3:10-12; 1 Cor. 2:14*). Christ must send His Spirit to bring us to the Word of God and give us an understanding of how God justifies the ungodly by the blood of Jesus Christ crucified and risen from the dead (*John 6:45; 16:8-11; Rom. 1:16-17; 6:17-18; 10:13-17; 1 Cor. 1:26–2:12; 1 John 5:20*).

(Dan. 5:10-12) - The queen (probably his mother) had been aware of Daniel who had interpreted Nebuchadnezzar’s dreams. Daniel was probably about eighty years old at this time. The queen said, “*O king, live for ever*” - This reveals the vain thoughts and desires of all unbelievers. Light and immortality only comes through Christ as He is identified and distinguished in the Gospel of God’s grace (*John 14:6*). Only righteousness can bring eternal life, and righteousness can only be found in Christ (*Rom. 5:21*). It took a man gifted and sent from God to interpret the writing on the wall, and this is how God brings the Gospel to His people (*Acts 8:26-35; 1 Cor. 1:18-21; 1 Pet. 1:22-25*). It is by the preaching of Christ crucified and risen from the dead, which is the preaching of righteousness by Him, that the Spirit of God applies the truth to the hearts and consciences of God’s people.

(Dan. 5:13-17) - The king attributes Daniel’s gifts to the idols of Babylon rather than the true and living God. He promises Daniel wealth and position if he can interpret the writing. Daniel agreed to tell the king the meaning of the writing, but he refused the king’s gifts. This reminds us of how Christ saves us from our sins and reveals life and light to us freely and unconditionally. None of the blessings and benefits of salvation come to us because we give gifts to God or because of anything we do for God. It is all of grace. Also, we who are saved are to serve God, not for the gifts He gives and not to attain or maintain our salvation, but as we are motivated by His grace and glory, and by love and gratitude.

(Dan. 5:18-23) - Daniel then reminds Belshazzar of what happened to his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar. He became proud and haughty, but God brought him down and humbled him (Dan. 4:28-37). This is a picture of how God saves sinners. We are all by nature proud and haughty in that we imagine we can do or decide something to get God to save us. But God brings us down and humbles us to know that salvation was (and is) all conditioned on Christ Who alone fulfilled those conditions for His people as their Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer. We have no righteousness before God with which to bargain with Him. All things are given to us freely from God in Christ (Rom. 8:32-34; Eph. 1:3).

(Dan. 5:24-31) - Daniel interpreted the writing on the wall - "**MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN**" - "**MENE**" means "*God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it.*" God had numbered Babylon, and her number was up! We have all heard the saying, "Our days are numbered." The psalmist wrote, "*So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.*" (Psa. 90:12).

"**TEKEL**" has to do with a measure of weight. The meaning is, "*Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting*" (lacking). This is the message God has for all of us in our natural state of sin and depravity, no matter if we are kings or servants, rich or poor, male or female (Rom. 3:10-20). Belshazzar and all of Babylon had been weighed in God's divine scales of justice, and the scales were tipped against them. They did not measure up to the perfection of righteousness that God requires in justice.

"**PERES**" (singular form of "**UPHARSIN**") - The meaning is, "*Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.*" God's judgment was about to fall on Babylon.

All of this should be a solemn reminder to us, sinners saved by the grace of God, that were it not for Christ and His righteousness imputed to us and received by God-given faith, God's judgment would fall upon us for our sins. Based on our best efforts to keep the law, we too are weighed in the balance and found wanting. The question then is this - How can we stand before God and not be lacking? What is the balance? This is God's balance, and it is a true and just balance. Man's balances are always false and unjust (Prov. 11:1; 20:23). It is by false balances and unjust weights that man measures himself and claims to be righteous, but his claim of righteousness is an abomination to God (Luke 16:15).

The true measure in God's balance is the Lord Jesus Christ and His righteousness (Acts 17:31). All who do not measure up and balance the scales of God's justice shall be found wanting and shall perish. What, then, is our hope of salvation? How can we who are so sinful balance the scales of a perfect righteousness? Our only hope of salvation is to "*be found in HIM [Christ], not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith*" (Php. 3:9; cf. Rom. 3:210-26; 4:6-8; 5:21; 8:3-34; 2 Cor. 5:21). Christ's righteousness imputed to us and received by God-given faith is the only way we can balance the scales of God's justice and be found whole in God's sight. Our works will not balance the scales (Matt. 7:21-23; Eph. 2:8-10). "*For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth*" (Rom. 10:4).

(Dan. 5:30-31) - God's judgment came down upon Belshazzar and Babylon that very night. God is faithful both to His promises and His threats. He promises to save sinners by His grace in Christ. They are all who come to Him begging for mercy and pleading the merits of Christ (Luke 18:13-14; John 6:37-40). And God will condemn all who come any other way but Christ (John 14:6).