

CHAPTER 5

The destruction of the kingdom of Babylon had been long and often foretold when it was at a distance; in this chapter we have it accomplished, and a prediction of it the very same night that it was accomplished. Belshazzar now reigned in Babylon; some compute he had reigned seventeen years, others but three; we have here the story of his exit and the period of his kingdom. We must know that about two years before this Cyrus king of Persia, a growing monarch, came against Babylon with a great army; Belshazzar met him, fought him, and was routed by him in a pitched battle. He and his scattered forces retired into the city, where Cyrus besieged them. They were very secure, because the river Euphrates was their bulwark, and they had twenty years; provision in the city; but in the second year of the siege he took it, as is here related. We have in this chapter,

- I.** The riotous, idolatrous, sacrilegious feast which Belshazzar made, in which he filled up the measure of his iniquity (v. 1-4).
- II.** The alarm given him in the midst of his jollity by a handwriting on the wall, which none of his wise men could read or tell him the meaning of (v. 5-9).
- III.** The interpretation of the mystical characters by Daniel, who was at length brought in to him, and dealt plainly with him, and showed him his doom written (v. 10-28).
- IV.** The immediate accomplishment of the interpretation in the slaying of the king and seizing of the kingdom (v. 30, 31).

DANIEL 5:1-9

BELSHAZZAR'S FEAST

We have here Belshazzar the king very gay, but all of a sudden very gloomy, and in straits in the fulness of his sufficiency. See how he affronts God, and God affrights him; and wait what will be the issue of this contest; and whether he that hardened his heart against God prospered.

I. See how the king affronted God, and put contempt upon him. He *made a great feast, or banquet of wine*; probably it was some anniversary solemnity, in honour of his birth-day or coronation-day, or in honour of some of their idols. Historians say that Cyrus, who was now with his army besieging Babylon, knew of this feast, and presuming that they then would be off their guard, *somno vinoque sepulti* — *buried in sleep and wine*, took that opportunity to attack the city, and so with the more ease made himself master of it. Belshazzar upon this occasion invited *a thousand of his lords* to come and drink with him. Perhaps they were such as had signalized themselves in defense of the city against the besiegers; or these were his great council of war, with whom, when they had well drunk, he would advise what was further to be done. And they were to look upon it as a great favour that he *drank wine before* them, for it was the pride of those eastern kings to be seldom seen. He drank wine before them, for he made this feast, as Ahasuerus did, to show the *honour of his majesty*. Now in this sumptuous feast,

1. He put an affront upon the providence of God and bade defiance to his judgments. His city was now besieged; a powerful enemy was at his gates; his life and kingdom lay at stake. In all this the hand of the Lord had gone out against him, and by it he called him to *weeping, and mourning, and girding with sackcloth*. God's voice cried in the city, as Jonah to Nineveh, *Yet forty days, or fewer, and Babylon shall be destroyed*. He should therefore, like the king of Nineveh, have proclaimed a fast; but, as one resolved to walk contrary to God, he proclaims a feast, and behold *joy and gladness, slaying oxen, killing sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine*, as if he dared the Almighty to do his worst, ²³²²Isaiah 22:12, 13. To show how little fear he had of being forced to surrender, for want of provisions, he spent thus extravagantly. Note, Security and sensuality are sad presages of approaching ruin. Those that will not be warned by judgments of God may expect to be wounded by them.

2. He put an affront upon the temple of God, and bade defiance to his sanctuary, v. 2. *While he tasted the wine, he commanded to bring the vessels of the temple*, that they might drink in them. When he tasted how rich and fine the wine was, "O," said he, "it is a pity but we should have holy vessels to drink such delicious wine as this in," which was looked upon as a piece of wit, and, to carry on the humour, the vessels of the temple were immediately sent for. Nay, there seems to have been something more in it than a frolic, and that it was done in a malicious

despite to the God of Israel. The heart of his people was very much upon these sacred vessels, as appears from ^{<2716>}Jeremiah 27:16, 18. Their principal care, at their return, was about these, ^{<4107>}Ezra 1:7. Now, we may suppose, they had an expectation of their deliverance approaching, reckoning the seventy years of their captivity near a period; and some of them might perhaps have given out some words to that purport, that shortly they should have the vessels of the sanctuary restored to them, in defiance of which Belshazzar here proclaims them to be his own, will keep them in store no longer, but will make use of them among his own plate. Note, That mirth is sinful indeed, and fills the measure of men's iniquity apace, which profanes sacred things and jests with them. This ripened Babylon for ruin — that no songs would serve them but the *songs of Zion* (^{<4937>}Psalm 137:3), no vessels but the vessels of the sanctuary. Let those who thus sacrilegiously alienate what is dedicated to God and his honour know that he *will not be mocked*.

3. He put an affront upon God himself, and bade defiance to his deity; for *they drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver*, v. 4. They gave that glory to images, the work of their own hands and creatures of their own fancy, which is due to the true and living God only. They praised them either with sacrifices offered to them or with songs sung in honour of them. When their heads were giddy, and their hearts merry, with wine, they were in the fittest frame to *praise the gods of gold and silver, wood and stone*; for one would think that men in their senses, who had the command of a clear and sober thought, could not be guilty of so gross an absurdity; they must be intoxicated ere they could be so infatuated. Drunken worshippers, who are not men, but beasts, are the most proper for the service of dunghill deities, that are not gods, but devils. *They have erred through wine*, ^{<2716>}Isaiah 27:7. They drank wine, and praised their idol-gods, as if they had been the founders of their feast and the givers of all good things to them. Or, when they were drinking wine, they praised their gods by drinking healths to them; and the king *drank wine before* them (v. 1), that is, he began the health, first to this god, and then to the other, till they went through the *bead-roll* or *farrago* of them, those of *wood and stone* not excepted. Note, Immorality and impiety, vice and profaneness, strengthen the hands and advance the interests one of another. Drunken frolics were an introduction to idolatry, and then idolatrous healths were a shoeing-horn to further drunkenness.

II. See how God affrighted the king, and struck a terror upon him.

Belshazzar and his lords are in the midst of their revels, the cups going round apace, and all upon the merry pin, drinking confusion, it may be, to Cyrus and his army, and roaring out huzzas, in confidence of the speedy raising of the siege; but the hour had come when that must be fulfilled which had been long ago said of the king of Babylon, when his city should be besieged by the Persians and Medes, ^{<307>}Isaiah 21:2-4. *The night of my pleasures has he turned into fear to me.* The mirth of this ball at court must be spoiled, and a damp cast upon their jollity, though the king himself be master of the revels; immediately, when God speaks the word, we have him and all his guests in the utmost confusion, and the end of their mirth is heaviness.

1. There appear the *fingers of a man's hand writing on the plaster of the wall*, before the king's face (v. 5), “the angel Gabriel,” say the rabbin, “directing these fingers and writing by them.” “That divine hand” (says a rabbi of our own, Dr. Lightfoot) “that had written the two tables for a law to his people now writes the doom of Babel and Belshazzar upon the wall.” Here was nothing sent to frighten them which made a noise, or threatened their lives, no claps of thunder nor flashes of lightning, no destroying angel with his sword drawn in his hand, only a pen in the hand, writing upon the wall, *over-against the candlestick*, where they might all see it by the light of their own candle. Note, God's written word is sufficient to put the proudest boldest sinners into a fright, when he is pleased to give it the setting on. The king saw *the part of the hand that wrote*, but saw not the person whose hand it was, which made the thing more frightful. Note, What we see of God, the part of the hand that writes in the book of the creatures and the book of the scriptures (*Lo, these are parts of his ways*, ^{<304>}Job 26:14), may serve to possess us with awful thoughts concerning that of God which we do not see. If this be *the finger of God*, what is his arm made bare? And what is he?

2. The king is immediately seized with a panic fear (v. 6): *His countenance was changed* (his colour went and came); *the joints of his loins were loosed*, so that he had no strength in them, but was struck with a pain in his back, as is usual in a great fright; *his knees smote one against another*, so violently did he tremble like an aspen leaf. But what was the matter? Why is he in such a fright? He perceives not what is written, and how does he know but it may be some happy presage of deliverance to him and to his kingdom? But the business was *his thoughts troubled him*;

his own guilty conscience flew in his face, and told him that he had no reason to expect any good news from Heaven, and that the hand of an angel could write nothing but terror to him. He that knew himself liable to the justice of God immediately concluded this to be an arrest in his name, a summons to appear before him. Note, God can soon awaken the most secure and make the heart of the stoutest sinner to tremble; and there needs no more to do it than to let loose his own thoughts upon him; they will soon play the tyrant, and give him trouble enough.

3. The wise men of Babylon are immediately called in, to see what they can make of this writing upon the wall, v. 7. The king *cried aloud*, as one in haste, as one in earnest, to bring the whole college of magicians, to try if they can *read this writing*, and *show the interpretation of it*; for the king and all his lords cannot pretend to it, it is out of their sphere. The study of divine revelation (such as they had, or thought they had) and converse with the world of spirits were by the heathen confined to one profession, and no other meddled with it; but what is written to us by the finger of God is legible to all; whoever will may read the mind of God in the scriptures. To engage these wise men to exert the utmost of their skill in this matter, and provoke them to an emulation in the attempt, he promised that whoever would give him a satisfactory account of this writing should be dignified with the highest honours of the court. He knew what these pretenders to wisdom aimed at, and what would please them, and therefore promised them a *scarlet robe* and a *gold chain*, glorious things in the eyes of those that know no better. Nay, he should be *primus par regni* — *chief minister of state*, the *third ruler* in the kingdom, next to the king and his heir apparent.

4. The king is disappointed in his expectations from them; they can none of them *read the writing*, much less interpret it (v. 8), which increases the king's confusion, v. 9. He likes the thing yet worse and worse, and fears that mischief is towards him. *His lords* also, that had been partners with him in his jollity, are now sharers with him in his terrors; they also were *astonished* at their wits' end; and neither their numbers nor their refreshment by wine would serve to keep up their spirits. The reason why the wise men could not read the writing was not because it was written in any language or characters unknown to them, but God either cast a mist before their eyes or put such confusion upon their spirits that they could not read it, that the honour of expounding this mystical writing might be reserved for Daniel. Note, The terror of an awakened convinced

conscience may justly be increased by the utter insufficiency of all creatures to give it ease or satisfaction.

210 DANIEL 5:10-29

DANIEL BROUGHT BEFORE BELSHAZZAR

Here is,

I. The information given to the king, by the queen-mother, concerning Daniel, how fit he was to be consulted in this difficult case. It is supposed that this queen was the widow of Evil-Merodach, and was that famous Nitocris whom Herodotus mentions as a woman of extraordinary prudence. She was not present at the feast, as the king's *wives and concubines were* (v. 2); it was not agreeable to her age and gravity to keep a merry night. But, tidings of the fright which the king and his lords were put into being brought to her apartment, she came herself to the banqueting-house, to recommend to the king a physician for his melancholy. She entreated him not to be discouraged by the insufficiency of his wise men to solve this riddle, for that there was *a man in his kingdom* that had more than once helped his grandfather at such a dead lift, and, no doubt, could help him, v. 11, 12. She could not undertake to read the writing herself, but directed him to one that could; let *Daniel be called* now, who should have been called first. Now observe,

1. The high character she gives of Daniel: He is a *man in whom is the spirit of the holy gods*, who has something in him more than human, not only the *spirit of a man*, which, in all, is the *candle of the Lord*, but a divine spirit. According to the language of her country and religion, she could not give a higher encomium of any man; she speaks honourably of him as a man that had,

(1.) An admirably good head: *Light, and understanding, and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, were found in him*. Such an insight had he into things secret, and such a foresight of things to come, that it was evident he was divinely inspired; he had *knowledge and understanding* beyond all the other wise men for *interpreting dreams*, explaining enigmas or hard sentences, untying knots, and resolving doubts. Solomon had a wonderful sagacity of this kind; but it should seem that in these things Daniel had

more of an immediate divine direction. *Behold, a greater than Solomon himself is here.* Yet what was the wisdom of them both compared with the treasures of wisdom hidden in Christ?

(2.) He had an admirably good heart: *An excellent spirit was found in him,* which was a great ornament to his wisdom and knowledge, and qualified him to receive that gift; for *God gives to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy.* He was of a humble, holy, heavenly spirit, had a devout and gracious spirit, a spirit of zeal for the glory of God and the good of men. This was indeed an excellent spirit.

2. The account she gives of the respect that Nebuchadnezzar had for him; he was much in his favour, and was preferred by him: *“The king thy father”* (that is, thy grandfather, but even to many generations Nebuchadnezzar might well be called the father of that royal family, for he it was that raised it to such a pitch of grandeur), *“the king, I say, thy father, made him master of the magicians.”* Perhaps Belshazzar had sometimes, in his pride, spoken slightly of Nebuchadnezzar, and his politics, and the methods of his government, and the ministers he employed, and thought himself wiser than he; and therefore his mother harps upon that. *“The king, I say, thy father, to whose good management all thou hast owing, he pronounced him chief of, and gave him dominion over, all the wise men of Babylon, and named him Belteshazzar, according to the name of his god, thinking thereby to put honour upon him;”* but Daniel, by constantly making use of his Jewish name himself (which he resolved to keep, in token of his faithful adherence to his religion), had worn out that name; only the queen-dowager remembered it, otherwise he was generally called *Daniel*. Note, It is a very good office to revive the remembrance of the good services of worthy men, who are themselves modest, and willing that they should be forgotten.

3. The motion she makes concerning him: *Let Daniel be called, and he will show the interpretation.* By this it appears that Daniel was now forgotten at court. Belshazzar was a stranger to him, knew not that he had such a jewel in his kingdom. With the new king there came in a new ministry, and the old one was laid aside. Note, There are a great many valuable men, and such as might be made very useful, that lie long buried in obscurity, and some that have done eminent services that live to be overlooked and taken no notice of; but, whatever men are, God is not unrighteous to forget the services done to his kingdom. Daniel, being

turned out of his place, lived privately, and sought not any opportunity to come into notice again; yet he lived near the court and within call, though Babylon was now besieged, that he might be ready, if there were occasion, to do any good office, by what interest he had among the great ones, for the children of his people. But Providence so ordered it that now, just at the fall of that monarchy, he should by the queen's means be brought to court again, that he might lie there ready for preferment in the ensuing government. Thus do *the righteous shine forth out of obscurity, and before honour is humility.*

II. The introducing of Daniel to the king, and his request to him to read and expound the writing. Daniel was *brought in before the king*, v. 13. He was now nearly ninety years of age, so that his years, and honours, and former preferments, might have entitled him to a free admission into the king's presence; yet he was willing to be conducted in, as a stranger, by the master of the ceremonies. Note,

1. The king asks, with an air of haughtiness: *Art thou that Daniel who art of the children of the captivity?* Being a Jew, and a captive, he was loth to be beholden to him if he could help it.

2. He tells him what an encomium he had heard of him (v. 14), *that the spirit of the gods was in him*; and he had sent for him to try whether he deserved so high a character or no.

3. He acknowledges that all the wise men of Babylon were baffled; they could not *read this writing*, nor *show the interpretation*, v. 16. But,

4. He promises him the same rewards that he had promised them if he would do it, v. 16. It was strange that the magicians, when now, and in Nebuchadnezzar's time, once and again, they were nonplussed, did not attempt something to save their credit; if they had with a good assurance said, "This is the meaning of such a dream, such a writing," who could disprove them? But God so ordered it that they had nothing at all to say, as, when Christ was born, the heathen oracles were struck dumb.

III. The interpretation which Daniel gave of these mystic characters, which was so far from easing the king of his fears that we may suppose it increased them rather. Daniel was now in years, and Belshazzar was young; and therefore he seems to take a greater liberty of dealing plainly and roundly with him than he had done upon the like occasions with

Nebuchadnezzar. In reproofing any man, especially great men, there is need of wisdom to consider all circumstances; for they are *the reproofs of instruction* that are *the way of life*. In Daniel's discourse here,

1. He undertakes to read the writing which gave them this alarm, and to show them the interpretation of it, v. 17. He slighted the offer he made him of rewards, is not pleased that it was mentioned, for he is not one of those that *divine for money*; what gratuities Nebuchadnezzar gave him afterwards he gladly accepted, but he scorned to bargain for them, or to read the *writing to the king* for and in consideration of such and such honours promised him. No: "*Let thy gifts be to thyself*, for they will not be long thine, and *give thy fee to another*, to any of the wise men whom thou wouldst have most wished to earn it; I value it not." Daniel sees his kingdom now at its last gasp, and therefore looks with contempt upon his gifts and rewards. And thus should we despise all the gifts and rewards that this world can give did we see, as we may by faith, its final period hastening on. Let it give its perishing gifts to another; there are better gifts which we have our eyes and hearts upon; but let us do our duty in the world, do it all the real service we can, read God's writing to it in a profession of religion, and by an agreeable conversation make known the interpretation of it, and then trust God for his gifts, his rewards, in comparison with which all the world can give is mere trash and trifles.

2. He largely recounts to the king God's dealings with his father Nebuchadnezzar, which were intended for instruction and warning to him, v. 18, 21. This is not intended for a flourish or an amusement, but is a necessary preliminary to the interpretation of the writing. Note, That we may understand aright what God is doing with us, it is of use to us to review what he has done with others.

(1.) He describes the great dignity and power to which the divine Providence had advanced Nebuchadnezzar, v. 18, 19. He had *a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour*, for aught we know, above what any heathen prince ever had before him; he thought that he got his glory by his own extraordinary conduct and courage, and ascribed his successes to a projecting active genius of his own; but Daniel tells him who now enjoyed what he had laboured for that it was the *most high God, the God of gods and Lord of kings* (as Nebuchadnezzar himself had called him), that gave him *that kingdom*, that vast dominion, that majesty wherewith he presided in the affairs of it, and that *glory and honour* which by his prosperous

management he acquired. Note, Whatever degree of outward prosperity any arrive at, they must own that it is of God's giving, not their own getting. Let it never be said, *My might, and the power of my hand, have gotten me this wealth*, this preferment; but let it always be remembered that it is *God that gives men power to get wealth*, and gives success to their endeavours. Now the power which God gave to Nebuchadnezzar is here described to be very great in respect both of ability and of authority.

[1.] His ability was so strong that it was irresistible; such was the majesty that God gave him, so numerous were the forces he had at command, and such an admirable dexterity he had at commanding them, that, which way soever his sword turned, it prospered. He could captivate and subdue nations by threatening them, without striking a stroke, for *all people trembled and feared before him*, and would compound with him for their lives upon any terms. See what force is, and what the fear of it does. It is that by which the brutal part of the world, even of the world of mankind, both governs and is governed.

[2.] His authority was so absolute that it was uncontrollable. The power which was allowed him, which descended upon him, or which, at least, he assumed, was without contradiction, was absolute and despotic, none shared with him either in the legislative or in the executive part of it. In dispensing punishments he condemned or acquitted at pleasure: *Whom he would he slew, and whom he would he saved alive*, though both were equally innocent or equally guilty. The *jus vitae et necis* — *the power of life and death* was entirely in his hand. In dispensing rewards he granted or denied preferment at pleasure: *Whom he would he set up, and whom he would he put down*, merely for a humour, and without giving a reason so much as to himself; but it is all *ex mero motu* — *of his own good pleasure*, and *stat pro ratione voluntas* — *his will stands for a reason*. Such was the constitution of the eastern monarchies, such the manner of their kings.

(2.) He sets before him the sins which Nebuchadnezzar had been guilty of, whereby he had provoked God against him.

[1.] He behaved insultingly towards those that were under him, and grew tyrannical and oppressive. The description given of his power intimates his abuse of his power, and that he was directed in what he did by humour and passion, not by reason and equity; so that he often condemned the innocent and acquitted the guilty, both which are an *abomination to the Lord*. He deposed men of merit and preferred unworthy men, to the great

detriment of the public, and for this he was accountable to the most high God, that gave him his power. Note, It is a very hard and rare thing for men to have an absolute arbitrary power, and not to make an ill use of it. Camden has a distich of Giraldus, wherein he speaks of it as a rare instance, concerning our king Henry II of England, that never any man had so much power and did so little hurt with it.

*Glorior hoc uno, quod nunquam vidimus unum,
Nec potuisse magis, nec nocuisse minus —*

*Of him I can say, exulting, that with the same power
to do harm no one was ever more inoffensive.*

But that was not all.

[2.] He behaved insolently towards the God above him, and grew proud and haughty (v. 20): *His heart was lifted up*, and there his sin and ruin began; his *mind was hardened* in pride, hardened against the commands of God and his judgments; he was willful and obstinate, and neither the word of God nor his rod made any lasting impression upon him. Note, Pride is a sin that hardens the heart in all other sin and renders the means of repentance and reformation ineffectual.

(3.) He reminds him of the judgments of God that were brought upon him for his pride and obstinacy, how he was deprived of his reason, and so *deposed from his kingly throne* (v. 20), *driven from among men, to dwell with the wild asses*, v. 21. He that would not govern his subjects by rules of reason had not reason sufficient for the government himself. Note, Justly does God deprive men of their reason when they become unreasonable and will not use it, and of their power when they become oppressive and use it ill. He continued like a brute till *he knew* and embraced that first principle of religion, *That the most high God rules*. And it is rather by religion than reason that man is distinguished from, and dignified above, the beasts; and it is more his honour to be a subject to the supreme Creator than to be lord of the inferior creatures. Note, Kings must know, or shall be made to know, that the most high God rules in their kingdoms (that is an *imperium in imperio — an empire within an empire*, not to be excepted against), and that he appoints over them whomsoever he will. As he makes heirs, so he makes princes.

3. In God's name, he exhibits articles of impeachment against Belshazzar. Before he reads him his doom, from the hand-writing on the wall, he

shows him his crime, that God may be *justified when he speaks, and clear when he judges*. Now that which he lays to his charge is,

(1.) That he had not taken warning by the judgments of God upon his father (v. 22): *Thou his son, O Belshazzar! hast not humbled thy heart, though thou knewest all this*. Note, It is a great offence to God if our hearts be not humbled before him to comply both with his precepts and with his providences, humbled by repentance, obedience, and patience; nay, he expects from the greatest of men that their hearts should be humbled before him, by an acknowledgment that, great as they are, to him they are accountable. And it is a great aggravation of the unhumbleness of our hearts when we know enough to humble them but do not consider and improve it, particularly when we know how others have been broken that would not bend, how others have fallen that would not stoop, and yet we continue stiff and inflexible. It makes the sin of children the more heinous if they tread in the steps of their parents' wickedness, though they have seen how dearly it has cost them, and how pernicious the consequences of it have been. Do we know this, do we know all this, and yet are we not humbled?

(2.) That he had affronted God more impudently than Nebuchadnezzar himself had done, witness the revels of this very night, in the midst of which he was seized with this horror (v. 23): *“Thou hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven, hast swelled with rage against him, and taken up arms against his crown and dignity, in this particular instance, that thou hast profaned the vessels of his house, and made the utensils of his sanctuary instruments of thy iniquity, and, in an actual designed contempt of him, hast praised the gods of silver and gold, which see not, nor hear, nor know anything, as if they were to be preferred before the God that sees, and hears, and knows every thing.”* Sinners that are resolved to go on in sin are well enough pleased with gods that *neither see, nor hear, nor know*, for then they may sin securely; but they will find, to their confusion, that though those are the gods they choose those are not the gods they must be judged by, but one to whom *all things are naked and open*.

(3.) That he had not answered the end of his creation and maintenance: *The God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified*. This is a general charge, which stands good against us all; let us consider how we shall answer it. Observe,

[1.] Our dependence upon God as our creator, preserver, benefactor, owner, and ruler; not only from his hand our breath was at first, but *in his hand our breath is still*; it is he that *holds our souls in life*, and, if he *take away our breath, we die*. Our times being *in his hand*, so is our breath, by which our times are measured. *In him we live, and move, and have our being*; we live by him, live upon him, and cannot live without him. *The way of man is not in himself*, not at his own command, at his own disposal, *but his are all our ways*; for our hearts are in his hand, and so are the hearts of all men, even of kings, who seem to act most as free-agents.

[2.] Our duty to God, in consideration of this dependence; we ought to glorify him, to devote ourselves to his honour and employ ourselves in his service, to make it our care to please him and our business to praise him.

[3.] Our default in this duty, notwithstanding that dependence; we have not done it; for we have *all sinned, and come short of the glory of God*. This is the indictment against Belshazzar; there needs no proof, it is made good by the notorious evidence of the fact, and his own conscience cannot plead guilty to it. And therefore,

4. He now proceeds to read the sentence, as he found it *written upon the wall*: “*Then*” (says Daniel) “when thou hast come to such a height of impiety as thus to trample upon the most sacred things, *then* when thou wast in the midst of thy sacrilegious idolatrous feast, then was *the part of the hand*, the writing fingers, sent *from him*, from that God whom thou didst so daringly affront, and who had borne so long with thee, but would bear no longer; he *sent them*, and *this writing*, thou now seest, *was written*, v. 24. It is he that now *writes bitter things against thee*, and *makes thee to possess thy iniquities*,” ~~13:26~~ Job 13:26. Note, As the sin of sinners is written in the book of God's omniscience, so the doom of sinners is written in the book of God's law; and the day is coming when those *books shall be opened*, and they shall be judged by them. Now the writing was, *Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin*, v. 25. It is well that we have an authentic exposition of these words annexed, else we could make little of them, so concise are they; the signification of them is, *He has numbered, he has weighed, and they divide*. The Chaldean wise men, because they knew not that there is but one God only, could not understand who this *He* should be, and for that reason (some think) the writing puzzled them.

(1.) *Mene*; that is repeated, for the thing is certain — *Mene, mene*; that signifies, both in Hebrew and Chaldee, *He has numbered and finished*,

which Daniel explains thus (v. 26): “*God has numbered thy kingdom, the years and days of the continuance of it; these were numbered in the counsel of God, and now they are finished; the term has expired for and during which thou wast to hold it, and now it must be surrendered. Here is an end of thy kingdom.*”

(2.) *Tekel*; that signifies, in Chaldee, *Thou art weighed*, and, in Hebrew, *Thou art too light*. So Dr. Lightfoot. For this king and his actions are weighed in the just and unerring balances of divine equity. God does as perfectly know his true character as the goldsmith knows the weight of that which he has weighed in the nicest scales. God does not give judgment against him till he has first pondered his actions, and considered the merits of his case. “*But thou art found wanting, unworthy to have such a trust lodged in thee, a vain, light, empty man, a man of no weight or consideration.*”

(3.) *Upharsin*, which should be rendered, *and Pharsin*, or *Peres*. *Parsin*, in Hebrew, signifies the *Persians*; *Paresin*, in Chaldee, signifies *dividing*; Daniel puts both together (v. 28): “*Thy kingdom is divided, is rent from thee, and given to the Medes and Persians, as a prey to be divided among them.*” Now this may, without any force, be applied to the doom of sinners. *Mene, Tekel, Peres*, may easily be made to signify *death, judgment, and hell*. At death, the sinner's days are *numbered and finished*; after death the judgment, when he will be *weighed in the balance and found wanting*; and after judgment the sinner will be *cut asunder*, and given as a prey to the devil and his angels. Daniel does not here give Belshazzar such advice and encouragement to repent as he had given Nebuchadnezzar, because he saw the decree had gone forth and he would not be allowed any space to repent.

One would have thought that Belshazzar would be exasperated against Daniel, and, seeing his own case desperate, would be in a rage against him. But he was so far convicted by his own conscience of the reasonableness of all he said that he objected nothing against it; but, on the contrary, gave Daniel the reward he promised him, put on him the *scarlet gown* and the *gold chain*, and proclaimed him the *third ruler in the kingdom* (v. 29), because he would be as good as his word, and because it was not Daniel's fault if the exposition of the hand-writing was not such as he desired. Note, Many show great respect to God's prophets who yet have no regard to his word. Daniel did not value these titles and ensigns of

honour, yet would not refuse them, because they were tokens of his prince's good-will: but we have reason to think that he received them with a smile, foreseeing how soon they would all wither with him that bestowed them. They were like Jonah's gourd, which came up in a night and perished in a night, and therefore it was folly for him to be *exceedingly glad* of them.

DANIEL 5:30-31

BELSHAZZAR SLAIN

Here is,

- 1.** The death of the king. Reason enough he had to tremble, for he was just falling into the hands of the *king of terrors*, v. 30. *In that night*, when his heart was merry with wine, the besiegers broke into the city, aimed at the palace; there they found the king, and gave him his death's wound. He could not find any place so secret as to conceal him, or so strong as to protect him. Heathen writers speak of Cyrus's taking Babylon by surprise, with the assistance of two deserters that showed him the best way into the city. And it was foretold what a consternation it would be to the court, ^{<2511>}Jeremiah 51:11, 39. Note, Death comes as a snare upon those whose hearts are overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness.
- 2.** The transferring of the kingdom into other hands. From the head of gold we now descend to the breast and arms of silver. *Darius the Mede took the kingdom* in partnership with, and by the consent of, Cyrus, who had conquered it, v. 31. They were partners in war and conquest, and so they were in dominion, ^{<2768>}Daniel 6:28. Notice is taken of his age, that he was now sixty-two years old, for which reason Cyrus, who was his nephew, gave him the precedency. Some observe that being now sixty-two years old, in the last year of the captivity, he was born in the eighth year of it, and that was the year when Jeconiah was carried captive and all the nobles, etc. See ^{<12413>}2 Kings 24:13-15. Just at that time when the most fatal stroke was given was a prince born that in process of time should avenge Jerusalem upon Babylon, and heal the wound that was now given. Thus deep are the counsels of God concerning his people, thus kind are his designs towards them.