



DANIEL

Unshakable Trust — in — Uncertain Times



Sunday
October 11, 2026

Daniel 5:1-30

Example Teaching Rhythm

Welcome and Connect: 10 Minutes

This helps people feel connected and more comfortable participating in the study and discussion.

Look Forward: 5-10 Minutes

Share any important church events, service opportunities, or upcoming group plans. Keep this brief but clear.

Look at Scripture: 25-35 Minutes

This is the main focus of Community Groups. Read the selected scripture together and guide the group through discussion questions and observations.

Prayer: 10 Minutes

Invite members to share prayer requests and praises, then pray together as a group. This is a time to support one another.

Explaining the H.E.A.R Method

The acronym **HEAR** stands for **Highlight, Explain, Apply, and Respond**. Each of these four steps aims to cultivate an atmosphere to hear God speak.

Highlight - After praying for the Holy Spirit's guidance, read the passage of scripture, and highlight each verse that speaks to you.

Explain - Explain what the text means. Ask questions like:

- Who wrote this, to whom, and why? What does this reveal about God? What do the key words actually mean? What did this call the original audience to, and what does that reveal for me?

By asking questions, with the help of God's Spirit, and by using helpful study resources, you can understand the meaning of a passage or verse.

Apply - Application is the heart of the process. Everything you have done so far culminates under this heading. As you have done before, work to uncover the significance of these verses and the implications they have. Ask questions like:

- What does this passage reveal about God, yourself, or the world that you need to embrace or sit with? Does this passage challenge an attitude, assumption, or habit that needs to change? Is there something to do? Is there someone to love?

Respond - Your response to the passage may take on many forms. Ask: Is there something to pray? - Let the passage shape your prayer, not just inform it. Use the "Five Daily Prayer Prompts" to guide you in your response.

Interpreting Signs of Times Reading what everyone else is too drunk to see

Introduction

The party is still going when the hand appears.

That detail matters more than people give it credit for. Belshazzar doesn't encounter God in a moment of reflection or crisis – he encounters him at the height of his own celebration, mid-toast, surrounded by a thousand lords, with wine being poured from cups his grandfather looted from the Jerusalem temple. He has weaponized sacred objects for a party and called it a decree.

Then the fingers appear. Just fingers – not a figure, not a voice, not a vision requiring interpretation. Just a hand writing on a plaster wall, and the king watching the color drain out of the room he was commanding four verses ago.

What nobody tells you about this chapter is that the queen is the calmest person in it. The king's face has changed, his knees are knocking, his lords are useless, and she walks in and names the problem in one sentence: there's a man in your kingdom who can tell you what this says. She knows who Daniel is. She even knows what he's known for. The chapter raises the question it never directly answers: why does no one at the table already know this?

Daniel is brought in. He turns down the rewards before he says a word. Then he delivers a verdict with no cushioning, no gradual buildup, no diplomatic softening at all.

He places the inscription in its full theological frame: your grandfather was humbled by God, you knew it and didn't care, you lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven this very night, and the word on the wall is your end.

Belshazzar gives him the purple robe anyway.

Before midnight, he is dead.

Discussion Questions + Illustration

Select a question or two below to open up discussion.

- When have you watched someone receive a clear warning and keep doing exactly what they were doing? What made you certain it wouldn't change anything?
- What's the difference between a person who doesn't know they're accountable to God and a person who knows and doesn't care?
- Why do the clearest-eyed people in a crisis often turn out to be the ones without power in the room? Have you seen that play out?
- Have you ever seen someone get honored or rewarded before they'd actually earned it? What usually drives that?

On October 14, 1962, a U.S. spy plane photographed missile sites under construction in Cuba. Kennedy's advisers had the same images, the same intelligence – the evidence was plain. But what it meant divided the room. Some read it as a bluff. Some as a provocation. Some as a test of nerve. The same data, three different diagnoses.

- What distinguished the advisers who read it correctly wasn't better information. It was willingness to let the evidence mean what it actually meant.
- Where do you tend to argue with the evidence rather than with the interpretation?

Highlight | Daniel 5:1-30

The crisis lands inside the celebration itself – a king drunk on his own authority, judged mid-party.

Daniel's absence in the first eight verses is its own statement. He is not among the wise men called, not in the room. The queen has to introduce him – Belshazzar didn't want him there.

Her speech (vv.10-12) is a reminder, not a recommendation: four phrases describing someone the king had deliberately overlooked. The wise men couldn't read the writing not because the letters were foreign, but because they lacked what made Daniel useful – access to the God who wrote it.

Daniel's speech (vv.17-28) moves without pausing: precedent, indictment, verdict. Verse 22 – "you knew all this" – closes the only exit. His grandfather's humiliation was public. Belshazzar had the information and set it aside.

The inscription reads MENE MENE TEKEL PARSIN (v.25); MENE appears twice, and Daniel gives it its own interpretation (v.26): God has numbered the days of the kingdom and ended them. The repetition signals a verdict already reached, not a warning still open.

- What does Daniel's refusal of the gifts before speaking tell you about how he understands his role?
- What changes about a warning once someone is told they already knew?

Explain | Consider the Context

Belshazzar is almost certainly Nebuchadnezzar's grandson, ruling as co-regent while his father Nabonidus was absent. It matters because Daniel's speech in verses 18–22 rests entirely on what Belshazzar inherited – not only a kingdom, but the record of what God did to its previous king.

The temple vessels (v.2) were seized in 605 BC and appear in the book's opening verse. This chapter closes a loop Daniel I opened. In ancient Near Eastern practice, displaying a conquered people's sacred objects was a public claim about whose deity had prevailed. Belshazzar is not only being irreverent – he is making a theological argument. God answers it.

Ancient historians – Herodotus and Xenophon both – record that this was the night Cyrus's forces diverted the Euphrates and entered Babylon through the dry riverbed while the city celebrated. The party is not incidental to the judgment – it is the setting into which judgment arrives. Babylon falls not despite its confidence but because of it.

- The temple vessels enter the story in Daniel I and close it here. What does that suggest about how God keeps account of things people assume are forgotten?
- Babylon fell to an army. Daniel gives a theological explanation. How do you hold both truths at once?

Apply | Discuss as a Group

The hardest sentence in this chapter isn't the writing on the wall. It's verse 22: "You knew all this, but you have not humbled yourself."

The problem with Belshazzar isn't ignorance. He grew up knowing what happened to Nebuchadnezzar. He watched an empire-ruling king lose his mind in a field for seven years until he credited the God of heaven with his throne. That story was in the family. And Belshazzar concluded it was somebody else's story.

That's the category of person this chapter is most directly addressed to. Not someone who's never heard – someone who has filed the information away somewhere it doesn't require a response.

Daniel's willingness to say it plainly – without softening, without accepting the rewards first – raises a question most people in ministry positions sit with: when is the truthful thing also the kind thing, and when does making the truth easier to hear make it easier to dismiss?

Belshazzar honored Daniel anyway. There's no contempt in his response, no rage. He just couldn't – or wouldn't – let the word change anything.

- Is there an area of your life where you've been keeping something as information rather than letting it become a conviction? What keeps it in one category instead of the other?
- Daniel spoke to a king who had every power to harm him. What made that possible? What's the smaller version of that courage you avoid?
- Who in your life has been clear with you about something you needed to hear – and what did you do with it?

Respond | How should I live/pray?

Start with verse 22. Not with the writing on the wall, not with the miracle – with the ordinary accusation: you knew.

Bring one thing before God this week that has been living in the "information" category – something true you have acknowledged but not inhabited. Not something you've been ignorant about. The thing you've heard, nodded at, maybe even repeated to someone else, and not let it move from head to chest to hand. Name it specifically. Vague acknowledgment is exactly what Belshazzar's entire life consisted of.

Then notice Daniel's posture before he speaks. He refuses the rewards in advance – not because he's indifferent to them, but because accepting them would make what he's about to say transactional. There's a version of faithfulness that takes the gifts first and then softens the message accordingly. Daniel's version doesn't work that way. Before you speak hard truth to someone this week, ask what you've already agreed to receive from them that might shape what you're willing to say.

Here's what this chapter teaches us about God: he keeps a longer account than any human calendar – the temple vessels enter the story in chapter 1 and close it in chapter 5, and God tracks what Belshazzar assumed was decorative history. Here's what it teaches us about ourselves: the most dangerous response to a warning isn't rage or refusal. It's a thank-you and a robe, and then nothing changing before morning.

- What's the specific thing you've known but not let land?
- Who needs you to speak clearly this week – not cruelly, but without the softening that makes what's true easier to set aside?

Response Tool: Five Daily Prayer Prompts

As you leave today, let these five questions carry the weight of your response into the week ahead – not as a checklist, but as an ongoing conversation with God. Introduce the five daily questions as a simple spiritual practice that can help us intentionally live out our faith in our workplaces, homes, families, and communities.

- God, where do you want me to go?
- God, who do you want me to see?
- God, what do you want me to say?
- God, what do you want me to pray?
- God, how do you want me to serve?

After this time of reflection, transition into a time of prayer requests. Allow time for members to share and, if appropriate, allow others in the class to pray for each other.

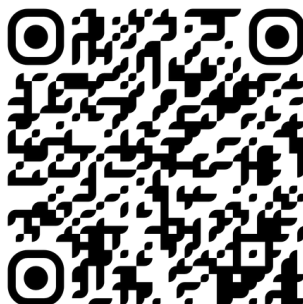
Additional Commentary

- On Belshazzar (בֶּלְשַׁצְצָר, Belteshazzar-variant): Confirmed in the Nabonidus Chronicle and the Verse Account of Nabonidus as co-regent – his father Nabonidus was in Teima (Arabia) for most of the reign. He could offer the third-highest position in the kingdom (v.7) because he himself held the second; no higher was available to give.
- On the vessels (מִזְבָּחַיָּא, manayya, v.2): The same vessels seized in Daniel 1:2 reappear here, closing a five-chapter bracket – Hebrew כְּלִי there, Aramaic מִזְבָּחַיָּא here, but the same objects. In Neo-Babylonian practice, temple vessels carried theological freight: possession of them was public testimony to whose deity had prevailed. Using them to toast Babylonian gods is a direct counter-claim.
- On MENE MENE TEKEL PARSIN (מִנָּה מִנָּה תִּקְלָל פָּרְסִין, v.25): All three roots are Aramaic weights or monetary units – mina, shekel, half-shekel. The wordplay is on secondary meanings: מִנָּה (numbered/completed), תִּקְלָל (weighed/found deficient), פָּרְסִין (divided/Persia). The pun on Persia turns a unit of currency into a prophecy of succession. Scribes in the room couldn't read it not because the letters were illegible, but because the meaning required revelation, not literacy.
- On "knew" (יָדָעַתָּ, yēda'tā, v.22): Perfect tense – completed, settled knowledge. The indictment isn't that Belshazzar should have figured it out. It's that he already had.
- On the queen (v.10): Almost certainly the queen mother, not Belshazzar's wife (his wives were already present, v.3). She is the one person in the chapter who enters the room rather than being summoned – a structural detail that marks her as carrying different authority than anyone at the table.
- On "that very night" (בְּרֵגֶל לַיְלִיָּא, v.30): The Nabonidus Chronicle records Babylon falling to Cyrus on the 16th of Tishri, 539 BC. Herodotus and Xenophon both record the river diversion strategy. The chapter does not present the Persian conquest as the real agent of judgment – it presents it as the instrument. The verdict is divine; the army is its execution.

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