

# The Book of Daniel, Teacher's Guide

## Lesson 5: The Writing on the Wall

### Daniel 5:1–31

#### Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, this chapter sets forth the holiness of God, the certainty of His judgment, and the special danger of sinning against light we already possess. Belshazzar's crime was not ignorance but defiance: he knew what God had done to his grandfather, yet he deliberately profaned the holy vessels and exalted himself against the Lord of heaven. The handwriting on the wall, and the fall of Babylon that very night, declare that God weighs every life and kingdom in His balances, and that His word of judgment never fails. Help students grasp both the reality of God's holiness and the seriousness of treating sacred things with contempt.

A central thread is accountability. "You have been weighed in the balances and found wanting" (5:27) confronts every illusion that we can live as we please without reckoning. The swift, exact fulfillment of God's judgment on Babylon points beyond itself to the final judgment, in which God will weigh every life (Hebrews 9:27; Acts 17:31). Yet the lesson is not meant to leave students in despair, but to drive them to the mercy and grace God offers in Christ to all who humble themselves and turn to Him.

This lesson is sharply formational in at least two directions. First, it calls students to examine where they have grown careless toward the holiness of God, treating His name, His word, His worship, or their own bodies as common rather than sacred. Second, it holds up the fearless old prophet who told a king the truth, modeling the courage that comes from fearing God more than man. Aim to send students home with a renewed reverence for God's holiness, an honest reckoning with His judgment that points them to grace, and fresh courage to speak and live the truth.

#### Question 1

##### Student Question:

*Belshazzar deliberately used the holy vessels from God's temple to toast pagan gods (5:2–4). What does this act of desecration reveal about the human impulse to defy God? Why does Scripture take the profaning of what is holy so seriously (compare Leviticus 10:3)?*

#### Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the deliberate nature of Belshazzar's sin. This was not a careless oversight but a calculated act of defiance. He called specifically for the sacred vessels his grandfather had taken from the temple of the living God, filled them with wine, and used them to toast lifeless idols (5:2–4). It was a public, intentional desecration of what God had set apart as holy.

Help students understand the biblical category of the holy. Holiness means set apart for God, belonging to Him, not to be treated as common. The temple vessels were holy because they belonged to the worship of the one true God. To use them to honor dead idols was to invert reality, to take what was God's and devote it to His rivals. This is the essence of sacrilege.

Show why Scripture treats the profaning of the holy so gravely. "Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified" (Leviticus 10:3). God's holiness is not a detail; it is central to who He is. To treat the holy as common is to deny the very Godness of God, to act as though He may be mocked. Belshazzar's toast was, in effect, a declaration of war on heaven.

Set up the heart issue for the following question. The impulse to defy God, to seize what is His and bend it to our own purposes, did not die with Babylon. It lives in every human heart that wants the gifts of God without the Lordship of God. The forms are subtler now, but the temptation to profane the holy remains.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The holiness of God and the category of what is set apart for Him (Leviticus 10:3).
- Sacrilege as treating the holy as common and devoting God's things to His rivals.
- Belshazzar's act as deliberate defiance, not mere carelessness.
- God's holiness as central to His being, not a peripheral detail.
- The human impulse to seize God's gifts while refusing His Lordship.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What does it mean for something to be holy, set apart for God?
- Why does Scripture treat the profaning of holy things so seriously?
- How is the impulse behind Belshazzar's act still alive in human hearts?

### **Question 2**

#### **Student Question:**

*We can profane holy things in subtler ways, by treating God's name, His word, or His worship as ordinary or trivial. Where have you grown careless about something God calls holy? What is one way you could restore reverence for God in a specific area of your life?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This self-examining question brings the profaning of the holy into the believer's ordinary life. We are unlikely to drink from temple vessels, but we are very capable of treating God's name, His word, His worship, and even our own bodies (which Scripture calls a temple of the Holy Spirit, 1 Corinthians 6:19) as common and trivial.

Help students identify the subtle erosions of reverence. God's name becomes a casual exclamation; His word becomes background noise we rarely open with attention; corporate worship becomes a routine we attend distractedly; our bodies, set apart for God, are used carelessly. Familiarity can breed a quiet contempt for what is sacred.

Avoid both legalism and license. The point is not a list of new rules but a recovered sense of the holiness of God that naturally produces reverence. When we truly grasp who God is, we handle His name, His word, and His worship with care, not out of fear of punishment but out of love and awe.

Move toward one concrete area. Encourage students to name a specific place where reverence has eroded, and to take a step to restore it: more careful speech, more attentive time in the word, more engaged worship, or more honor toward their bodies as God's. Reverence is rebuilt in concrete habits.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Reverence for God's name, word, and worship as fitting His holiness.
- The body as a temple of the Holy Spirit, to be honored (1 Corinthians 6:19).
- Familiarity as a breeder of quiet contempt for sacred things.
- Reverence flowing from love and awe, not mere rule-keeping.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Where have you grown careless toward something God calls holy?
- How does a true sense of God's holiness produce reverence?
- What is one concrete way to restore reverence in a specific area?

### **Question 3**

#### **Student Question:**

*Daniel reminds Belshazzar that his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar had been humbled "until he knew that the Most High God rules the kingdom of mankind" (5:21), yet Belshazzar ignored that example. What does this teach about our responsibility to learn from the lessons God has already made plain, in Scripture and in the lives of others?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Focus on Daniel's pointed accusation: Belshazzar knew. He had the example of Nebuchadnezzar, whose pride God had humbled "until he knew that the Most High God rules the kingdom of mankind" (5:21). The lesson had been written large in his own family history, and yet "you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this" (5:22).

Help students see the principle: we are responsible for the light we have been given. God had taught a clear, public lesson through Nebuchadnezzar, and Belshazzar was without excuse for

ignoring it. To sin against known truth is more serious than to sin in ignorance, because it adds defiance to disobedience (compare Luke 12:47–48).

Broaden the application. God has made many lessons plain, in Scripture and in the lives of others around us. We watch people reap the consequences of pride, of folly, of neglecting God, and the lesson is set before us as clearly as Nebuchadnezzar's was before Belshazzar. The question is whether we will learn from it or repeat it.

Note the grace in this. God does not hide the lessons we need; He makes them visible, in His word and in the examples of others, precisely so we do not have to learn everything the hard way. To ignore the lessons He has already provided is to despise a real mercy. Wisdom learns from others; folly insists on learning only from its own wounds.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Responsibility for the light and truth we have been given (Luke 12:47–48).
- The greater seriousness of sinning against known truth.
- God's provision of clear lessons in Scripture and in the lives of others.
- Wisdom as learning from others rather than only from our own wounds.
- Ignoring God's plain lessons as the despising of mercy.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Why is it more serious to sin against truth we already know?
- What lesson has God made plain that you are tempted to ignore?
- Why do we so often insist on learning the hard way?

### **Question 4**

#### **Student Question:**

*Belshazzar had every opportunity to know better and still chose pride. Whose example, or what past lesson in your own life, is God calling you to take seriously instead of ignoring? Why do we so often have to learn the hard way what we could have learned from others?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This self-focused question applies the danger of ignored lessons to the student's own life. Each of us has been given examples, whether in Scripture, in our families, or in people we have watched, that show plainly where certain choices lead. The question is whether we are humble enough to learn from them.

Help students name the specific examples God has set before them. Perhaps a relative whose bitterness or addiction shows the end of a road they are tempted to walk; perhaps a biblical figure whose failure mirrors their own temptation; perhaps a past lesson in their own life that they are in danger of forgetting and repeating.

Explore why we resist learning from others. Pride tells us our case is different, that we can handle what destroyed someone else. Self-deception lets us see clearly in others what we excuse in ourselves. The same blindness that ruined Belshazzar, knowing better and still refusing to bend, threatens every one of us.

Move toward concrete humility. Encourage students to identify one lesson God has already made clear and to take it seriously now, choosing to learn from another's example rather than repeating it. The humble heart that learns from others is spared much sorrow.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Humility to learn from the examples God has set before us.
- Pride and self-deception as the barriers to learning from others.
- The blindness of excusing in ourselves what we condemn in others.
- The sorrow spared to those who heed lessons already made plain.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Whose example or what past lesson is God calling you to take seriously?
- Why do we assume our case is different from those who fell before us?
- What would change if you truly learned from another's example now?

### **Question 5**

#### **Student Question:**

*The words on the wall declared, "you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting" (5:27). What does this picture of God weighing a person's life reveal about His judgment? How does the certainty that God measures every life confront the illusion that we can live however we please without accountability?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Turn to the words on the wall and especially Tekel: "you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting" (5:27). The image is of God placing a life on the scales and measuring it against His standard. Belshazzar's reign, and his soul, came up short. This is a vivid picture of divine judgment: God evaluates, God measures, God renders a verdict.

Help students feel the weight of the claim that every life is measured. We live in a culture that loves the illusion of unaccountability, the idea that we may live however we please and answer to no one. The handwriting on the wall declares the opposite: there is a God who weighs, and no life escapes His scales. "It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).

Be honest about the verdict apart from grace. Measured against God's perfect standard, every one of us would be found wanting, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans

3:23). The point of the weighing is not that Belshazzar was uniquely bad while we are fine, but that the scales of God reveal a deficit in us all that we cannot make up by ourselves.

Direct this toward grace, which the next question will develop. The reality of God's judgment is meant not to crush us into despair but to drive us to mercy. Belshazzar had run out of time, but the student reading this has not. The God who weighs is also the God who, in Christ, offers to cover the deficit and welcome the one who turns to Him.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- God as the One who weighs and judges every life (Daniel 5:27).
- The certainty of judgment after death (Hebrews 9:27).
- The illusion of unaccountability confronted by God's scales.
- All falling short of God's standard apart from grace (Romans 3:23).
- Judgment intended to drive us to mercy, not only to despair.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What does the image of God weighing a life reveal about His judgment?
- How does the certainty of judgment confront the illusion of unaccountability?
- Why would all of us be found wanting apart from grace?

### **Question 6**

#### **Student Question:**

*If your life were weighed today, where do you sense you would be found "wanting"? Rather than driving you to despair, how can this honest reckoning drive you to the grace and mercy God offers to all who turn to Him?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This self-focused question invites an honest personal reckoning, but aims it toward grace rather than despair. The point of asking where we would be found wanting is not self-loathing but truthful self-knowledge that drives us to God. Belshazzar's tragedy was that his weighing came too late; the student's reckoning comes while mercy is still available.

Help students do honest business with God. Where, measured by His standard, do they fall short? In hidden sins, in pride, in neglect of God, in failures of love? The aim is not to manufacture guilt but to see ourselves truly, which is the beginning of repentance and the doorway to grace.

Then turn decisively to the gospel. The good news is that the deficit revealed by God's scales has been met in Christ, who bore our judgment and offers His own righteousness to all who come to Him. We do not balance the scales by our own efforts; we flee to the One who balanced them for us at the cross.

Move toward response. For some students this may mean coming to Christ for the first time, in the way the New Testament describes, hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, and being baptized into Christ (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3–4). For others it means renewed repentance and a deeper resting in grace. Either way, the honest reckoning should end not in fear but at the foot of the cross.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Honest self-knowledge as the beginning of repentance, not self-loathing.
- The deficit of our sin met fully in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- Grace received through faith expressed in obedience to the gospel (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3–4).
- The reckoning that ends at the cross rather than in despair.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Where do you sense you would be found wanting if weighed today?
- How can that honest reckoning drive you to grace rather than despair?
- What response is God calling you to make while there is still time?

### **Question 7**

#### **Student Question:**

*Daniel, now an old man, fearlessly told the king the truth even though it was unwelcome and the king held the power of life and death (5:17–23). What does Daniel's boldness reveal about a life shaped by the fear of God rather than the fear of man (Proverbs 29:25)? Where does such courage come from?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Turn to Daniel's remarkable courage. Now an old man in his eighties, summoned before a terrified king who held the power of life and death, Daniel refuses the rewards and tells the unvarnished truth: you knew better, you exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven, and you have been weighed and found wanting (5:17–28). He neither flatters the king nor softens the verdict.

Help students see the source of such courage. Daniel feared God more than he feared Belshazzar. "The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe" (Proverbs 29:25). Because Daniel's deepest reverence was reserved for God, no human threat could buy his silence or bend his message. The fear of God is the cure for the fear of man.

Note the consistency of Daniel's life. This boldness did not appear suddenly in old age; it was the fruit of a lifetime of faithfulness, of small daily choices to honor God over comfort, stretching all

the way back to the young man who would not defile himself in chapter one. Courage in the great moment grows from faithfulness in the small ones.

Apply this to the believer's call to truthfulness. We are called to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), even when it is unwelcome, even when it costs us. The world, and sometimes our own circle, pressures us to flatter, to stay silent, to go along. Daniel shows that a life anchored in the fear of God is free to speak the truth without calculating the cost to self.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The fear of God as the cure for the fear of man (Proverbs 29:25).
- Courage to speak truth rooted in reverence for God above all.
- Boldness in the great moment as the fruit of daily faithfulness.
- The call to speak the truth in love even when it is costly (Ephesians 4:15).
- Freedom from flattery and people-pleasing in a God-fearing life.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Where did Daniel's fearless courage come from?
- How does the fear of God free us from the fear of people?
- How is boldness in big moments built by small daily choices?

### **Question 8**

#### **Student Question:**

*Speaking hard truth, to a friend, a family member, or in a culture that does not want to hear it, often feels risky and costly. Where is God calling you to speak truth in love when it would be easier to stay silent? What helps you fear God more than you fear people's reactions?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This self-focused question applies Daniel's courage to the student's own relationships and culture. We all face moments where love requires us to speak a hard truth: to a friend heading toward harm, to a family member in sin, or simply to live and speak as a Christian in a culture that does not welcome it. Silence often feels safer.

Help students discern the difference between godly boldness and mere harshness. Daniel spoke truth, but he spoke it as one who had served and even loved this royal house. Speaking the truth in love means neither cowardly silence nor cruel bluntness, but courageous honesty seasoned with genuine care for the other person.

Name what makes truth-telling hard: the fear of rejection, the desire to be liked, the comfort of avoiding conflict. These are all forms of the fear of man. The antidote is the same as Daniel's: a heart that fears and trusts God more than it fears the reactions of people.

Move toward a concrete situation. Ask students to identify one relationship or setting where God may be calling them to speak truth in love, and to take a prayerful step toward it, trusting God with the outcome. The aim is courage joined to love, modeled on the prophet and perfected in Christ.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Speaking the truth in love as a mark of Christian maturity (Ephesians 4:15).
- The difference between godly boldness and mere harshness.
- Fear of rejection and desire to be liked as forms of the fear of man.
- Trusting God with the outcome of faithful, loving honesty.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Where is God calling you to speak truth in love when silence feels safer?
- How do you speak hard truth with genuine care rather than harshness?
- What helps you fear God more than people's reactions?

### **Question 9**

#### **Student Question:**

*That very night Babylon fell, exactly as God's word declared, and Belshazzar was killed (5:30–31). How does the swift fulfillment of God's judgment display that He is the sovereign Lord who holds every kingdom and every life in His hand, and that His word never fails? And how does this sobering scene point us to the certainty of a final judgment, in which God will weigh every life and from which our only refuge is Christ (Hebrews 9:27; Acts 17:31)?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This doctrinal capstone gathers the chapter into the great theme of the book and points it forward to final judgment. "That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom" (5:30–31). God's word of judgment, written on the wall, was fulfilled within hours, exactly and completely. The mightiest, most secure kingdom on earth fell in a single night at the word of God.

Help students see how this displays the central message of Daniel. God is the sovereign Lord who holds every kingdom and every life in His hand, who sets up and removes rulers, and whose word never fails. Belshazzar trusted in impregnable walls and full storehouses; none of it could stand against the decree of God. The kingdoms of men are as nothing before the Most High.

Draw the line to the certainty of final judgment. The swift fulfillment of judgment on Babylon is a sober preview of a coming day. "It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). God "has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in

righteousness by a man whom he has appointed,” Jesus, and has given assurance by raising Him from the dead (Acts 17:31). The God who weighed Belshazzar will weigh us all.

End by pointing to our only refuge. The lesson is sobering but not hopeless, because the same God who judges has provided a Savior. Our refuge from the coming judgment is not high walls or full storehouses but Christ, who bore the judgment we deserved and offers shelter to all who come to Him. The wise response to the handwriting on the wall is not to drink on in defiance but to humble ourselves while there is still time and to take refuge in the Lord.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- God’s sovereign rule over every kingdom and life, fulfilling His word exactly (Daniel 5:30–31).
- The fall of Babylon as a display of the central theme of the book.
- The certainty of a final judgment in which God will weigh every life (Hebrews 9:27).
- Christ as the appointed Judge, attested by His resurrection (Acts 17:31).
- Christ as the only refuge from the coming judgment.
- Humble repentance while there is still time as the wise response.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- How does the swift fall of Babylon display God’s sovereignty and faithfulness?
- How does this scene point forward to a final judgment of every life?
- Where is your refuge when you consider standing before God?

### **Question 10**

#### **Student Question:**

*Look back across the whole chapter, from the defiant feast to the fallen kingdom. Name one specific way the truth that God weighs every life, and that His holiness and judgment are real, is reshaping how you will live, worship, and walk before Him this coming week.*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This capstone question calls for a personal, concrete response. The aim is to move students from watching a kingdom fall to living soberly and reverently before the God who weighs every life. Ask them to look back across the chapter and name where the Spirit is pressing on them.

Help them gather the threads: the holiness of God, the danger of profaning sacred things, the responsibility to learn from lessons already given, the certainty of God’s judgment, the courage that comes from fearing God, and the refuge found in Christ. Ask which of these speaks most directly to them.

Refuse vagueness. “Take God more seriously” is not a plan. “This week I will restore reverence in this area, do honest business with God about this sin, or speak this truth in love” is concrete and livable. The best answers will be specific and personal.

Close by lifting their eyes to Christ. Belshazzar was weighed and found wanting, but in Christ the believer is covered by a righteousness not his own and welcomed rather than condemned. We live in the reverent fear of God, yet without terror, because we have fled to the Savior who bore our judgment and is forming His own reverence and courage in us (Hebrews 12:28; Philippians 1:6).

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The goal of study as a reverent, God-fearing life transformed by grace (Romans 8:29).
- Christ as the refuge who bears our judgment and covers our deficit (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- Reverent fear of God without terror for those who are in Christ (Hebrews 12:28).
- Concrete, named obedience as the fruit of genuine study.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Which truth from this chapter is God pressing most on your heart?
- What is one specific way you will live reverently before God this week?
- How does refuge in Christ free you to face God’s judgment without terror?