

Dr. Wendy L. Widder, Daniel, Session 8, Daniel 9 & 5, A Humble King and God's Rescinded Power

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This is Dr. Wendy Widder in her teaching on the book of Daniel. This is session 8, Daniel 9 & 5, A Humble King and God's Rescinded Power.

This lecture is about Daniel nine. I will also be talking about Daniel nine in the next lecture. The chapter is only 27 verses long, but it ends with four of the most controversial verses in the Old Testament. So, we're going to set that aside for the next lecture.

And in this first lecture, we are going to talk about really the largest part of the chapter. This chapter is about repentance and God's promise of restoration. That's what chapter nine is about.

This chapter is different from the other chapters that include Daniel's visions. So in Daniel's visions, he has four, he sees symbolic representations of kingdoms. In chapter seven and chapter eight, there are symbolic visions.

In chapter nine, he has something, it's not really a vision. It's more like an epiphany. He's given a revelation by an angel, Gabriel.

And the same will be true in chapters 10 through 12. But in chapter nine, the actual revelation, or what's just commonly called a vision, is only four or five verses long. It's very short.

And so, we have this big lead-in, 20 verse lead-in to the actual revelation. Sadly, most of the writing done in this chapter deals with those last four verses. The first, the biggest part of the chapter, is discussed, but it's sort of the lead-in, gone through rather quickly to get to what's of great interest to people, which is the 70 weeks.

So, I want to do justice to the text and give the longest part of it a good bit of time. So, this is the third of Daniel's four visionary experiences. Though, as I said, this is not symbolic.

This is more like an epiphany or just a revelation, a verbal revelation that he receives. In the context of the visions that Daniel sees, this one continues to narrow the focus. So, in chapter seven, we had this cosmic focus with a little bit of introduction to the desolation of the sanctuary, this destruction that was going to take place, and oppression under Antiochus IV.

We had a little bit of that in there. In chapter eight, we really zeroed in on Jerusalem and the temple and the destruction that would happen there. In chapter nine, we're going to focus even more on the destruction of the temple.

When we get to chapters 10 through 12, we're looking at the destruction of the temple or the desecration of the temple, but what that vision really does is it fills out the historical background. What was going on in the world scene when all of those events took place and leading up to those events? So altogether, Daniel's visions are giving us a glimpse of a time in Jewish history, a time in Israel's history, that was really horrific, the second century BC under Antiochus IV. So, it portrays that for us, but it also gives us a biblical pattern of rulers who defy God and oppress his people, evil rulers.

And that pattern will ultimately culminate in the book of Revelation. So, chapter nine divides pretty nicely, pretty evenly, well not evenly, but pretty clearly into three sections. In verses one through three, I won't write this down, in verses one through three, we get the context.

So, Daniel establishes the time and place of what is going to happen in the rest of the chapter. And then in verses four through 19, we have Daniel's prayer. He offers a prayer of repentance, a long confession in which he confesses his people's sin.

And he says that they did not listen to Yahweh, they did not listen to the prophets. And then he will beg God, beg Yahweh to listen to their plea and to restore them. So that's the bulk of the chapter.

And then in verse 20 through 27, we have this revelation. So first we get introduced to the character who's doing the revealing, and that's Gabriel. And Gabriel actually gives the revelation beginning in verse 22, going on through verse 27.

So, in this lecture, we're going to look at the context of this repentance, and we're going to look at the repentance itself. We will save the revelation for the next lecture. So, verses one through four, this first section.

In the first year of Darius, the son of Ahasuerus, by descent Amid, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans, in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely 70 years. Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession, saying, O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments.

I think I went a little farther than I needed to there, but we'll take it a verse at a time. We get the space-time reference for Daniel's vision, or his epiphany that he's going to have at the end, in the first two verses. The previous two visions were set during the reign of Belshazzar.

Now, we are in the first year of Darius. Well, we've encountered Darius before. He first appeared at the end of chapter 5, when Belshazzar was killed, and his kingdom passed to Darius.

In chapter 6, Darius was the king when Daniel went to the lion's den, and then he disappeared until this chapter. So, in terms of chronology, we've moved back up almost to the end of the chronology of the book. So, in the first year of Darius, now we get these details about Darius.

We're told that he's the son of Ahasuerus, or some versions will say the son of Xerxes. He is of Median descent, and he was made king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans. I can't help but wonder why we get so much information.

Previously, it was just in the third year of Belshazzar. That's all we get. But here we get this genealogical information.

Why does the narrator care to give us this much information about Darius? We might expect a little bit, like maybe Darius the Median. Just a reminder, we haven't seen this guy for a couple of chapters, but he's the one we met back there. So I'd expect that.

But why not just Darius the king or Darius the Median king? Why all this other information? A couple of possible reasons. So, by connecting Darius to Ahasuerus, or Xerxes, it could be a reference to his Persian history. So, Xerxes became a common name in Persian dynasties, and Darius is connected to Persia.

If Darius is Cyrus, in my view, he is of both Median and Persian descent. His mother was Median, and his father was Persian. So, this is a reminder here that this king is of Persian royalty.

But then we're also told he's of Median descent. So that's reminding us he is Median and Persian. His mother was royalty, so royalty continues.

He's made king over the Chaldeans. That's passive. Why not? He was king. It could be this repeated theme in the book of Daniel that there's an unseen hand behind all of these events in history.

God's hand is moving and active in all of these. So, God is the one who's behind Darius being king. He was made king.

Why not just say he was made king over Babylon, or just say he was made king? Why over the kingdom of the Chaldeans? Again, I don't know for sure, but it's extra information. And I wonder if it isn't part of the book of Daniel's display of the rise and fall of kingdoms. Darius was made king, the kingdom of Chaldea has gone, and now we're into the next kingdom.

This is just a reminder that God's hand is at work in history behind the rise and fall of kings and kingdoms. And why do we want to remind the reader that he's Median and Persian? Well, again, remember, according to the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, Babylon will fall to a Median and a Persian king. So, the author of Daniel is demonstrating again the fulfillment of that prophecy.

In the first year of his reign, that's actually said twice here. So in the first year of Darius, then we get this genealogical information, and then again it says in the first year of his reign. That could just be repeated because we may have forgotten after all that genealogical information, by the way, in the first year of his reign, or it could just be highlighting the importance of that time period.

If Darius is Cyrus, then where are we in his first year? We're in 539 BC. Well, what's the importance of 539 BC? Babylon falls. Media, Persia, rises to the top.

Ultimately, this was the beginning of the restoration of the Jews because Cyrus issued his decree that they could return to their homeland. 539 is the official end of the enforced period of exile. So, think about where Daniel is in terms of time.

Enforced exile is over or just about over, and that would mean for Daniel's restoration, glorious restoration ahead. That's his time. Now, let's look at his place.

He doesn't give us a geographic place, but he tells us what he's doing and where he's at. Where is he? He's reading his scrolls or his books. We're not sure exactly what shape it would have been in at that point, other than being a scroll, but how much of the book of Jeremiah it was, I don't know.

But he's reading Jeremiah. And he's specifically reading or understanding from Jeremiah the number of years that must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem. Well, there are two places in Jeremiah where this comes up specifically because Daniel then says 70 years.

So, he's reading in Jeremiah about Jerusalem's desolation coming to an end after 70 years. The two places that Daniel could have been reading in Jeremiah 25 are where Jeremiah gives this prophecy. This is before the exile.

He prophesied that Judah would be punished by way of Nebuchadnezzar. God would use Nebuchadnezzar as his instrument to destroy their land, punish them, and take them captive for 70 years. And then, after 70 years, God was going to punish Babylon.

So, Babylon will be punished in 70 years. That's Jeremiah 25. In Jeremiah 9, Jeremiah writes a letter to the Jews who are in exile.

So, Jeremiah is an exilic prophet, but he's not in exile. He was back in the land of Palestine and then he was in Egypt, but he's not in Babylon. But he sends them a letter.

He sends a letter to the community there, and he tells them that they'd better settle in, build houses, and raise families. You're going to be there for 70 years, and then God will restore the people. So, Daniel is where in time? 539 BC, the first year of Darius, on the verge of restoration.

Where is he in place? Well, he's reflecting on Jeremiah's prophecies that destruction and desolation would last for 70 years. Well, Daniel's a smart guy. He can figure out the time, right? He knows what time it is.

Babylon's been punished by a Median Persian king, but there hasn't been restoration yet. Where's this glorious restoration? Well, the people had also been told that they needed to repent. Remember Solomon's dedication prayer of the temple way back in 1 Kings, and he prays and sees what's going to happen down the road.

He probably knew his own heart, and he knew that at some point, God's people were going to be unfaithful and would land in exile. He prayed that God would hear his people when they prayed from exile, when they confessed their sin and sought his face, and that God would restore them. What follows in Daniel 9 is a confession. So, Daniel seems to be thinking, we need restoration, but we have to confess.

We are not where we need to be with God. So, he prays, he confesses, he turns his face to the Lord, seeking him by prayer. He wears sackcloth and ashes.

He is serious about confessing. He's going to respond in obedience to this call to confess. That is the end of the first section.

The second section begins with his actual prayer in verse 4 and goes through verse 19. I prayed to the Lord my God and made a confession saying, O Lord, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments. We have sinned, we have done wrong, we have acted wickedly, we have rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules.

We have not listened to your servants, the prophets who spoke in your names to our kings, our princes, our fathers, and to all the people of the land. To you, O Lord belongs righteousness, but to us, open shame. As at this day to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to all Israel, those who are near and those who are far, in all the lands to which you have driven them because of the treachery that they have committed against you.

To us, O Lord belongs open shame. To our kings, to our princes, to our fathers, because we have sinned against you. To you, the Lord our God, belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God by walking in his laws, which he set before us by his servants, the prophets.

All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice. And the curse and oath that are written in the law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out upon us because we have sinned against him. He has confirmed his words, which he spoke against us and against our rulers who ruled us by bringing upon us a great calamity.

For under the whole heaven there has not been done anything like what has been done in Jerusalem. As it is written in the law of Moses, all this calamity has come upon us, yet we have not entreated the favor of the Lord our God, turning from our iniquities and gaining insight by your truth. Therefore, the Lord has kept ready the calamity and has brought it upon us.

For the Lord, our God is righteous in all the works that he has done, and we have not obeyed his voice. And now, O Lord our God, who brought your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand and have made a name for yourself, as at this day we have sinned, we have done wickedly. O Lord, according to all your righteous acts, let your anger and your wrath turn away from your city, Jerusalem, your holy hill, because for our sins and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and your people have become a byword among all who are around us.

Now, therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer of your servant and to his pleas for mercy. And for your own sake, O Lord, make your face to shine upon your sanctuary, which is desolate. O my God, incline your ear and hear, open your eyes and see our desolations and the city that is called by your name.

We do not present our pleas before you because of our unrighteousness, but because of your great mercy. O Lord, hear. O Lord, forgive.

O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name."

That's quite a confession. There is a lot of repetition in this confession, a lot of themes that are pervasive.

I think for me the way to best approach this is to think about it in terms of there's a confession where Daniel just confesses everything, and then there's a supplication where he makes his request. So, we have in verses 4 through 14 a confession. And then in verses 17 through 19, we have a supplication, his request.

And then, in 15 and 16, between these two, we have what I call a bridge. It's kind of a review of what Daniel's just confessed, and it previews what's to come. It sort of connects these two things.

He confesses, he supplicates, he begs, really, and those themes are connected. Both of these key components revolve around the theme of listening. There is a word that appears several times.

If you read this in Hebrew, there's a word that appears over and over and over again. It's translated slightly differently to catch the different nuances. But the Hebrew word shama, which is to hear or to listen, and by extension it means to obey, all of those are wrapped up in the word to listen or to hear, shama.

In his confession, Daniel is going to say repeatedly that we didn't listen. We didn't obey. We didn't listen.

We didn't listen. He says it over and over and over again. And when you get to the supplication, he says, because we didn't listen, we desperately need you to listen.

We need you to hear us. We didn't obey. We desperately need you to hear us.

So, this word just holds this whole prayer together. Listen, please listen. Let's look at the confession first, verses 4 through 14.

And you could just summarize the confession by saying, we didn't listen. Daniel goes round and round this theme of we didn't listen. Let me tell you who didn't listen.

Let me tell you how we didn't listen. Over and over he says it. Before I say that, though, let me just tell you that this prayer is actually similar to a couple of other prayers in the Old Testament.

So, I'll come back to the listening. But this prayer in Daniel 9 has a lot of similarities to a prayer in Nehemiah 9 and, I think, Ezra 9. I think they're all 9s. And these are both after the exile.

And this one's on the verge of return from exile. And they are all great confessional prayers. Confession, repentance.

Some scholars have labeled them penitential prayers. And they share a lot of characteristics. So, after you read Daniel 9, go read these other two, and you'll hear a lot of the same language.

It reaches back to Deuteronomy language where there are the covenants being established, and the people are called to obey, to listen, listen, listen. And if you don't listen, this calamity is going to happen. Lots of similarities between these kinds of prayers.

So that's a little side note. All right. So, the confession, we didn't listen.

He starts by saying, identifying who he's praying to, Lord, the great and awesome God. Now, the word awesome in English has really been diluted. We use awesome to talk about breakfast, if it was any good.

We use awesome to describe a sunset. What's the big difference between breakfast and a sunset? Awesome describes mountains, but you can make it to lunch. That's awesome.

It's diluted. It means almost nothing. It just means, yay.

In the Bible, awesome is a dreadful, fearful. This is an otherly being. God is awesome. We should be full of awe.

A little bit of dread, even, at who God is. So, Daniel starts by praying to this awesome God. I like what Goldingay says about this beginning.

He says there's courage in beginning with a recognition of the majestic aspect of God. That majestic aspect is a threat to those who fail to obey him, whether foreigners or Israelites. And it's precisely such a failure that Daniel will go on to acknowledge.

So, Daniel comes before this awesome God, knowing what he's about to say. And he's praying to the one who keeps the covenant and loving-kindness to those who love him and keep his commandments, which is exactly not God's people, right? They are not the ones who love him and keep his commandments, which are kind of one and the same. You love God by keeping his commandments.

So, God keeps covenant with those who love it and keep his commandments, but we're not those people. We don't do that. So, we really need mercy.

So, in the sanctuary, in the temple in Jerusalem, if you're a good Jew, you know this, there is God's vessels are used in a holy place, God's gold vessels. The only things in that place are a lampstand, the table, and the altar of incense. That's it.

Here, we have God's gold vessels being brought into a context where there is a lampstand, and the hand is riding opposite the lampstand. Again, you can think I'm overreading, and I might be, but I do think the combination of all these things suggests what's going on here. So, I think this description, opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the palace of the king, in part, just in part, is supposed to be suggesting God's presence and specifically his sanctuary.

In the Old Testament, nearly all the references to a literal lamp or a lampstand are to lamps in the sanctuary, specifically the holy place, the central sanctuary. Again, I said there are three pieces of furniture in there. The Pentateuch, the law, gives us nearly four dozen references with instructions about that lampstand in the sanctuary.

And two of them are concerned about the placement in the holy place. The lampstand was to stand in front of or opposite the table of presents that held the bread of the presents. So, the narrator in this chapter, before we get to this description, has already emphasized the temple.

These vessels came from the temple, and he specified that the vessels Belshazzar and his guests drank from were gold vessels. Gold vessels are of the central sanctuary. So, in this context, the narrator specifies that there's a lampstand opposite the fingers, which we just assume at this point are God's fingers, writing on the wall.

I think what the narrator wants to do is show that God is in this place. But what is this place and why is God here? And that's the rest of the description here. What is this place? The writing was on the wall of the palace of the king.

Now, that's superfluous information. Who's holding the feast? Belshazzar. You would just sort of assume it's in his palace.

Besides, why would we care if it were somewhere else? Why do we include this information? Palace of the king. I think because the word that's translated palace there, which is, let's see if I can get it right in Aramaic, Hekalah. It's translated palace.

This word appears twice in the text, in verses two and three, to refer to the temple in Jerusalem. So, this word that's referring to the palace of the king, where this hand is writing, is used two times prior to refer to the temple in Jerusalem. It's the same word, just translated differently for context.

It refers to the temple in Jerusalem. And then the narrator also told us then that, by the way, that's the house of God because you didn't know that. No, because the narrator is making a point.

The vessels that Belshazzar has commandeered for his palace came from God's palace, which is God's house, and he has brought them to his palace, his house. And in bringing them, God has come to Belshazzar's house or palace. Belshazzar never stepped foot in the Jerusalem temple, but he brought the God of the Jerusalem temple to his doorstep when he used those vessels.

He had invaded God's territory. Those vessels were God's. And by doing that, he had challenged God's rule.

God answered. God came into Belshazzar's territory. Those vessels came from God's house.

Now God has shown up at Belshazzar's house. Not only has he shown up, he's taking control of it. The king is undone.

And he's going to pass judgment on it. The judgment that he passes is ultimately going to lead to the restoration of those vessels to their rightful place and God's people to their land. So that's a whole lot of different moving pieces.

I could be wrong, but I don't think it's extra words that the narrator is including. I think there's a reason for him to say these fingers were writing opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the palace of the king. God has come to Belshazzar's house, and he has taken control of it.

All right. So, then we have the first of three speeches in this chapter. The first person to make a speech is the queen.

And she shows up in verses 9 through 12. So, verse 9, Belshazzar was greatly alarmed. His color changed.

His lords were perplexed. The queen, because of the words of the king and his lords, came into the banqueting hall and declared, O king, live forever. Let not your thoughts alarm you or your color change.

There is a man in your kingdom who is the spirit of the holy gods. In the days of your father, light and understanding and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods were found in him. And king Nebuchadnezzar, your father, your father, the king, made him chief of the magicians, enchanters, Chaldeans and astrologers.

Because an excellent spirit, knowledge and understanding to interpret dreams, explain riddles and solve problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belshazzar.

Now let Daniel be called and he will show the interpretation. Who is this queen? It's probably the queen mother, someone higher up on this list of kings, because Belshazzar's wives and concubines were already at the feast, and this woman was not at the feast.

She also appears to have access to the king without being particularly invited or summoned. So, she has a little bit of authority, perhaps over him, which is what the Queen mother would have had. Commentators disagree on the queen's tone.

Some people think she's being a little sarcastic. Some people think she's very sympathetic. I will let you decide.

I tend to hear a little bit of sarcasm in her voice. There's a man in your kingdom that really he probably should have known and we'll talk about why he should have known it. And then she praises Daniel in language that we've already heard.

There's a man in your kingdom who is the spirit of the holy gods. That is a continuing trait of Daniel that has impressed the Babylonians. The question is, does Belshazzar know Daniel? Now the queen's opening words sound like he doesn't.

There's a man in your kingdom as if Belshazzar didn't know who he was. And you'd think if Daniel had all these great abilities that the queen has described, you'd think Belshazzar should have known. But the queen is at least sounding on paper as if he doesn't.

But Daniel was Belshazzar's father's chief wise man. I realize historically speaking, we're several decades removed from Nebuchadnezzar. But in terms of the narrative, we're not.

In terms of the narrative, father, and son, you might think a son would know who his father's chief magician had been. Just speculation. And the fact that she repeats this father, there's a man in your kingdom, in the days of your father, King Nebuchadnezzar, your father, your father, the king.

What is the deal with Nebuchadnezzar being his father? It's going to, I think, explain Belshazzar's behavior in this chapter. I think Belshazzar knows who Daniel is. I think he's chosen to ignore who Daniel was precisely because Daniel was so important to his father.

And Belshazzar is going to seem like he is trying to show up his father. He's trying to show himself to be more powerful than his father. And when Belshazzar talks, I think we'll hear him say that in so many words.

So, Belshazzar answers verses 13 through 16. Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king answered and said to Daniel, you are that Daniel, one of the exiles of Judah, whom the king, my father, brought from Judah? I've heard of you, that the spirit of the gods is in you, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you.

Now the wise men, the enchanters, have been brought in before me to read this writing and make known to me its interpretation, but they could not show the interpretation of the matter. But I've heard that you can give interpretations and solve problems. Now, if you can read the writing and make known to me its interpretation, you shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around your neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.

Now, I told you this chapter has three speeches. What I haven't mentioned before is that when we hear characters speak, a narrator is doing more than just advancing the plot. We know people's character, their motives, by what they say.

So, when a narrator allows a character to speak, you want to listen to what they say and what it reveals about their motives and their thoughts. And I think Belshazzar reveals a lot in what he says about his attitude toward Daniel. Did you hear how he addressed Daniel? Are you, Daniel, one of the exiles of Judah? Did the queen say that? The queen did not say that.

The queen simply said, there's a man in your kingdom. She described what he was like, and she said he was your father's chief magician. Now, why didn't Belshazzar say, are you, Daniel, the one who's my father's chief magician? He says, are you, Daniel, one of the exiles of Judah? Well, how would he know that? You could say, well, the queen used the name Daniel, which is his Hebrew name, which may have suggested he wasn't, you know, okay, so maybe Belshazzar put the pieces together. I don't think so.

I think Belshazzar knows who Daniel is. And then he also, are you one of the exiles of Judah whom my father, the king, brought from Judah? Again, why does that matter? Where Daniel, he already said it, did you come from Judah? Why does it matter that Nebuchadnezzar, his father, brought him? There's this obsession with the father. Also, notice that not only does he not address him as the chief of magicians, but he never even acknowledges that he has achieved that.

He simply leaves him as an exile from Judah, and then he reports hearsay. I've heard that you're able to do this, this, and this, and I've heard that you can solve problems. So, he's not even really acknowledging that that's true.

This is just what I've heard. And if you're able to tell me, go ahead and tell me. The attitude of Belshazzar, he doesn't seem, in my opinion, he doesn't like Daniel.

He knows him and he's intentionally ignored him because he was his father's esteemed servant. So, this esteemed vessel of God that Nebuchadnezzar esteemed, Belshazzar, is disregarding. The vessels of the temple that Nebuchadnezzar knew enough to put in the treasury of his God to show esteem for them, Belshazzar has disregarded, shown disdain for even.

So that's Belshazzar's speech. Let's hear Daniel. Now, what is Belshazzar asked? He said, can you tell me the interpretation? Daniel has a very long speech.

This is the longest section in the chapter, verses 17 through 28. So, Daniel answered and said to the king, let your gifts be for yourself. Give your rewards to another.

Nevertheless, I will read the writing to the king and make known to him the interpretation. O king, let me pause here. Daniel's just said he's going to read the writing and make the interpretation known.

So, you should expect me to now say what the writing said, right? Oh no. O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar, your father, kingship and greatness and glory and majesty. And because of the greatness that he gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him.

Whom he would, he killed. Whom he would, he kept alive. Whom he would, he raised up, and whom he would, he humbled.

But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened so that he dealt proudly, he was brought down from his kingly throne, and his glory was taken from him. He was driven from among the children of mankind, and his mind was made like that of a beast, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. He was fed grass like an ox and his body was wet with the dew of heaven until he knew that the Most High God rules over the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he will.

We just had a long history lesson that Belshazzar did not ask for. Verse 22, and you, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this, but you have lifted up yourself against the God, the Lord of heaven, and the vessels of his house have been brought in before you and you and your lords, your wives and your concubines have drunk wine from them and you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know. But the

God in whose hand is your breath and whose ways are all your ways, whose are all your ways, you have not honored.

We're still waiting for the reading and the interpretation. So, we got a history lesson on Nebuchadnezzar, we got an indictment of Belshazzar, now we're finally ready for Daniel to spill the beans. Verse 24, then from his presence the hand was sent and this writing was inscribed.

This is the writing, many, many, tekem, parsin. This is the interpretation of the matter, many, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end. Tekem, you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting.

Parsin, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians. So that's Daniel's reading and interpretation. He refuses the king's gifts and some people think Daniel's being pretty terse and abrupt and rude to the king.

Keep the gifts for yourself. He might be, but he's responding to Belshazzar really in the way that Belshazzar I think has treated him. And Belshazzar has disdained his God, has disdained his God's vessels, has disdained him.

If Belshazzar's original greeting, are you one of the exiles, was a put down, it kind of helps us understand Daniel's twist here. Daniel does not have time for this king. This king has no regard for God, for what is sacred, for his father and what was sacred to his father.

Then, we get a history lesson about Nebuchadnezzar. But the reason for the history lesson is to explain why Belshazzar's behavior was so egregious and, therefore, why he's being judged. So, Daniel can't just come in and read the writing.

It doesn't mean there's no explanation for it. The explanation for it is that you are a successor of a great king. Your father was a great king, and he was great because God made him so.

And when he got to thinking he was just great on his own, God judged him. And Nebuchadnezzar repented and acknowledged his dependence and God's authority over him. That was your father.

You, Belshazzar, you knew all this. You knew everything about Nebuchadnezzar. But you haven't humbled yourself.

You have not learned the lesson of your father. Instead, you have mocked the God who holds your life in his hands. He is rebuking and indicting Belshazzar for his pride because he learned nothing from Nebuchadnezzar.

He exalted himself against the Lord of heaven by desecrating the temple vessels. He worshipped worthless idols with them, and he failed to honor the God who gave him power and held his life. So, Belshazzar is not just proud; he's blatantly idolatrous, and he's blasphemous.

So, Daniel takes the opportunity to draw this contrast between these two human kings. It is interesting to think about their greatness. So, Nebuchadnezzar was a great king because God made him so, but he was a great king.

He's known as one of history's greatest kings for his accomplishments. Belshazzar, we didn't even know his name until the 19th century, but he was a legitimate king. He is the stand-in son of a usurper who's done nothing except make this great drunken feast.

Daniel doesn't explicitly say that, but I think the contrast is there. Belshazzar or Nebuchadnezzar was a great king and he acknowledged his greatness was from God. You're not even a great king, and you can't acknowledge anything about God.

This is one place in Daniel where he acts a little more like a prophet than normal. He is indicting Belshazzar for his sin. So then Daniel deciphers the writing.

First of all, he identifies the hand as being an agent of God. This judgment, this message, is from God. There are four words, well, technically three, just one of them appears twice.

They're a bit of a riddle. So, let's see if we can make some sense of what Daniel does. All right, so the words are, and I'm going to write them in Aramaic, and then I'll put them so you can sort of see them better.

You need a little language lesson here to make sense of what Daniel's doing. Okay, so on the left are the letters, the Aramaic letters, that Daniel is reading. As a whole inscription, it would look like that, and possibly there wouldn't have been spaces here.

It's possible it was all run together. We don't really know, but there is some writing where that's true. So this is what Daniel's looking at, and here's your language lesson.

Why was this so hard for him to read? I know it's hard for you to read probably, but why was this so hard for him or for anybody? It wasn't hard for him, and it was hard for everybody else to read. Why couldn't they read it? Let me take you through an example in English and see if you have trouble. So, what I've done here is I've given you only the consonants for a sentence in English.

The reason I've only given you the consonants is that Aramaic and Hebrew are consonantal. What you are looking at here are only the consonants. There are no vowels included.

Now, that doesn't mean the words don't have vowels. Of course, they have vowels, or you can't pronounce them, but native speakers would know what the vowels are just by looking at them. They would know how to say the word.

You don't believe me? How do you read that? You have a couple of options, and if English is your first language, it's not hard to see. John rode the bike. Jane read the book.

You've got options. It's not hard. So why couldn't the wise men read that? If it's their first language, why can't they make sense of it as easily as you can make sense of this? Like I said, it's possible they were all run together.

So, if I give you that, it's a little trickier. If I ran them all together and didn't put spaces in. You'd have to work a little bit harder, but I'm guessing with a little bit of time, you could probably come up with a sentence or two.

Probably. Another suggestion for why it might have been difficult is maybe they were written this way. Maybe they were written up and down.

So, then you're having to go, oh, John, read the book. So, you might look at this and, well, I don't know quite how to sort out that puzzle. So that's possible why the wise men couldn't read this.

We don't, it doesn't tell us why they couldn't read it, but they couldn't read it. So, let's say they could come up with what it said. That still doesn't solve our problem.

Let me keep giving you your lesson over here. So, in English, this isn't a direct comparison, but it's the best I can do between languages that are very different. In English, let's say I give you the noun scribe.

Okay, scribe is your noun. In English, we can turn this into a verb by adding parts to it. You could say inscribe.

You could say describe. It's got the same root word to which we've added things, and now we have verbs. Noun and verb, working with the same root, but adjusting things to create a different kind of word.

Now, Hebrew isn't exactly analogous to this, but in Hebrew, what we have, or Aramaic, I'm going to do Hebrew just to keep it simple. They have a system of words that is a root system. So, they have three-letter roots.

So let me give you a Q, a D, and then that which is the sh sound. So, we have a k, d, sh. This is a root, and it's a root that has to do with holiness, being holy, holy things.

I'll tell you that much. Now, just those consonants, you can't do anything with it. You need vowels.

What happens is that we use different vowels to create different kinds of words. So, co-dash, notice the vowels, which equal a noun or a noun that means holiness. This is a noun.

This pattern of vowels used on a root typically creates a noun. If you want to make an adjective, then you could do qa-dash, a-e. That's going to make an adjective for us, and then our word is going to be holy.

If you want to make a verb, then you might use ca-dash. And that's to be holy. So the consonants don't change.

What changes are the vowels. So, when we come to this inscription and what Daniel says it means, when he reads it to the king, he reads nouns, mene, tekel, and pharsen, and their weights and values, measurement values. It's kind of like saying quarter nickel dime.

It doesn't mean anything, does it? He's just listed three nouns. That's what he reads to the king. When he interprets it, he interprets verbs.

So he says mene, tekel, perez. The interpretation is mene, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end. Tekel, you've been weighed and found wanting.

Your kingdom is divided. So that might help us understand the riddle aspect here. Why couldn't the wise men sort it out? If they're looking at this, they may have been able to come up with mene, tekel, pharsen.

But then saying what that means is a different story. We know the meaning of the interpretation from what Daniel said, but we might wonder why these are the things chosen, why these words of value, these words of weights and measure, why value words, coins, evaluation, assessment, why use them? Why did God choose to use those words in the context of Belshazzar's feast and blasphemy? And Nolan Feewell, the woman who wrote the book I was referring to that I forgot to bring for you, argues that the choice of these words and the imagery behind them suggests that the issue of the whole chapter in Belshazzar's offense is value. The problem of value or failure to value has been at the crux of the whole story.

The narrator has used Belshazzar's actions and Daniel's words to portray a king who did not value the example of his father. He didn't value the sacred vessels of the temple. He didn't value his father's esteemed chief magician, and most importantly, he hadn't valued the God that his father had learned to exalt.

The chapter ends with Belshazzar's power and kingdom actually being taken away, verses 29-31. Then Belshazzar gave the command and Daniel was clothed with purple. A chain of gold was put around his neck.

A proclamation was made about him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom. That very night, Belshazzar, the Chaldean king, was killed. Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about 62 years old.

All right, it's a short section. We've got a couple of things to cover in this section. The king rewards Daniel even though he said he didn't want the reward.

That troubles some people, but given what the prophecy has been here, does it matter? Daniel's just said your kingdom's going to fall. Whatever rewards Belshazzar gives are going to be worthless. But the king rewards him anyway.

We don't hear Belshazzar's response to this inscription or interpretation. We don't know what he thinks. He doesn't say anything.

He just rewards Daniel. So, historical sources tell us that Babylon fell without a battle, and I'll let you refer to historical sources to see how that all happened. The biblical narrator doesn't care.

All he cares about here is that Belshazzar, the Chaldean king, was killed that very night. This judgment was instant. Darius the Mede received the kingdom at about 62 years old.

The identity of Darius the Mede is a tricky issue. We will come back to it in the next lecture when Darius is more of a main character here. He's just introduced. Why do we have the specification that Belshazzar, the Chaldean king, was killed and Darius the Mede received the kingdom? I think that the narrator is trying to highlight God's sovereignty over kingdoms.

He raises kings up and takes them down. So, we have just transferred kingdoms from Chaldea, and now we have Media. Media-Persia that gets kind of messy.

God raises up and takes down kings. So, we have the highlight of God's sovereignty. Why do we care about this Median king? History will tell us that Cyrus the Persian is the one who conquered Babylon, and here we have Darius the Mede.

Again, we'll come back to Darius in a second, but why is there an emphasis on the Median King? Why does Babylon have to fall to the Medes? That's actually a fulfillment of prophecy. Isaiah and Jeremiah had both prophesied that God would ultimately punish Babylon by bringing in the Medes. So, the narrator wants to demonstrate that biblical prophecy has been fulfilled.

And when we discuss Darius the Mede, I will flesh out a little bit more. The curious thing about Darius the Mede here is this comment that he's about 62 years old. Usually, you use the description about for a round number.

Why wouldn't you say he's about 60? Saying about 62 is actually exact, right? Some commentators say, well, it's just showing that he's at an advanced age, at least for that day, and so he's not going to rule very long before the narrative moves on to Cyrus. Well, that doesn't answer it for me because why not just say he's about 60? Does two years make that much difference? I think that the narrator is trying to make a specific point. And since Darius is close enough to 62, whatever age he actually was, the narrator can say he was about 62, and here's why we care about 62.

Well, at least if you solve the puzzle according to the narrator, then you can figure out what 62 is. So, the specific number of 62 helps the narrator make a point. And here's the point that this is not my unique argument.

I think Carol Newsome in her OTL commentary is where I first saw this, I think. The inscription was a mina, a shekel, and two half shekels. A mina is worth 60 shekels.

There are two different ones, and one's worth 50. We're going with the one that's worth 60. A shekel, obviously, is worth one shekel.

And plural of that peres, so a half shekel and a half shekel, equals one shekel. So, from this inscription, you could add up to the number 62. So, the years that are attributed to Darius, he's about 62, in some creative way, sum up another aspect of the omen's meaning.

This is actually John Goldingay quote. The years attributed to Darius sum up another aspect of the omen's meaning. He is the actual person who brings the fulfillment of the omen upon Belshazzar.

So, he was about 62. Why do we need 62? Because that's what that adds up to. He's the one that fulfilled that.

Maybe he was really 60, but the narrator says, close enough, he's about 62. I can make the point. What's the place of this chapter in the Book of Daniel? Well, first of all, these vessels are important.

The vessels matter. They matter in the book. Whose vessels are they? From chapter one, these are God's vessels, and he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar.

In chapter five, Belshazzar takes them, and God judges Belshazzar for it. We also have the transition of kingdoms. History is marching along just as God said it would, in just the way he said it would.

I think another thing that is significant in this chapter that we won't really recognize until we get a couple of chapters farther is that Belshazzar serves as a prototype. Remember, Belshazzar is a contrast to Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar was a great king who acknowledged God as the source of his power and greatness.

Belshazzar is a blasphemous, defiant king who shakes his fist at Israel's God and thumbs his nose even. He's the book's first glimpse of a blasphemous, defiant king who's judged by God. When we get to Daniel's apocalyptic visions, they will be set in the year of Belshazzar, the first year and third year of Belshazzar, and they will visualize for Daniel kings that actually almost make Belshazzar look good.

So, Belshazzar is the first king who's horrible in the book of Daniel. His successors will just amplify that. So, he's an important literary character, but again, you don't know that until you get a little further in.

So, I think that's the significance of this chapter in the book. I think for us, personally, it's a reminder that we have a lot of examples to learn from, and we really need to be good students of the things that God makes available for us to know with respect to honoring him and acknowledging the source of our lives. It talks about Belshazzar being in God's hand.

We are, too, and we would do well to acknowledge God's role and power over our lives. We will come back and look at Daniel in the Lion's Den, chapter six.

This is Dr. Wendy Widder in her teaching on the book of Daniel. This is session 8, Daniel 9 & 5, A Humble King and God's Rescinded Power.