

The king called for his wise men to interpret the message, but every one of them failed. Then the king calls on Daniel. All his life Daniel served in the court of the kings of Babylon. More than once he had pulled Nebuchadnezzar out of a jam. Now he is called for one last act of service to a Babylonian king. Daniel reminds the king that when Nebuchadnezzar was arrogant and his heart was filled with pride, God humbled the king by taking away his sanity until he acknowledged that God was sovereign over all. *But you his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this* (Daniel 5:22).

Daniel points out that by drinking wine from the sacred goblets and by praising the gods of Babylon, Belshazzar arrogantly sets himself in opposition to the God of heaven. It was a direct, public, premeditated assault on the Lord. Belshazzar provoked *the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways* (Daniel 5:23), which is why God sent the hand that made the strange writing on the wall.

*Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin* is what God wrote on the wall.. Daniel's explanation is short and to the point. *Mene* means "numbered." God has numbered the days of the king's reign. *Tekel* means "weighed." God has weighed the king's life in the scales of justice and he's come up short. *Parsin* means "divided." Babylon is about to fall. These mysterious words are a message from God that Belshazzar's reign is over, his life will soon end, and his kingdom will be divided and given to someone else.

The end of story comes quickly. Verse 30 says Belshazzar was slain "that same night." The Persian army, camped near the Euphrates River, captured Babylon in a surprise attack, by diverting the river into a nearby lake, and using the dry riverbed to breach the city walls. Before sunrise Belshazzar was dead and the Babylonian Empire at its inglorious end.

Belshazzar should have known better. He knew that God once judged his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar for his pride. He now. When he took the silver and gold goblets and used them as party favors, he was daring God to punish him, and God called his bluff. Babylon became great because of the sovereign blessing of God. But when Babylon became great, pride made them forget God. When they forgot God, they took God for granted. When they took God for granted, God judged them and they were no longer a great nation.

Daniel 5 is a warning. If we forget God or take God for granted, then what happened to Babylon may also happen to us. Great nations come and go – Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, the Third Reich, the Soviet Union – it's the tendency of every great nation to believe that they will always be a superpower. They push God out of the picture. They take God out of public life. They forbid the mention of God's name. They ridicule those who believe in God. Arrogant nations promote those who exalt humanity and down play God, they chafe at God's commands, they rewrite the rule book, and they live by their own set of rules. Over time prideful people take God for granted, turn to their own idols of technology, and begin to worship the things made with human own hands. In the end God judges that nation and it is no longer great; and that judgment often comes at the hands of another nation God raises up for that very purpose.

Does any of this sound familiar? It should. In the past fifty years this is exactly what we've been doing in our own country. The United States was founded by God-fearing men and women. The Pilgrims came to these shores seeking religious freedom and God's Kingdom on earth. The Founders praised God's sovereignty and grace, and sought God's help to make a better world. The generations before us lived faithfully within the confines of the Ten Commandments, and raising good, honest, God-fearing citizens.

But somewhere, somehow something changed. Now we rely too much on our own abilities. We think we know all the answers. We banish prayer from public places. We silence the Church. We make the economy our king. We permit lawmakers to determine our behaviors and morals. We allow the media to control our beliefs. We replace the Gospel with national pride. We neglect to love our neighbor. And we forget all about God.

What happened to Babylon may happen to America if we continue to take God's grace for granted and push God to the sidelines. That being said, I do not believe that America is definitely marching toward oblivion, but I do believe that Christians must be vigilant in our stand for truth, justice, and righteousness. We must turn things around, stand with God, and remember the lessons from Daniel.

**MENE. (Numbered)** We like to believe that God will never punish us, or that if punishment is coming, it is so far off in the distant future that we have plenty of time to repent and be ready

to meet the Lord. This is a dangerous and even deadly attitude. God’s Spirit does not strive forever. God is not obligated to continually send the Spirit to convict us of our sinful ways. The time will come when God says, “You have crossed the line.” Our days are numbered by God: we must use the days given to us by God to do God’s work in God’s world, recognizing God as our Creator and King. This is the way to be right with God, both as faithful individuals and as a Godly nation.

**TEKEL. (Weighed)** God weighs every human heart. God scrutinizes every human heart: not simply our outward actions but also our inner motivations, thoughts, dreams and secrets. Left to our own devices, we will be found wanting. We need someone to stand in our place and tip the scales of justice. We need Jesus Christ to take our place. Jesus never sinned - not in thought, word, or deed – but by his perfect righteousness he fulfilled the Law of God in every detail. He succeeded where we failed, he died in our place, and only he can represent us when we stand before the Lord. If we stand on our own merits, we will be found “wanting.” If Jesus stands for us, we will be found qualified to enter God’s Kingdom.

**PARSIN. (Divided)** Fifty years earlier Daniel told King Nebuchadnezzar that Babylon would be overthrown by the Persians. At that point there was no reason to take him seriously. But on October 12, 539 BC it happened just as the prophet said. God’s Word is sure. Nothing God says will be left unfulfilled. Though the days turn into months, the months into years, the years in decades, and the decades into centuries, in the end every word of the Lord will come to pass. If we stay faithful to God’s Word, if we stand united with God, we will be a blessed nation; but if we stray from God’s Word, if we divorce ourselves from God, we will fall: a nation divided and at war with itself.

The writing is on the wall. Just as God humbled proud kings, God can do the same to us. Daniel teaches us that our place is at God’s feet in obedience, submission, and gratitude; and the stories of the Babylonian kings teach us as clearly as anything what happens when we forget that God is God and we are not.

## God’s Graffiti

**Sunday, February 8, 2015**

**The Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN**

**Daniel 5:22-30**

The year is 539 BC, nearly 70 years since Daniel arrived as an exile from Jerusalem. King Nebuchadnezzar has been dead for 24 years and his grandson Belshazzar sits on the throne of the shrinking empire centered in the great city of Babylon. Outside the massive walls the mighty Persian army surrounded the city. Inside the city the residents felt secure, protected by a double line of walls that stretched for 15 miles with its one hundred watchtowers. The Euphrates River ran through the city bringing fresh water to the citizens, and the city contained a 20-year stockpile of food and supplies. Though surrounded, the citizens of Babylon believed no army could conquer them: they would outlast any siege.

There was excitement in the city because the king was throwing a massive party. One thousand nobles, the cream of Babylonian society, were invited; along with their wives, and entourages, the total crowd could number well over 8,000. This party was the king’s way of diverting attention from the events outside the walls. It was a massive morale-booster, meant to lift the spirits of the entire city.

Evidently the party got off to a great start with lots of laughter, bright conversation around the tables, and plenty of wine for everyone. Then King Belshazzar decided to bring out the gold and silver goblets stolen from the temple in Jerusalem when Nebuchadnezzar seized that city. The guests passed the goblets around and someone began to sing a song of praise to the gods of Babylon, praising the pagan gods of gold, silver, stone, and wood. This was exactly what the king wanted...a really wild party to help people forget the trouble on the other side of the city walls. Everything was going according to plan.

Then God crashes the party in a most dramatic fashion. Without warning a disembodied hand began to write on the plaster wall near the lampstand in the royal palace. No body, no face, no torso...just some fingers writing on the plaster wall. Then, just as suddenly as it had appeared, the hand vanished. But the words remained. Four words in Aramaic. What did they mean?