

Daniel 5:13-16

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Daniel is summoned to King Belshazzar. The King lists all of Daniel's abilities and accomplishments, and promises great reward if Daniel can interpret the writing on the wall.

King Belshazzar, terrified after seeing a supernatural hand interrupt his feast and write words on the wall, is further frightened because none of his wisemen or magicians can explain the meaning of the words. The queen (likely his mother), reminds him of *Daniel*, who was famous for interpretation and truth during King Nebuchadnezzar's reign. She urges Belshazzar to summon Daniel to read the writing on the wall.

The king agrees with this advice. So Daniel is *brought in before the king*. Belshazzar questions Daniel in an introductory fashion, "*Are you that Daniel who is one of the exiles from Judah?*" The story drips with irony, since now the king is asking aid from an exile taken from Judah after defiling the holy vessels taken from Judah. An episode intending to build morale with a reminder of a conquest of Judah has now turned to a petition for help from an exile from Judah.

Since it's the God of Judah and Israel who is communicating with King Belshazzar, it makes sense that it takes one of the Judean exiles in Babylon to act as a translator between God and the king. This is what Daniel has done his entire career in Babylon. All the court magicians and stargazers repeatedly turn up empty when the kings (Nebuchadnezzar or Belshazzar) experience an encounter with God.

God, the one true God, reveals Himself and His will in mysterious ways to the Babylonians, which is why Daniel is the only one who can make sense of the dreams and words sent by God. Daniel walks faithfully and obediently before God, and God calls upon and elevates Daniel in his faithfulness. Even at this point, Daniel is an old man and forgotten by the entire court, save for the queen mother, but he is called upon yet again to explain God's revelation to the king.

Belshazzar admits that his own professional advisors have failed him, explaining that *the wise men and the conjurers* have already attempted to explain the writing on the wall, *but they could not declare the interpretation of the message*. So now, the task falls to Daniel, whom the king has *heard about*, specifically that he has *a spirit of the gods* in him, as well as *illumination, insight and extraordinary wisdom*. Belshazzar repeats that he has *heard about* Daniel, from the queen, emphasizing that Daniel's reputation is powerful and reliable. Belshazzar expects Daniel to be *able to give interpretations and solve difficult problems*.

The king is making clear why he believes Daniel is right for the job, though in reality he has already exhausted all other options and had forgotten who Daniel was until very recently. Whether he is attempting to flatter Daniel or express desperation, he speaks truthfully about Daniel's legacy. As before, the king promises Daniel a great reward if he can *read the inscription and make its interpretation known* to Belshazzar. Namely, that Daniel *will be clothed with purple and wear a necklace of gold*, as well as rule *the kingdom as the third ruler*.

This reward stresses how desperate King Belshazzar is to understand the writing on the wall. Not only does he promise costly material treasure (purple clothing and a golden necklace), Belshazzar is also willing to bestow authority over all of Babylon, third to only him and his father Nabonidus.

Biblical Text

¹³ Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king spoke and said to Daniel, “Are you that Daniel who is one of the exiles from Judah, whom my father the king brought from Judah? ¹⁴ Now I have heard about you that a spirit of the gods is in you, and that illumination, insight and extraordinary wisdom have been found in you. ¹⁵ Just now the wise men *and* the conjurers were brought in before me that they might read this inscription and make its interpretation known to me, but they could not declare the interpretation of the message. ¹⁶ But I personally have heard about you, that you are able to give interpretations and solve difficult problems. Now if you are able to read the inscription and make its interpretation known to me, you will be clothed with purple and *wear* a necklace of gold around your neck, and you will have authority as the third *ruler* in the kingdom.”