

# Focus on Prophecy GUIDE 3



# Running the Wrong Way

- **On October 25, 1964, San Francisco's Candlestick Park rocked with the sound of thousands of 49er fans cheering as their team moved down the field against a National Football League rival, the Minnesota Vikings. But their cheers suddenly stopped when a 49er halfback fumbled the ball after a hard tackle.**
- **A Viking defender, Jim, managed to scoop up the loose ball and race toward the goal line, sixty-six yards away.**
- **The 49er fans began cheering again. In fact, they went wild with excitement. Their roar drowned out the shouts of dismay from Jim's Viking teammates—who were trying to catch up with him. None of the 49er players stopped Jim's run to the end zone. Jim was elated, thinking he'd scored a touchdown. But then a 49er player threw his arms around him and said, "Thanks, man, for the safety." Jim, unfortunately, had run the wrong way! He'd been downed behind his own goal line and scored two points for the other team!**

# Running the Wrong Way

- **After recovering from his horror, Jim played hard the rest of the game, and the Vikings won 27-22. But football history will always remember Jim's wrong-way run.**
- **On the field of life, there are really only two ways to run. We head either toward redemption or ultimate destruction. When we run toward destruction it may seem like we're running downhill. Nobody's going to force us to stop. We may even enjoy the run for a while—crowds cheer, our heart races with excitement. But how awful it will be to reach the end and discover it was all for nothing. That we were running the wrong way, away from Jesus and His cross.**
- **Daniel chapters 5 and 6 tell a story about two individuals running through life in opposite directions. Daniel moved steadily toward the God to whom he was committed. A monarch named Belshazzar was slipping and sliding in Satan's direction. The results of their choices provide lessons for us to think about.**

# 1. The Party of All Parties

- **Belshazzar, a relative of Nebuchadnezzar, ruled as king of Babylon. On October 12, 539 B.C., he decided to host the party of all parties in his palace. The most important men of Babylon were there with their wives and mistresses. As the wine flowed freely and the senses dulled, everyone danced and frolicked. It had been about twenty-three years since King Nebuchadnezzar's death.**
- **The golden age of Babylon had been declining under his incompetent successor. And now, for this empire, the sand in the hourglass was about to run out.**

# 1. The Party of All Parties

- **While Belshazzar and his friends stumbled around in drunken stupors, something ominous was happening just outside the city walls. Darius the Mede, under cover of darkness, had surrounded Babylon with his army. The capital lay within his grasp. This would be the final conquest in a campaign the Medes and Persians had carried on for some time. Moreover, Darius' Persian counterpart, Cyrus the Great, was swallowing up more and more Babylonian territory. Now Babylon had become the proverbial mouse cornered by the cat.**
- **Belshazzar kept partying at this moment of great peril because he felt his city was impregnable; no one could possibly break through the mighty walls of Babylon. Its gates towered over the surrounding territory; its storehouses bulged with food; and the Euphrates River, flowing through the middle of the city, provided a sure supply of water. Let the enemies come!**

# 1. The Party of All Parties

- **“Belshazzar gave the command to bring the gold and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple which had been in Jerusalem, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. . . . The king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines . . . drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone” (Daniel 5:2-4).**
- **This haughty act of defiance swept away the king’s last chance to escape disaster.**
- **Suddenly a cry of fear rang through the hall. Belshazzar had risen to his feet and was pointing to the palace wall. “L-I-look!” he cried.**
- **The wild revelry turned to dead silence. “What is it?” someone whispered.**
- **Another horror-struck voice exclaimed, “A hand. It’s a hand!”**

# 1. The Party of All Parties

- **At the height of the party, as the king and his guests were defying God, a supernatural sight appeared.**
- **“The fingers of a man’s hand appeared and wrote . . . on the plaster of the wall of the king’s palace. . . . Then the king’s countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened, and his knees knocked against each other” (vss. 5, 6).**
- **As they watched, the hand began to write strange letters on the wall—mene, mene, tekel, peres (vss. 5, 25, 26) Belshazzar was so terrified that his face turned pale.**
- **His legs became weak, and his knees started knocking together.**

# 1. The Party of All Parties

- **Belshazzar called in his wise men to interpret what was written on the wall.**
- **But they couldn't explain the strange writing.**
- **Word of the incident raced throughout the palace.**
- **When the news reached the queen, she hurried into the hall where the noisy party had been stilled.**
- **Quickly sizing up the situation, she advised Belshazzar to call for Daniel to interpret the writing.**



# 1. The Party of All Parties

- **When Daniel arrived, the king vowed to shower him with gifts and make him third in command in his kingdom if he would just tell the king what the writing meant.**
- **In reply, Daniel told Belshazzar, “Give your rewards to another; yet I will read the writing to the king, and make known to him the interpretation” (vs. 17).**
- **Daniel knew that the writing was a message to King Belshazzar from God. He would tell interpret the supernatural writing without any thought of reward.**

## 1. The Party of All Parties

- **Thought questions: When a supernatural hand appeared and began writing on the wall, Belshazzar and his wise men were able to read the writing immediately. (True or False)**
- **At the party Belshazzar hosted for the most important people of Babylon, they drank wine from the gold and silver vessels taken from God's temple in Jerusalem—thus signifying their contempt for God. (True or False)**

## 2. Daniel's Interpretation

- **Daniel wouldn't respond to the king's promises with flattery. He wouldn't "sugarcoat" the situation. He tells it like it is. Read verses 18-21.**
- **Here Daniel reviews God's very public attempt to persuade Belshazzar that even monarchs need to bow before the Almighty and serve Him.**
- **Throughout Babylon's rule as a world empire, God repeatedly gave the Babylonian people opportunities to understand His will and form a personal relationship with Him.**
- **But the Babylonians had hardened their hearts against God, and now there was little left to do but accept their choice—and its consequences.**

## 2. Daniel's Interpretation

- **Belshazzar could have learned from the example of King Nebuchadnezzar, but instead he made a crucial mistake.**
- **He had seen what had happened to Nebuchadnezzar when that king failed to humble himself before God.**
- **But Belshazzar did the same. He trusted in self and defied God.**
- **He refused to follow God's leading. Daniel told the king plainly, You "have not humbled your heart. . . . You have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven" (vs. 23).**

### 3. Daniel's Interpretation

- **Belshazzar turned his back on God. He knew what was right, but he chose to run the wrong direction in life.**
- **He ran away from God.**
- **The next few words are gripping! “The God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified. Then the fingers of the hand were sent from Him, and this writing was written” (vss. 23, 24).**
- **Wow! God Himself had sent that particular hand to write that particular message on the wall.**
- **This powerful king must have been trembling from head to foot. Next he heard God’s message.**

### 3. Daniel's Interpretation

- **READ VERSES 25-28. The supernatural hand had written on the wall, “MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN” (vs. 25). What was the meaning of these words on the wall, sent directly from God?**
- **Daniel told the king, “This is the interpretation of each word. MENE: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it; TEKEL: You have been weighted in the balances, and found wanting; PERES: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians” (vss. 26-28).**
- **God’s words on the wall came true. “That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom” (vss. 30, 31).**

### 3. Daniel's Interpretation

- **Historians tell us that on the night of this feast, the Medes besieging Babylon actually lowered the waters of the Euphrates. They diverted its flow through another channel they'd been secretly digging. The soldiers of Darius waded up the riverbed, passed under the city's towering walls, and poured into the streets.**
- **Soon they overwhelmed Babylon's defenders, and Medo-Persia replaced Babylon as the next world empire. It happened just as outlined in the prophecy of Daniel chapter 2. The head of gold gave way to the breast and arms of silver.**
- **Thought question: Daniel told the king that the writing meant that the kingdom would be taken away from him and given to the Medes and Persians. (True or False )**
- **The king threatened Daniel with death if he didn't tell him the meaning of the writing on the wall. (True or False)**

## 4. Rebellion and Loyalty

- **Babylon fell because it was left to its own defences. God would not protect the city. Its citizens had been shown what was right, but they openly rebelled against God.**
- **There is an invisible line we cannot cross without suffering serious consequences.**
- **Sometimes God has to say, “Enough!” The Bible gives examples.**
- **It happened in Noah’s day when a flood swept over the world.**
- **It happened in Lot’s day when Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by fire and brimstone.**
- **And it will happen again in the last days of Earth’s history. A time is coming when all human beings will have decided their destiny—and all decisions will be sealed forever.**



## 4. Rebellion and Loyalty

- **Belshazzar made a decision to walk away from God. But in Daniel chapter 6, we find a very different story—Daniel’s courageous loyalty to God.**
- **His decision to walk consistently in the will of God creates a stark contrast with Belshazzar’s stubborn resistance to the divine plan.**
- **When Belshazzar’s desires conflicted with God’s will, he chose to follow his own whims.**
- **But when Daniel was tested, he made his decisions count for God.**
- **Temptations and trials don’t have to oppress our spirits.**
- **They can enable us to grow and become more like Christ.**

## 4. Rebellion and Loyalty

- **At the time of the events in chapter 6, Daniel had reached the ripe old age of about eighty-four. Here was a man whose fruitful life demonstrated that God could be a faithful source of support. The words of Isaiah the prophet were evident in his life—“Even to your old age, I am He, and even to gray hairs I will carry you! I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you” (Isaiah 46:4).**
- **King Darius had appointed Daniel to a very high position in his government, similar to that of a vice president. But some of the other cabinet members became quite jealous of this Hebrew, this foreigner, and began to conspire against him. They wanted Daniel’s position.**
- **These men set a trap for Daniel and waited for him to walk into it. Let’s look at the highlights of the story.**

## 4. Rebellion and Loyalty

- **The chief officials of the new Persian government tried their best to find some accusation to bring against the prophet Daniel. “But they could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him. Then these men said, ‘We shall not find any charge against this Daniel unless we find it against him concerning the law of his God.’ ” (vss. 4, 5). The only thing at all that they might use against Daniel concerned his faithfulness to God and his obedience to God’s law.**
- **So these officials designed a trap for Daniel.**
- **They persuaded the king to decree that “whoever petitions any god or man for thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions” (vs. 7). They knew that Daniel prayed to the God of heaven faithfully three times each day.**

## 4. Rebellion and Loyalty

- **When Daniel learned of this decree, he paid no attention to it. He kept right on praying to God every day, just as he always had.**
- **The conspirators lost no time in reporting Daniel to the king. He'd violated the royal decree and prayed to the God of heaven.**
- **The penalty: being thrown alive into a den of ravenous lions. The king felt he had no choice; he had to carry out his command.**
- **As the sentence was carried out and Daniel was thrown to the lions, the king spoke remarkable words of faith, "Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you" (vs. 16).**

## 4. Rebellion and Loyalty

- **Have you ever had someone lie about you or set you up for a fall? How did that make you feel?**
- **Darius had condemned someone he didn't want to condemn. Because this king knew it was terribly unfair to throw Daniel into the lions' den, he spent a sleepless night in the palace. Daniel, however, rested peacefully that night, as we shall see.**
- **This story gives us a vivid picture of what creates peace and what takes it away.**
- **Guilt and anxiety over doing wrong will always sabotage our happiness.**
- **But following God brings a sure bounty of peace—even in the midst of life's toughest moments.**

## 4. Rebellion and Loyalty

- **READ VERSES 18-23.** King Darius “arose very early in the morning and went in haste to the den of lions. And when he came to the den, he cried out. . . . ‘Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God . . . been able to deliver you from the lions?’ . . . . Then Daniel said to the king, . . . . ‘My God sent His angel and shut the lions’ mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you.’ ” (vss. 19-22).
- Realizing how Daniel’s accusers had unjustly tried to destroy him, the king ordered that they should be thrown into the same den of lions that they had planned for Daniel. “And the lions overpowered them, and broke all their bones in pieces before they ever came to the bottom of the den” (vs. 24).

## 4. Rebellion and Loyalty

- **What a powerful message! Daniel had faced a very difficult choice. If he prayed openly to the God of heaven, he would end up in a den of lions. But he made a decision to pray anyway. He didn't hide his faith. He didn't change his devotional habits or adjust his lifestyle. He didn't hunker down—he trusted God.**
- **Verse 10 tells us he “gave thanks” as was his custom. Faced with the prospect of being torn to pieces by lions, Daniel was still able to give thanks. Daniel wasn't looking at the danger. He was looking at God's promises. And those same promises are there for us too. They will enable us to be like Daniel.**
- **Thought question: The prophecy written on the wall came true, but not for many years; the Medes and Persians didn't conquer Babylon until much later. (True or False)**

## Conclusion

- **“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear . . .” (Psalm 46:1, 2).**
- **“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6, 7).**



# Conclusion

- **Remember, there are two ways to run on the field of life. You either run toward God or away from Him. Don't think there is anything that can keep you from moving toward your heavenly Father. There's nothing so terrible that God can't fix it. He specializes in what we think is impossible! He can help us overcome any obstacle. So let us get into the good race—and fix our eyes on the good goal, on Jesus Christ who inspires our faith.**
- **TO THINK ABOUT:** Jesus promised that He would take care of all our needs if we first seek His kingdom and right living (righteousness) and trust fully in Him. *What do you want to say to Jesus?*