

Old Testament Stories

"The Handwriting on the Wall"

Daniel 5

☞ What would you like to praise God for today?

☞ Pray for God's guidance as you study



King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them. ² While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. ³ So they brought in the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. ⁴ As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.

⁵ Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote. ⁶ His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his legs became weak and his knees were knocking.

⁷ The king summoned the enchanters, astrologers and diviners. Then he said to these wise men of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing and tells me what it means will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around his neck, and he will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom."

⁸ Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or tell the king what it meant. ⁹ So King Belshazzar became even more terrified and his face grew more pale. His nobles were baffled.

¹⁰ The queen, hearing the voices of the king and his nobles, came into the banquet hall. "May the king live forever!" she said. "Don't be alarmed! Don't look so pale!" ¹¹ There is a man in your kingdom who has the spirit of the holy gods in him. In the time of your father he was found to have insight and intelligence and wisdom like that of the gods. Your father, King Nebuchadnezzar, appointed him chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners. ¹² He did this because Daniel, whom the king called Belteshazzar, was found to have a keen mind and knowledge and understanding, and also the ability to interpret dreams, explain riddles and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means."

¹³ So Daniel was brought before the king, and the king said to him, "Are you Daniel, one of the exiles my father the king brought from Judah?" ¹⁴ I have heard that the spirit of the gods is in you and that you have insight, intelligence and outstanding wisdom. ¹⁵ The wise men and enchanters were brought before me to read this writing and tell me what it means, but they could not explain it. ¹⁶ Now I have heard that you are able to give interpretations and to solve difficult problems. If you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around your neck, and you will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom."

¹⁷ Then Daniel answered the king, "You may keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else. Nevertheless, I will read the writing for the king and tell him what it means.

¹⁸ "Your Majesty, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendor. ¹⁹ Because of the high position he gave him, all the nations and peoples of every language dreaded and feared him. Those the king wanted to put to death, he put to death; those he wanted to spare, he spared; those he wanted to promote, he promoted; and those he wanted to humble, he humbled. ²⁰ But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory. ²¹ He was driven away from people and given the mind of an animal; he lived with the wild donkeys and ate grass like the ox; and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and sets over them anyone he wishes.

²² "But you, Belshazzar, his son, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this. ²³ Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. You had the goblets from his temple brought to you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines drank wine from them. You praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways. ²⁴ Therefore he sent the hand that wrote the inscription.

²⁵ "This is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN

²⁶ "Here is what these words mean: *Mene*: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. ²⁷ *Tekel*: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting. ²⁸ *Peres*: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians."

²⁹ Then at Belshazzar's command, Daniel was clothed in purple, a gold chain was placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom.

³⁰ That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, ³¹ and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, at the age of sixty-two.

1. Recall one of your most scary, hair-raising, goose-bumpy, heart thumping experiences. What was so frightening?
2. Belshazzar was the successor of King Nebuchadnezzar. Belshazzar was king at the height of the Babylonian empire's glory. But having a great party wasn't *party* enough for this king. What did he do that put this party "over the top"?

3. Why was this such an affront to God? How does this historical anecdote highlight the fulfillment of prophecy? (Jer. 20:5; 27:21-22)
4. How did God respond to Belshazzar's disrespect? (Dan. 5:5)
5. How did King Belshazzar respond to God's message? (Dan. 5:6-9)
6. Ironically it is Belshazzar's mother that comes to the rescue. What advice does she offer her terrified son?
7. Enter Daniel. What does Daniel's rejection of flattery and rewards say about the authenticity/confidence of this man and his message? (Dan 5:13-17; Jer. 25:1-14; 29:8-10)
8. Why does Daniel begin by recounting family history? (Dan. 5:18-28) In your experience, do sin tendencies follow generational lines? Does that excuse a person from, or educate for, greater accountability?
9. What did Belshazzar do with the goblets? Why does God attach a generational element to idolatry (Exodus 20:5; 34:7)?
10. Below write in your own words what the handwriting on the wall meant for King Belshazzar:
Mene: _____
Tekel: _____
Peres: _____
 Why did God repeat the word "*Mene*" and what does that reveal about God's love as well as His justice? (Jer. 9:24; 2 Peter 3:9)
 What happened to fulfill God's edict? (Daniel 5:29-30)
11. What contemporary examples come to mind of people mocking God by demeaning sacred things, as Belshazzar did with the temple goblets?
12. Read 2 Peter 3:3-13. What future warning does the Bible present? How should this impact the way we live?

Prayer: For one another

LIFE GROUPS

A safe place to build friendships and grow spiritually.

- L** ♦ Learn..... applying Biblical truth for everyday living
- I** ♦ Invite.....welcoming others to our fellowship
- F** ♦ Fellowship.....nurturing Christ centered caring relationships
- E** ♦ Evangelism..... reaching others with the hope of Christ

DID YOU KNOW?

This story has been targeted by those wanting to discredit the Bible. By pointing to the Babylonian progression of rulers they point to Nabonidus as the final Babylonian regent, NOT Belshazzar. However, further research has uncovered that Belshazzar not only did exist, but that he was both “the son of and co-regent with Nabonidus. Nabonidus was absent from Babylon for 10 of his 17 years, indicating why Belshazzar was appointed co-regent and exercised kingly authority even though Nabonidus actually held the throne.”

“This co-regency explains why Belshazzar offered ‘third highest ruler in the kingdom’ to anyone who could interpret the handwriting on the wall (see Dan. 5:7). Nabonidus and Belshazzar occupied places one and two.”

Belshazzar’s position is not the only supportive evidence for the Biblical account. “Archaeologists have excavated a large hall in Babylon 55 feet wide and 165 feet long that had **plastered** walls. Such a room would have been sufficient to house a gathering the size of the one described in Daniel 5.

Still not convinced? There is evidence that a party probably took place on the eve of the capture of Babylon. The two ancient historians, Herodotus and Xenophon, both allude to a feast in Babylon at this time. According to Herodotus, Babylon was captured while the besieged were off their guard during a festival. Xenophon mentions that Cyrus (leading the capture of Babylon) was aware that a feast was going forward.



Along a different track, consider Saddam Hussein’s attempt to re-create Babylon. He wanted (and tried) to build a legendary palace to rival the one experienced by Daniel. In fact, he built atop the “original bricks. . . (which) bear ancient inscriptions praising Nebuchadnezzar.” Hussein added more than 60 million bricks (inscribed with the words – *‘In the era of Saddam Hussein, protector of Iraq, who rebuilt civilization and rebuilt Babylon’*) – atop Nebuchadnezzar’s rubble. Within ten years the new bricks had begun to crack. A big hint if he’d cared to notice.

By then the building project extended across an area as large as five football fields. Like Nebuchadnezzar of old, Hussein saw no problem in dispossessing a thousand people from their homes to make this possible. Beyond being huge, the structure was also ostentatious. “On the ceilings and walls of the palace were murals of ancient Babylon, Ur and the Tower of Babel.” The plumbing fixtures were engraved and gold plated.

If Saddam Hussein had read Isaiah 13:19-22 he would have saved himself a lot of investment. For in this passage God forever curses any resurgence of Babylon. God’s Word proved true once again in 2003. In that April, American troops entered Saddam’s palace. Hussein’s fall from power emboldened vandals and looters. They stormed the palace, carrying off what they could and reducing the rest to rubble. Without intending to, these modern day Iraqis were validating the fall of Babylon from the book of Daniel.