

Daniel 5

The Handwriting on the Wall

[1] King Belshazzar made a great feast for a thousand of his lords and drank wine in front of the thousand.

[2] Belshazzar, when he tasted the wine, commanded that the vessels of gold and of silver that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple in Jerusalem be brought, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. [3] Then they brought in the golden vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. [4] They drank wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

[5] Immediately the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, opposite the lampstand. And the king saw the hand as it wrote. [6] Then the king's color changed, and his thoughts alarmed him; his limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together. [7] The king called loudly to bring in the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers. The king declared to the wise men of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing, and shows me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around his neck and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom." [8] Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or make known to the king the interpretation. [9] Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, and his color changed, and his lords were perplexed.

[10] The queen, because of the words of the king and his lords, came into the banqueting hall, and the queen declared, “O king, live forever! Let not your thoughts alarm you or your color change. [11] There is a man in your kingdom in whom 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, [12] because an excellent spirit, knowledge, and understanding to interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar. Now let Daniel be called, and he will show the interpretation.”

Daniel Interprets the Handwriting

[13] 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. [14] I have heard of you that the spirit of the gods is in you, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you. [15] 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. [16] But I have 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.”

[17] Then Daniel answered and said before the king, “Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another. Nevertheless, I will read the writing to the king and make known to him the

interpretation. [18] O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father kingship and greatness and glory and majesty. [19] And because of the greatness that he gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whom he would, he killed, and whom he would, he kept alive; whom he would, he raised up, and whom he would, he humbled. [20] 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. [21] 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 the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he will. [22] And you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this, [23] but you have lifted up yourself against 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 are all your ways, you have not honored.

[24] "Then from his presence the hand was sent, and this writing was inscribed. [25] And this is the writing that was inscribed: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, and PARSIN. [26] This is the interpretation of the matter: MENE, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; [27] TEKEL, you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting; [28] PERES, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians."

[29] Then Belshazzar gave the command, and Daniel was clothed with purple, a chain of gold was put around his neck, and a proclamation was made about him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

[30] That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed. [31] And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old. (ESV)

NASB

Belshazzar's Feast

1 Belshazzar the king held a great feast for a thousand of his nobles, and he was drinking wine in the presence of the thousand. 2 When Belshazzar tasted the wine, he gave orders to bring the gold and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. 3 Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God which was in Jerusalem; and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. 4 They drank the wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.

5 Suddenly the fingers of a man's hand emerged and began writing opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, and the king saw the back of the hand that did the writing. 6 Then the king's face grew pale and his thoughts alarmed him, and his hip joints went slack and his knees began knocking together. 7 The king called aloud to bring in the conjurers, the Chaldeans and the diviners. The king spoke and said to the wise men of Babylon, "Any man who can read this inscription and explain its interpretation to me shall be clothed with purple and have a necklace of gold around his neck, and have authority as third ruler in the kingdom." 8 Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the inscription or make known its interpretation to the king. 9 Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, his face grew even paler, and his nobles were perplexed.

10 The queen entered the banquet hall because of the words of the king and his nobles; the queen spoke and said, "O king, live forever! Do not let your thoughts alarm you or your face be pale. 11 There is a man in your kingdom in whom is a spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of your father, illumination, insight and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods were found in him. And King Nebuchadnezzar, your father, your father the king, appointed him chief of the magicians, conjurers, Chaldeans and diviners. 12 This was because an extraordinary spirit, knowledge and insight, interpretation of dreams, explanation of enigmas and solving of difficult problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar. Let Daniel now be summoned and he will declare the interpretation."

Daniel Interprets Handwriting on the Wall

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."

17 Then Daniel answered and said before the king, “Keep your gifts for yourself or give your rewards to someone else; however, I will read the inscription to the king and make the interpretation known to him. 18 O king, the Most High God granted sovereignty, grandeur, glory and majesty to Nebuchadnezzar your father. 19 Because of the grandeur which He bestowed on him, all the peoples, nations and men of every language feared and trembled before him; whomever he wished he killed and whomever he wished he spared alive; and whomever he wished he elevated and whomever he wished he humbled. 20 But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit became so proud that he behaved arrogantly, he was deposed from his royal throne and his glory was taken away from him. 21 He was also driven away from mankind, and his heart was made like that of beasts, and his dwelling place was with the wild donkeys. He was given grass to eat like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until he recognized that the Most High God is ruler over the realm of mankind and that He sets over it whomever He wishes. 22 Yet you, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this, 23 but you have exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines have been drinking wine from them; and you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which do not see, hear or understand. But the God in whose hand are your life-breath and all your ways, you have not glorified. 24 Then the hand was sent from Him and this inscription was written out.

25 “Now this is the inscription that was written out: ‘MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.’ 26 This is the interpretation of the message: ‘MENE’—God has numbered your kingdom and put an end to it. 27 ‘TEKEL’—you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient. 28 ‘PERES’—your kingdom has been divided and given over to the Medes and Persians.”

29 Then Belshazzar gave orders, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a necklace of gold around his neck, and issued a proclamation concerning him that he now had authority as the third ruler in the kingdom.

30 That same night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain. 31 So Darius the Mede received the kingdom at about the age of sixty-two.

NIV

The Writing on the Wall

1 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.

NKJV

Belshazzar's Feast

1 Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in the presence of the thousand. 2 While he tasted the wine, 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. 3 Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken from the temple of the house of God which had been in Jerusalem; and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. 4 They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone.

5 In the same hour the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. 6 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. 7 The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. The king spoke, saying to the wise men of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing, and tells me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around his neck; and he shall be the third ruler in the kingdom." 8 Now all the king's wise men came, but they could not read the writing, or make known to the king its interpretation. 9 Then King Belshazzar was greatly troubled, his countenance was changed, and his lords were astonished.

10 The queen, because of the words of the king and his lords, came to the banquet hall. The queen spoke, saying, "O king, live forever! Do not let your thoughts trouble you, nor let your countenance change. 11 There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God. And 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, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers. 12 Inasmuch as an excellent spirit, knowledge, understanding, interpreting dreams, solving riddles, and explaining enigmas were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar, now let Daniel be called, and he will give the interpretation."

The Writing on the Wall Explained

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 captives from Judah, whom my father the king brought from Judah? 14 I have heard of you, that the Spirit of God is in you, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you. 15 Now the wise men, the astrologers, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing and make known to me its interpretation, but they could not give the interpretation of the thing. 16 And I have heard of you, that you can give interpretations and explain enigmas. 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."

17 Then Daniel answered, and said before the king, "Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another; yet I will read the writing to the king, and make known to him the interpretation. 18 O king,

the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father a kingdom and majesty, glory and honor. 19 And because of the majesty that He gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whomever he wished, he executed; whomever he wished, he kept alive; whomever he wished, he set up; and whomever he wished, he put down. 20 But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him. 21 Then he was driven from the sons of men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till he knew that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses.

22 “But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this. 23 And you have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven. They have brought the vessels of His house 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, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know; and the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified. 24 Then the fingers of the hand were sent from Him, and this writing was written.

25 “And this is the inscription that was written:

MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.

26 This is the interpretation of each word. MENE: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it; 27 TEKEL: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; 28 PERES: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.” 29 Then Belshazzar gave the command, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a chain of gold around his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

Belshazzar’s Fall

30 That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. 31 And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.

NLT

The Writing on the Wall

1 Many years later King Belshazzar gave a great feast for 1,000 of his nobles, and he drank wine with them. 2 While Belshazzar was drinking the wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver cups that his predecessor, Nebuchadnezzar, had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem. He wanted to drink from them with his nobles, his wives, and his concubines. 3 So they brought these gold cups taken from the Temple, the house of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. 4 While they drank from them they praised their idols made of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

5 Suddenly, they saw the fingers of a human hand writing on the plaster wall of the king's palace, near the lampstand. The king himself saw the hand as it wrote, 6 and his face turned pale with fright. His knees knocked together in fear and his legs gave way beneath him.

7 The king shouted for the enchanters, astrologers, and fortune-tellers to be brought before him. He said to these wise men of Babylon, "Whoever can read this writing and tell me what it means will be dressed in purple robes of royal honor and will have a gold chain placed around his neck. He will become the third highest ruler in the kingdom!"

8 But when all the king's wise men had come in, none of them could read the writing or tell him what it meant. 9 So the king grew even more alarmed, and his face turned pale. His nobles, too, were shaken.

10 But when the queen mother heard what was happening, she hurried to the banquet hall. She said to Belshazzar, "Long live the king! Don't be so pale and frightened. 11 There is a man in your kingdom who has within him the spirit of the holy gods. During Nebuchadnezzar's reign, this man was found to have insight, understanding, and wisdom like that of the gods. Your predecessor, the king—your predecessor King Nebuchadnezzar—made him chief over all the magicians, enchanters, astrologers, and fortune-tellers of Babylon. 12 This man Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar, has exceptional ability and is filled with divine knowledge and understanding. He can interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means."

Daniel Explains the Writing

13 So Daniel was brought in before the king. The king asked him, "Are you Daniel, one of the exiles brought from Judah by my predecessor, King Nebuchadnezzar? 14 I have heard that you have the spirit of the gods within you and that you are filled with insight, understanding, and wisdom. 15 My wise men and enchanters have tried to read the words on the wall and tell me their meaning, but they cannot do it. 16 I am told that you can give interpretations and solve difficult problems. If you can read these words and tell me their meaning, you will be clothed in purple robes of royal honor, and you will have a gold chain placed around your neck. You will become the third highest ruler in the kingdom."

17 Daniel answered the king, "Keep your gifts or give them to someone else, but I will tell you what the writing means. 18 Your Majesty, the Most High God gave sovereignty, majesty, glory, and honor to your

predecessor, Nebuchadnezzar. 19 He made him so great that people of all races and nations and languages trembled before him in fear. He killed those he wanted to kill and spared those he wanted to spare. He honored those he wanted to honor and disgraced those he wanted to disgrace. 20 But when his heart and mind were puffed up with arrogance, he was brought down from his royal throne and stripped of his glory. 21 He was driven from human society. He was given the mind of a wild animal, and he lived among the wild donkeys. He ate grass like a cow, and he was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he learned that the Most High God rules over the kingdoms of the world and appoints anyone he desires to rule over them.

22 “You are his successor, O Belshazzar, and you knew all this, yet you have not humbled yourself. 23 For you have proudly defied the Lord of heaven and have had these cups from his Temple brought before you. You and your nobles and your wives and concubines have been drinking wine from them while praising gods of silver, gold, bronze, iron, wood, and stone—gods that neither see nor hear nor know anything at all. But you have not honored the God who gives you the breath of life and controls your destiny! 24 So God has sent this hand to write this message.

25 “This is the message that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, and PARSIN.

26 This is what these words mean:

Mene means ‘numbered’—God has numbered the days of your reign and has brought it to an end.

27 Tekel means ‘weighed’—you have been weighed on the balances and have not measured up.

28 Parsin means ‘divided’—your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and Persians.”

29 Then at Belshazzar’s command, Daniel was dressed in purple robes, a gold chain was hung around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom.

30 That very night Belshazzar, the Babylonian king, was killed.

31 And Darius the Mede took over the kingdom at the age of sixty-two.

NET

[1] King Belshazzar{1} prepared a great banquet{2} for a thousand of his nobles, and he was drinking wine in front of{3} them all.{4} [2] While under the influence{5} of the wine, Belshazzar issued an order to bring in the gold and silver vessels - the ones that Nebuchadnezzar his father{6} had confiscated{7} from the temple in Jerusalem{8} - so that the king and his nobles, together with his wives and his concubines, could drink from them.{9} [3] So they brought the gold and silver{10} vessels that had been confiscated from the temple, the house of God{11} in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, together with his wives and concubines, drank from them. [4] As they drank wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

[5] At that very moment the fingers of a human hand appeared{12} and wrote on the plaster of the royal palace wall, opposite the lampstand.{13} The king was watching the back{14} of the hand that was writing. [6] Then all the color drained from the king's face{15} and he became alarmed.{16} The joints of his hips gave way,{17} and his knees began knocking together. [7] The king called out loudly{18} to summon{19} the astrologers, wise men, and diviners. The king proclaimed{20} to the wise men of Babylon that anyone who could read this inscription and disclose its interpretation would be clothed in purple{21} and have a golden collar{22} placed on his neck and be third ruler in the kingdom.

[8] So all the king's wise men came in, but they were unable to read the writing or to make known its{23} interpretation to the king. [9] Then King Belshazzar was very terrified, and he was visibly shaken.{24} His nobles were completely dumbfounded.

[10] Due to the noise{25} caused by the king and his nobles, the queen mother{26} then entered the banquet room. She{27} said, "O king, live forever! Don't be alarmed! Don't be shaken! [11] There is a man in your kingdom who has within him a spirit of the holy gods. In the days of your father, he proved to have{28} insight, discernment, and wisdom like that{29} of the gods.{30} King Nebuchadnezzar your father appointed him chief of the magicians, astrologers, wise men, and diviners.{31} [12] Thus there was found in this man Daniel, whom the king renamed Belteshazzar, an extraordinary spirit, knowledge, and skill to interpret{32} dreams, solve riddles, and decipher knotty problems.{33} Now summon{34} Daniel, and he will disclose the interpretation."

[13] So Daniel was brought in before the king. The king said to Daniel, "Are you that Daniel who is one of the captives of Judah, whom my father the king brought from Judah? [14] I have heard about you, how there is a spirit of the gods in you, and how you have{35} insight, discernment, and extraordinary wisdom. [15] Now the wise men and{36} astrologers were brought before me to read this writing and make known to me its interpretation. But they were unable to disclose the interpretation of the message. [16] However, I have heard{37} that you are able to provide interpretations and to decipher knotty problems. Now if you are able to read this writing and make known to me its interpretation, you will wear purple and have a golden collar around your neck and be third{38} ruler in the kingdom."

DANIEL INTERPRETS THE HANDWRITING ON THE WALL

[17] But Daniel replied to the king, “Keep your gifts, and give your rewards to someone else! However, I will read the writing for the king and make known its^{39} interpretation. [18] As for you, O king, the most high God bestowed on your father Nebuchadnezzar a kingdom, greatness, honor, and majesty.^{40} [19] Due to the greatness that he bestowed on him, all peoples, nations, and language groups were trembling with fear^{41} before him. He killed whom he wished, he spared^{42} whom he wished, he exalted whom he wished, and he brought low whom he wished. [20] And when his mind^{43} became arrogant^{44} and his spirit filled with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and his honor was removed from him. [21] He was driven from human society, his mind^{45} was changed to that of an animal, he lived^{46} with the wild donkeys, he was fed grass like oxen, and his body became damp with the dew of the sky, until he came to understand that the most high God rules over human kingdoms, and he appoints over them whomever he wishes.

[22] “But you, his son^{47} Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself,^{48} although you knew all this. [23] Instead, you have exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven. You brought before you the vessels from his temple, and you and your nobles, together with your wives and concubines, drank wine from them. You praised the gods of silver, gold, bronze, iron, wood, and stone - gods^{49} that cannot see or hear or comprehend! But you have not glorified the God who has in his control^{50} your very breath and all your ways! [24] Therefore the palm of a hand was sent from him, and this writing was inscribed.

[25] “This is the writing that was inscribed: MENE, MENE,^{51} TEQEL, and PHARSIN.^{52} [26] This is the interpretation of the words:^{53} As for mene^{54} - God has numbered your kingdom’s days and brought it to an end. [27] As for teqel - you are weighed on the balances and found to be lacking. [28] As for peres^{55} - your kingdom is divided and given over to the Medes and Persians.”

[29] Then, on Belshazzar’s orders,^{56} Daniel was clothed in purple, a golden collar was placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed third ruler in the kingdom. [30] And in that very night Belshazzar, the Babylonian king,^{57} was killed.^{58} [31] (6:1)^{59} So Darius the Mede took control of the kingdom when he was about sixty-two years old.

{1} 5:1 sn As is clear from the extra-biblical records, it was actually Nabonidus (ca. 556-539 B.C.) who was king of Babylon at this time. However, Nabonidus spent long periods of time at Teima, and during those times Belshazzar his son was de facto king of Babylon. This arrangement may help to explain why later in this chapter Belshazzar promises that the successful interpreter of the handwriting on the wall will be made third ruler in the kingdom. If Belshazzar was in effect second ruler in the kingdom, this would be the highest honor he could grant.

{2} 5:1 sn This scene of a Babylonian banquet calls to mind a similar grandiose event recorded in Esth 1:3-8. Persian kings were also renowned in the ancient Near Eastern world for their lavish banquets.

{3} 5:1 sn The king probably sat at an elevated head table.

{4} 5:1 tn Aram “the thousand.”

{5} 5:2 tn Or perhaps, “when he had tasted” (cf. NASB) in the sense of officially initiating the commencement of the banquet. The translation above seems preferable, however, given the clear evidence of inebriation in the context (cf. also CEV “he got drunk and ordered”).

{6} 5:2 tn Or “ancestor”; or “predecessor” (also in vv. 11, 13, 18). The Aramaic word translated “father” can on occasion denote these other relationships.

{7} 5:2 tn Or “taken.”

{8} 5:2 map For location see Map5-B1; Map6-F3; Map7-E2; Map8-F2; Map10-B3; JP1-F4; JP2-F4; JP3-F4; JP4-F4.

{9} 5:2 sn Making use of sacred temple vessels for an occasion of reveling and drunkenness such as this would have been a religious affront of shocking proportions to the Jewish captives.

{10} 5:3 tc The present translation reads ܠܟܫܦܐ (vékhaspa’, “and the silver”) with Theodotion and the Vulgate. Cf. v. 2. The form was probably accidentally dropped from the Aramaic text by homoioteleuton.

{11} 5:3 tn Aram “the temple of the house of God.” The phrase seems rather awkward. The Vulgate lacks “of the house of God,” while Theodotion and the Syriac lack “the house.”

{12} 5:5 tn Aram “came forth.”

{13} 5:5 sn The mention of the lampstand in this context is of interest because it suggests that the writing was in clear view.

{14} 5:5 tn While Aramaic ܨܢܐ (pas) can mean the palm of the hand, here it seems to be the back of the hand that is intended.

{15} 5:6 tn Aram “[the king’s] brightness changed for him.”

{16} 5:6 tn Aram “his thoughts were alarming him.”

{17} 5:6 tn Aram “his loins went slack.”

{18} 5:7 tn Aram “in strength.”

{19} 5:7 tn Aram “cause to enter.”

{20} 5:7 tn Aram “answered and said.”

{21} 5:7 sn Purple was a color associated with royalty in the ancient world.

{22} 5:7 tn The term translated “golden collar” here probably refers to something more substantial than merely a gold chain (cf. NIV, NCV, NRSV, NLT) or necklace (cf. NASB).

{23} 5:8 tc Read וּפִשְׁרָה (ufishreh) with the Qere rather than וּפִשְׁרָא (ufishra') of the Kethib.

{24} 5:9 tn Aram "his visage altered upon him." So also in v. 10.

{25} 5:10 tn Aram "words of the king."

{26} 5:10 tn Aram "the queen" (so NAB, NASB, NIV, NRSV). In the following discourse this woman is able to recall things about Daniel that go back to the days of Nebuchadnezzar, things that Belshazzar does not seem to recollect. It is likely that she was the wife not of Belshazzar but of Nabonidus or perhaps even Nebuchadnezzar. In that case, "queen" here means "queen mother" (cf. NCV "the king's mother").

{27} 5:10 tn Aram "The queen." The translation has used the pronoun "she" instead because repetition of the noun here would be redundant in terms of English style.

{28} 5:11 tn Aram "[there were] discovered to be in him."

{29} 5:11 tn Aram "wisdom like the wisdom." This would be redundant in terms of English style.

{30} 5:11 tc Theodotion lacks the phrase "and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods."

{31} 5:11 tc The MT includes a redundant reference to "your father the king" at the end of v. 11. None of the attempts to explain this phrase as original are very convincing. The present translation deletes the phrase, following Theodotion and the Syriac.

{32} 5:12 tc The translation reads מִפְּשָׁר (mifshar) rather than the MT מִפְּשָׁר (méfashar) and later in the verse reads וּמִשְׁרָא (mishre') rather than the MT וּמִשְׁרָא (mésahre'). The Masoretes have understood these Aramaic forms to be participles, but they are more likely to be vocalized as infinitives. As such, they have an exegetical function in the syntax of their clause.

{33} 5:12 tn Aram "to loose knots."

{34} 5:12 tn Aram "let [Daniel] be summoned."

{35} 5:14 tn Aram "there has been found in you."

{36} 5:15 tn The Aramaic text does not have "and." The term "astrologers" is either an appositive for "wise men" (cf. KJV, NKJV, ASV, RSV, NRSV), or the construction is to be understood as asyndetic (so the translation above).

{37} 5:16 tn The Aramaic text has also the words "about you."

{38} 5:16 tn Or perhaps "one of three rulers," in the sense of becoming part of a triumvir. So also v. 29.

{39} 5:17 tn Or "the."

{40} 5:18 tn Or "royal greatness and majestic honor," if the four terms are understood as a double hendiadys.

{41} 5:19 tn Aram “were trembling and fearing.” This can be treated as a hendiadys, “were trembling with fear.”

{42} 5:19 tn Aram “let live.” This Aramaic form is the aphel participle of כַּיָּהַב (khayah, “to live”). Theodotion and the Vulgate mistakenly take the form to be from מִכָּחַ (mékha’, “to smite”).

{43} 5:20 tn Aram “heart.”

{44} 5:20 sn The point of describing Nebuchadnezzar as arrogant is that he had usurped divine prerogatives, and because of his immense arrogance God had dealt decisively with him.

{45} 5:21 tn Aram “heart.”

{46} 5:21 tn Aram “his dwelling.”

{47} 5:22 tn Or “descendant”; or “successor.”

{48} 5:22 tn Aram “your heart.”

{49} 5:23 tn Aram “which.”

{50} 5:23 tn Aram “in whose hand [are].”

{51} 5:25 tc The Greek version of Theodotion lacks the repetition of מְנֵה (méne’, cf. NAB).

{52} 5:25 tc The Aramaic word is plural. Theodotion has the singular (cf. NAB “PERES”).

{53} 5:26 tn Or “word” or “event.” See HALOT 1915 s.v. מִלָּה.

{54} 5:26 tn The Aramaic term מְנֵה (méne’) is a noun referring to a measure of weight. The linkage here to the verb “to number” (Aram. מְנָה, ménah) is a case of paronomasia rather than strict etymology. So also with תִּקְלָל (téqel) and פִּרְסִין (farsin). In the latter case there is an obvious wordplay with the name “Persian.”

{55} 5:28 sn Peres (פִּרְסֵי) is the singular form of פִּרְסִין (pharsin) in v. 25.

{56} 5:29 tn Aram “Belshazzar spoke.”

{57} 5:30 tn Aram “king of the Chaldeans.”

{58} 5:30 sn The year was 539 B.C. At this time Daniel would have been approximately eighty-one years old. The relevant extra-biblical records describing the fall of Babylon include portions of Herodotus, Xenophon, Berossus (cited in Josephus), the Cyrus Cylinder, and the Babylonian Chronicle.

{59} 5:31 sn Beginning with 5:31, the verse numbers through 6:28 in the English Bible differ from the verse numbers in the Aramaic text (BHS), with 5:31 ET = 6:1 AT, 6:1 ET = 6:2 AT, 6:2 ET = 6:3 AT, 6:3 ET = 6:4 AT, etc., through 6:28 ET = 6:29 AT. Beginning with 7:1 the verse numbers in the English Bible and the Aramaic text are again the same.

Questions

The date of this event is October 12, 539 BC (sixteenth day of the month Tishri in Nabonidus's seventeenth year). It is recorded in a group of tablets found in the 19th century called the Babylonian Chronicles, specifically a tablet called the Nabonidus Chronicle. It provides the history that occurred during the reign of King Nabonidus, which includes the downfall of Babylon in 539 BC (including some details of the actual final event) as well as the fact that Belshazzar was his son.

The Chronicle states that on this day "the army of Cyrus entered Babylon without a battle". It also states (speaking about the time of the overthrow) "those of the Babylonians who inhabited the centre knew nothing of the capture [of the people at the outskirts] (for it happened to be a festival); but they were dancing at the time, and enjoying themselves, till they received certain information of the truth. And thus Babylon was taken for the first time".

Characters

- King Nebuchadnezzar: Reigned from 605 BC to 562 BC
- King Nabonidus: Reigned from 556 BC to 539 BC
- King Belshazzar: Son of Nabonidus; co-regent of Babylon, since his father was away for long periods of time
- Queen: Married to Nabonidus, mother of Belshazzar; most likely a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar.
- Darius the Mede: "Darius" was a common title; Most likely this is referring to King Cyrus
- Daniel: About 80 yrs old at this point (teenager at deportation in 605 BC)

Setting

King Cyrus Persia (which includes the Medes starting at 550 BC) has invaded Babylon and has conquered all of the lands surrounding the city of Babylon itself. The only thing left was to conquer the city. So on this night, Babylon was surrounded by its enemy, but Babylon was greatly fortified and had plenty of food/resources that could last for a long period of time.

1. V1 – Describe the event that is occurring.

2. V2 – Belshazzar makes a decision regarding the vessels that were brought from the Temple in Jerusalem. What state of mind was he in when he made this decision? Was this a sound decision? Would he have made this decision with a clear mind?

3. V2-3 – What are these vessels?

4. V4 – What did they do with these vessels? What would God's view of this be?

5. V5-6 – A hand appears and writes on the wall in plain sight of the King and others. How did the King react?

6. V7-9 – What action did Belshazzar first take? Was it successful?

7. V10-12 – The Queen (his mother, daughter of Nebuchadnezzar) hears the ruckus, enters the feast area, and makes a recommendation to her son. What was that? How does she describe Daniel?

8. V13 – Does Belshazzar also know about Daniel?

9. V16-17 – Belshazzar makes the same offer to Daniel. How Daniel does respond?

10. V18-23a – Before Daniel tells the King what the writing means, he makes some pronouncements. What does he first tell the King in these verses? What is the main point that Daniel is making to him?

11. V23b – Daniel then gives an indictment of the King and his actions. What is that? How does Daniel describe Belshazzar’s “gods”? Daniel’s description of God?

12. V24: The hand appears and begins to write. Whose “hand” (and thus writing) is this?

13. V26-28 – Daniel gives an explanation of the words that were written:
 - a. God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end
 - b. You have been weighed in the balances and found wanting
 - c. Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians

What do we learn about God from these statements?

14. V30 – That very night, Belshazzar is killed and Darius the Mede receives the kingdom. This event is also found in the writings of Isaiah (13, 21) and Jeremiah (51) as well as Daniel (2). When were these written (approx.)? What does this tell us about Scripture?

15. Belshazzar's actions dishonored God and His holiness. Are there actions that you do/have been doing in the past that are dishonoring to God and His holiness?