

## DANIEL 5

## THE WRITING ON THE WALL

“Belshazzar the king,” we read, “made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand.” This magnificent banquet of 1,000 guests took place at night, in the sumptuous palaces of the king of Babylon. King Belshazzar had invited the most distinguished persons of his kingdom. And contrary to all the rules of decorum which prevailed in those times and places, even the women of his harem – in all the splendor of dress and beauty – were present. The joy was great; the guests drank wine freely; and the king himself – forgetting the dignity of his royal position – gave them the example of that sinful hilarity which wine excites. He even went so far as to bring out the sacred vessels of Jehovah, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the Temple in Jerusalem, so that he and his guests might make use of them in their drinking-party – which was the greatest insult that they could possibly offer to the God of the Hebrews.

But listen! A scream of terror escapes from the lips of King Belshazzar. What on earth is the matter? The paleness of death is upon his face; his wildly-staring eyes are fixed upon the wall. He is no longer able to support himself; his knees begin to knock against each other! What has happened? What does he see on that wall? Well, while this ungodly assembly were blaspheming the Lord, and desecrating the vessels of His sanctuary; and while they were madly giving themselves up to every kind of drunken excess – behold! The fingers of a man’s hand were seen to come out in front of the wall, just opposite where the king sat! And these fingers did not go away; they began to write something upon the wall; and the longer he looked at it, the more his terror increased.

At last, the king utters a loud cry: “Bring in the astrologers!” And as soon as they arrive, he says to them, “Whosoever of you shall read this writing, and show me the interpretation thereof; he shall be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about his neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom!” But alas! None of these men can read the writing. And now the king is “greatly troubled.” But at this very moment, a person who – up to this point – had taken no part in the evening’s festivities made her appearance in the royal apartments. This was the queen-mother, named Nocotris. She suggested to the king that he should immediately send for Daniel.

Let us pause for a moment, and not allow the details of this important history to be obliterated from our recollections. Let us remember that there is a hand in heaven which registers all the actions of men, and all the events of time – a hand even more terrible than that which appeared to King Belshazzar. This

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ The handwriting upon the wall terrifies Belshazzar out of his wits right in the middle of his drunken festivities – verses 1-9
- ❖ After the magicians’ failure to interpret it, Daniel is called in – verses 10-17
- ❖ Daniel warns the king of his doom, which was fulfilled that night – verses 18-31

hand daily writes down, in the Book of the Lord's remembrance, the most secret thoughts of your hearts, to be referred to in the Day of final Judgment. Never lose sight of that hand, and of that Book! And when you happen to fall into the society of those who would tempt you to do what is wrong, let your eyes be directed to the wall, and think of that hand which writes in heaven. O Lord God! On that great Last Day, let the blood of Jesus' atonement be sprinkled upon all the pages of that awful Book which speaks of me! Let it blot out and wash away the record of all my sins, which has been traced by the hand of Your eternal justice and truth.



What a moment when the elderly Daniel – now probably in his mid-80's – enters the midst of this assembled court, which is now a scene of utter confusion! After refusing the gifts which the king offered him, Daniel enters immediately upon his subject. He referenced the pride and subsequent humiliation which Nebuchadnezzar had experienced; and he reproved Belshazzar for not humbling himself before the Lord, even though he knew what had happened to Nebuchadnezzar. And then Daniel interpreted the words that had been written upon the wall. The awful words were as follows: “Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin” – three short words, the first of which is repeated for the sake of emphasis. And this was the meaning: *Mene*: “God hath numbered thy kingdom, and put an end to it.” *Tekel*: “Thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting.” *Upharsin*: “Thy kingdom shall be divided and given to the Medes and Persians.”

The king conferred upon Daniel the promised reward. And although he allowed the chain to be placed around his neck, and the scarlet robe to be put upon him, he knew that these worldly favors meant nothing; for that same night, Belshazzar was doomed to perish by the sword of the Medes and Persians. That night which began in drunkenness and blasphemy was destined to end in terror and bloodshed. All that the prophet had predicted was fulfilled to the letter, in its minutest details. With the help of two Babylonian deserters, King Cyrus the Persian – after besieging the city for more than two years – conceived and executed a novel plan for the capturing of the city. On that night of Belshazzar's great drinking-party, he diverted the waters of the Euphrates River into deep trenches which he had caused to be dug on each side of it, thereby draining the riverbed and allowing the Persian army to rush into the city without the least resistance. Thus fell Babylon. As the sun dawned the morning after the riotous and blasphemous feast of Belshazzar, the city was filled with a conquering host of Persian soldiers that was more numerous than the locusts of the desert.

*Lord, we pray for the souls of our lost family members and friends, that they would put their trust in Jesus' blood before that Great Last Day of final Judgment! Amen.*