

**CULTURE SHOCK**  
**The Handwriting on the Wall**  
**Daniel 5**

I have a question to ask you. This is a hugely important question. The answer to this question could save your life. The answer to this question is a message that God himself has sent to you. It is a question that your MOTHER desperately wants you to answer. **The funny thing is, you ALREADY KNOW THE ANSWER to this life-changing question! But it is not enough to know the answer to this question; you have to ADMIT you know it and then EMBRACE it.** If you DO NOT, then you will begin to see the handwriting on the wall for your life. God's best for you does not include any handwriting on the wall. When you see the handwriting on the wall, it will be TOO LATE. We'll get to the question a bit later in the message, so hang on.

Before we read today's story together, I want to make sure that you know that it takes place about 30 years after the humbling of King Nebuchadnezzar. That converted king has been dead for nearly 23 years, and Daniel is now about 80 years old. He has not been a key advisor to kings since the time that King Nebuchadnezzar died. King Belshazzar is probably a grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, and he rules Babylon as second in command behind his father Nabonidus. History tells us that Nabonidus spent most of his time in places other than Babylon attempting to conquer new lands and then restoring ancient pagan temples that fascinated him. Up until about 50 years ago, no ancient records had been found that mention the name Belshazzar at all, and many felt that Daniel was simply in error about this phantom king. But recent discoveries give abundant evidence that Belshazzar did indeed exist and rule as second in command in the city of Babylon. Go God! Here is Daniel's first mention of this pagan king. **Daniel 5:1-4 NLT**

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.

This arrogant second-class ruler decided to throw a party at his palace for 1,000 of his nobles. Belshazzar was most likely up on a pedestal at the head of the party and was leading the partiers in toasts to their gods. **When he was "three sheets to the wind," he decided to take his foolishness and wickedness to a NEW LEVEL. Now, this should not come as a surprise to anyone. When you get drunk, your inhibitions dissolve and you do godless things.** I am so grateful that my father stood in the gap for my family and stopped drinking before I was ever born. I have never seen my

father (or my mother!) with a cup of wine or a beer in his hand. He will quickly tell you that he has not missed out on anything except misery because of that simple, difficult decision. Neither have I! But Belshazzar, as a sign of arrogant trust in his own power and the power of their gods, decided to have all of the sacred gold cups that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem brought into the banquet hall so that they could MOCK the GOD that had humbled Nebuchadnezzar. This was a bad decision, and it was a clear sign of the king's rebel heart. God wasn't laughing.

**Daniel 5:5-6 NLT**

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.

**This really is one of the most unusual ways that God ever sent a message to a prophet or a fool.** He spoke to Moses by means of a burning bush. He made a donkey speak to Balaam. He allowed a mighty angel to speak to Daniel, but he sent a hand without a body to rebuke Belshazzar. The king was right next to the plaster wall, so he saw this bodiless hand up close and personal. Interestingly, archeologists have also uncovered a room in the center of the palace that was clearly a banquet hall. At one end of the hall, there was a raised pedestal that was positioned right beside a plaster wall. This was almost certainly the place where Belshazzar "got the message." It should also be noted that almost every wall in a king's palace would normally be covered with murals and writings about the king's exploits and conquests. On this wall however, God wrote a very different kind of message. **And God made sure that the message was written on the wall next to the lampstand (perhaps the one from the Temple) to insure that it could be clearly seen. God's messages always come in the LIGHT. Much of what was being done in that room was in partial or full darkness, but God speaks in the light!** The king fell apart, sobered up, and began crying and shouting for his advisors to come and find out what the message meant. He was shaking in his silver boots! He promised golden gifts and promotion to the third highest place in the kingdom (behind him) to the one who revealed the meaning of the script. **Daniel 5:8-9 NLT**

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.

Not a single one of the Wise Guys could come up with a plausible interpretation for the king. Because of this, EVERYONE in the place began to freak out with the king. It most probably turned into a big argument with advisors throwing out ridiculous theories about the meaning of the words (so that they could get the king's promised promotion!). I believe that God had a very clear reason for giving the king a message that neither he nor his advisors could understand. It is revealed in the next few verses. **Daniel 5:10-12 NLT**

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."

### **God always has his servants ready for moments of crisis in culture.**

God positions his key people in places that will serve him best when opportunities arise. They are there to remind outsiders about the power and the presence of God. Sadly, many believers do not live their lives in a manner that enables God to use them. **We are focused on our POSITION rather than on our potential godly INFLUENCE.** Daniel wasn't. He stayed faithful and focused on his God, and READY for whatever opportunity would arise to bring glory to God and help to people. Interestingly enough, Belshazzar has NO IDEA who Daniel was. In many ways, Daniel had been dismissed and forgotten by most of the power people of Babylon. Daniel could have assumed that he was no longer any use to God in the big picture of Babylon. Remember, Daniel was 80 years old by this time. Most of us think that we are well beyond any practical use to God once we are past our prime. **But we do not get to decide how and when God wants to use us. We must just stay ready for whatever moment he might decide to "send us in" again!** In fact, during these 23 years of obscurity, God was giving Daniel many of the prophecies that we will study in the last half of this book. This means that God was using Daniel for his time and for our time as well. That is ETERNAL PURPOSE no matter how you slice it!

The king promises Daniel the same reward that he promised his own advisors (which they desperately tried to earn to no avail). Daniel simply declined that reward, but assured the king that he would reveal the meaning of the message to him. But Daniel did not begin by simply telling the king what the words meant. He gave him the back-story and the context for the strange words so that the king could be sure that he got it. He told the story of Nebuchadnezzar. **Daniel 5:18-21 NLT**

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.

Daniel reminded this king that the greatest king that Babylon ever knew had been stunningly humbled by the One, True God in order to graciously display the truth that God reigns over all. He reminded him of the truth that God is able to quickly bring down those who think that they can mock God's power. And then he said the most devastating statement of the whole encounter. **Daniel 5:22-24 NIV**

**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.**

Wow! Belshazzar may not have known who Daniel was, but he certainly knew who his father was and what had happened to him. Daniel says that the king understood WHY this had happened to his father. And he knew how it applied to his own life as well. That was no mystery to him. But he chose to completely DISREGARD the lesson of his father's life, and he chose to DEFY the God that had humbled his father.

**Now it is time for me to ask you the question that you already know the answer to: How are you DISREGARDING or DEFYING the TRUTH that God has already shown you?**

You know the answer, don't you! You know the truth about what will happen if you continue down the path that you are currently on. You know where it leads. You see, I'm not here today to tell you what to do. You already don't like coming to church because you don't want anyone telling you what to do. I get that. **I am just trying to get you to THINK about what you what you ALREADY KNOW that you need to do, and about what you already know will happen if you don't DO what you KNOW you need to do. Got it?** Have you ever tried to tell your teenager something, and he responded with "I know!" What's amazing is, he really does know. It is not that he doesn't know; it's just that he REFUSES to DO IT. We know we need to eat better, stop texting while we drive, and start being more helpful around the house. We just disregard it day after day. Eventually, we start deliberately going against what we know is wise and best. Are you doing this? (You know if you are!)

Amazingly, Daniel tells him that God actually holds Belshazzar's destiny and his VERY BREATH **in his hand!** I want you to do me a favor right now. Just take a deep breath. Now, aren't you glad that you don't have to remember to breathe every second of every day? It just HAPPENS, right? Wrong! We breathe because the hand of God is giving us breath. He also holds our eternal DESTINY in his hand.

Belshazzar failed to ACCEPT this, even though he KNEW and could not DENY that God had the power to humble him. Remember this:

**You will be judged by what you DO with the truth that you cannot DENY.**

He KNEW what was TRUE, but he chose to DEFY what he could not DENY! I have a heavy heart today for many of you who are listening to my voice today. I am speaking primarily to those of you who have seen clear evidence of God's work in the people around you. I grieve for you, because you are in danger of getting a handwritten message on your wall. I have known so many church kids who grow up and fall away from the truth that they have been taught and from the power of transformation that they have witnessed in the lives of others around them. Some of you RIGHT NOW are living lives that absolutely DISREGARD or even DEFY the truth that you know you cannot DENY. You are living in a very dangerous place. You are assuming that everything is going to turn out all right. I am stunned at the abundant evidence I see of VOLUNTARY BLINDNESS in those who have been exposed to the light. **Some people cannot understand why the handwriting is on the wall for them!** Truly, that which is fully evident to everyone else is mysteriously hidden from those who need to know it the most. I have seen teenagers headed for destruction who choose to believe that they are just fine. I have seen spouses opening their hearts up to relationships that are BOUND to separate them and destroy their home, yet they refuse to think about where things are clearly headed. I have known alcoholics who spend their last days sucking down drink after drink, purposefully oblivious to the fact that their addiction is a BANQUET IN THE GRAVE. This is so tragic, and yet it is so common. They are putting themselves in a place where destruction is certain, and they refuse to receive the mercy that God wants to give to them. Their future does not look bright.

**Proverbs 1:29-32 NLT**

**29 For they hated knowledge and chose not to fear the LORD. 30 They rejected my advice and paid no attention when I corrected them. 31 Therefore, they must eat the bitter fruit of living their own way, choking on their own schemes. 32 For simpletons turn away from me--to death. Fools are destroyed by their own complacency**

God KNOWS what you KNOW! You cannot deny what he has undeniably done before your very eyes! **And he exposed you to that truth so that he could turn you away from trouble and toward his love. But you would not have any of it.** And God is not under obligation to keep trying to turn you around. When he gives you over to your sin, you will experience your own brand of crazy. Belshazzar did this. **I think that now is time for me to tell you something that you probably did not know about this story.** (I didn't know it either!) **This party that the king threw was the final act of a rebellious FOOL, because this party was going on while the city of Babylon was BEING ATTACKED!** That's right. They were PARTYING when they should have been PRAYING! They were FEASTING when they should have been

FIGHTING. Instead, they were relying on the mighty defenses that this fortress-city had in place. Babylon had massive walls that were 300 feet thick and huge bronze gates that secured both exterior and interior walls. The city sported enormous watchtowers with guards posted who were to report any infiltration by the enemy. But the city's leaders were in a drunken stupor, and no one noticed that the river that ran through the heart of the city had slowed to a trickle. [The Persian general in charge of the siege had led his army to dam the river above the city and channel it into a nearby swamp! His army was able to wade into the city in less than knee-deep water.] No guards closed and locked the gates that were meant to protect the inhabitants. What neither army knew was that God had already decreed how this city would fall some two-hundred years before so that the people of Israel could return to their homeland. **Isaiah 44:27-45:1 NLT**

27 When I speak to the rivers and say, 'Dry up!' they will be dry. 28 When I say of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd,' he will certainly do as I say. He will command, 'Rebuild Jerusalem'; he will say, 'Restore the Temple.'" 1 This is what the LORD says to Cyrus, his anointed one, whose right hand he will empower. Before him, mighty kings will be paralyzed with fear. Their fortress gates will be opened, never to shut again.

God had even given the NAME of the man who would conquer the city two-hundred years before he was born! God also gave Jeremiah insight into how the city of Babylon would fall as well many years before it happened. **Jeremiah 51:57-58 NLT**

57 I will make her officials and wise men drunk, her governors, officers and warriors as well; they will sleep forever and not awake," declares the King, whose name is the LORD Almighty. 58 This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Babylon's thick wall will be leveled and her high gates set on fire; the peoples exhaust themselves for nothing, the nations' labor is only fuel for the flames."

These prophecies were about to be fulfilled before Belshazzar's eyes. Daniel made this very clear to him as he explained the mystery of the handwriting on the wall.

**Daniel 5:25-31 NLT**

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.

Scripture makes it clear that God DESIRES for all men to come to repentance. [And for the record, his sentence is no different than ours. **Romans 3:23 says that “we all fall short of God’s glorious standard!”**] Even Belshazzar could have repented of his sin and humbled himself at this final hour just like the King of Nineveh did when Jonah pronounced God’s sentence. **He could have caused a glorious CULTURE SHOCK to Babylon like his grandfather did through repentance. But he did not! The culture shock he caused was the death of a nation. The handwriting simply explained it.** With a hard heart, the king listened to Daniel’s interpretation of the writing, acknowledged that it was indeed the explanation, rewarded Daniel, and sank into his doom that very night. Thus, the kingdom of Babylon ceased to be, the Medo-Persian Empire was born, and Daniel was protected in that fall and positioned once again by God to impact yet another kingdom. God is sovereign. He will have his way. He will either do what is necessary to bring you to repentance, or he will patiently work until you break because you refuse to bow. Once the handwriting is on the wall, it will be too late. You choose.

Let’s pray.