

The Handwriting on the Wall

Daniel 5

CONTEXT: Remember we began this book in Chapter 1 as Jerusalem was under siege by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian Empire. They not only destroyed the city, they burnt down the Temple of Jehovah and stole the golden tools that were used in worship.

The policy and practice of Babylon was to take the best and the brightest captive and place them in the service of the King. Among those captives was Daniel the namesake of this book. He was around the age of 17 when he was uprooted from Israel and transported (*today it would be called human trafficking*) to the capital city of the Babylonian Empire.

It was soon discovered that Daniel knew the Most High God and this God made known to Daniel mysteries and give him insights into the future. Nebuchadnezzar the Great assigned him a place among the Magicians of the Royal Court. It is very important that you remember that these magicians are the ancestors of those Magi who would come from the East to visit the child Jesus in the Gospel account.

We saw Daniel as a middle aged man in chapter 3. Now in chapter 5 we see him as a Senior Adult living out his retirement years.

Much had happened in Babylon since Daniel first arrived. Nebuchadnezzar had died and his Son Nabonidus had ruled as King. But Nabonidus was a very religious fellow and he spent most of his reign in Arabia on an extended religious pilgrimage.

He left his son Belshazzar to rule as Co-Regent in his stead. Incidentally, that was something we did not know until relatively recently. When I was in college Daniel 5 was used by liberal scholar as evidence that the Bible could not be trusted.

You see the historic record indicated that Nabonidus was King at the time of the Persian invasion. In recent years **37 different archival text** have been discovered by Archeologist that explain the discrepancy - that Nabonidus left his son to rule as co-regent. Later we will see that Belshazzar offers a **third highest office** in the Kingdom to the man who can interpret the writing on the wall. Why the third highest and not the second? Because he occupied the second place as Co-Regent under his father.

It is not wise to cross sword with the mind of Christ. He will take the very passage you question and wield it as the greatest evidence to the validity of His Word.

One more thing contextually - As Daniel had predicted years earlier and inferior Kingdom was on the rise. The Medes and the Persian have at this point united their forces and have begun to attack the cities of the Babylonian Kingdom.

The Capital City itself had a massive fortress that was thought to be impenetrable. Historians believe that at the time of Daniel 5, the Persian Army had already besieged the Capital City of Babylon and were working on a plan to get through the walls of the city.

TEXT: Daniel 5:1–31 (ESV)

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

This is a massive party. Over 1000 people in attendance. The Nobels of Babylon were invited. A great feast was prepared. Wine flowed freely. This is Coachella in Babylon.

Question - why would this guy decide to be the Great Gatsby while his city is under siege? There are a few reasons. Some have said it is because the city was too impenetrable that he was flaunting his strength as if he were unconcerned about the Persians. Some say that it was an attempt to keep his nobles happy, lest the turn against him. I believe there was another reason because of the next few verses.

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.

So they don't just get the good China, they get GOD'S China. These are those tools for worship that Nebuchadnezzar took from the Temple two generations earlier.

He invites his many wives and concubines to party with him and the nobles, you can imagine what that consisted of. Believe it or not this was all an orgy of worship. Look at verse 4.

⁴ They drank wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

What happens next was absolutely terrifying. Jesus comes to the party. Word of advice, never through a party you can't invite Jesus to.

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.

Jesus killed the King's high... It is amazing how quickly a man can sober up when God shows up at the party.

BTW, that is a good litmus test, anywhere you go, anything you do, ask yourself... would it get really weird if Jesus walked in? If so, you probably shouldn't be there.

Well not only had Jesus shown up - they were partying with the good china they stole from Jesus. Bad idea.

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."

Now remember he could only offer third place in the Kingdom because he was in second.

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.

Now this is the Queen Mother - the wife of Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar grandma apparently grandma had not been invited to the party either. Another good litmus test, if grandma can't go, you probably shouldn't either.

Listen to what Grandma says...

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.” 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.

Keep in mind the term, “father” refers to any male ancestor in Jewish literature. For example, “Father Abraham”. Nebuchadnezzar was his grandfather.

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.

So that's the story - what is it's relevance to us?

1. Speak Truth to Chaos

The Babylonian deportation in general can serve to teach us how to live as strangers and aliens in a world that worships other gods. Like Daniel, we are given great insight through scripture, we know what is coming. It is our job to speak truth to a troubled world.

We have a Gospel, it says that we are sinners by birth, we are bent toward sin, speaking lies from our mother's womb. But God in his love has made peace with us through the atoning sacrifice of his Son. In doing so he broke down the dividing wall between races and ethnicities. We are now one body, one bride of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are to love everyone, even those who make themselves out to be our enemies. But we abandoned the need for some earthly Priest to tell us when we have done enough penance a long time ago.

If a white man bows the knee to the Lord Jesus Christ, he is equal in standing with the black man who does the same. Nothing has to be added. Jesus paid it all.

God established human government - we are to obey the law.

If Police officers abuse the power entrusted to them, they are to held to the highest standard, the penalty must be swift and brutal. But they too must be proven guilty in a court of law.

Does your life matter? Jesus settled that question on the cross. I will affirm that. But you don't need my affirmation for it to be true anymore than I need yours.

What am I saying - friend I am speaking TRUTH to Chaos.

2. Beware of Borrowing the Lord's China to Worship Another God

How do we do that? Any time you obey God to get what you really want.

ILLUSTRATION: Tim Keller tells the story of a gentleman who was known to be a womanizer in college. He would seduce girl after girl, getting what he wanted then leaving for the next challenge.

Then one day he was saved. He was baptized, joined a church.

But his friends noticed that when he would go out on visitation he would become very argumentative with the people he tried to talk to about Christ. He demanded to be on the leadership team of the college group. He became angry when people would disagree.

What happened? He was eating the same meal, he was just using God's china. He was worshipping the same false demonic god, just doing it under the auspices of legitimate religion.

Do we do that? Do you give in order to get? Do you pray to connect with God or to get your wish list taken care of?

3. Take the Warning of God Seriously

History tells us that the Persians found a way into Babylon. The river Euphrates ran through the city, under the wall. The Persians rerouted the river and the remaining dry channel bed provided the perfect tunnel through which to enter.

- Nebuchadnezzar had a lifetime to decide about his response to God.

- Belshazzar only had a matter of hours.

It could be either for you. We don't know that. But it would be wise to live this day as if you were going to appear before the Judgement Bar of God tonight.

If you not a follower of Christ, this invitation is vitally important for you. What you do with will make all the difference in the world. Someone has said, "the opportunity of a lifetime only exists during the lifetime of that opportunity".

Here is what happens, "I'm going to extend the invitation, some like lady last week will be wise like Nebuchadnezzar and submit her life to Jesus." Others will wait, they won't reject the opportunity they will just neglect it. How will you escape if you neglect so great a salvation?

Perhaps the Persians have rerouted the river and are in the city as we speak... if you knew you only had minutes to decide what would you do with this invitation?