

# THE HANDWRITING ON THE WALL

## BIBLE TEXT : Daniel 5:1-31.

LESSON 422 Junior Course

**MEMORY VERSE:** "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished" (II Peter 2:9).

### BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

#### **Daniel 5:1-31**

1 Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand.

2 Belshazzar, while he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which *was* in Jerusalem; that the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, might drink therein.

3 Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God which *was* at Jerusalem; and the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, drank in them.

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

5 In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaister 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 was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another.

7 The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. *And* the king spake, and said to the wise *men* of Babylon, Whosoever shall read this writing, and shew me the interpretation thereof, shall be clothed with scarlet, and *have* a chain of gold about his neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.

### Bible References:

#### Notes:

##### **Belshazzar's Party**

Belshazzar was the last king of the Babylonian empire, which ruled the world in ancient times. His grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar, had come to the conclusion that the God of Israel is the King of Heaven, and that His "works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase" (Daniel 4:37). But Belshazzar did not profit by the word of the former king. He exalted himself and did anything his evil heart desired, contrary to the will of God.

One night Belshazzar gave a huge party. He invited more than a thousand guests, the royalty of Babylon. All the lords and ladies came in their rich clothing; and they no doubt had the best of the land in food, wine and entertainment. But it did not satisfy. Man can never be completely satisfied by the things of this world and sinful pleasures. God's Book is the only guide for true happiness, and He said that we would be happy when we give to others and deny ourselves to take up our cross and follow Jesus. God made man, and knows what will make him happy.

##### **Ridiculing Holy Things**

The more the people drank, the more sin they wanted. When they could think of nothing else evil to do, Belshazzar decided to defy God. Many people today use the name of God and of Jesus in swearing. They make fun of the holy things of the Bible, and ridicule those who want to live for Jesus and please Him. God has long patience with the sinner, but sooner or later judgment will fall if he fails to repent. Judgment came swiftly and suddenly for Belshazzar and his wicked friends. In the midst of the drunken party the fingers of a man's hand appeared on the plaster of the wall, and wrote the doom of Babylon. Such a sight would have been enough to frighten a sober person, and it terrified those whose minds were clouded by drink, and whose conscience no doubt bothered them for defying God.

##### **Belshazzar's Knees Shaking**

The shock of what he saw sobered Belshazzar at once. He was so much frightened that he could hardly stand up. He could not read the writing, nor know what it meant, but he was sure it was bad news. No doubt the sins of his whole lifetime came before him, and he knew he did not deserve anything good. He needed help, so he called for his wise men and fortune-tellers to come quickly to read the writing. He became very generous and promised great honour to the one who could interpret the writing for him. The wise men came, but they knew no more about what they saw than the king did. Now the king was really in trouble, and everyone could see he was scared to death. But so was everyone else.

How helpless sinners are when they refuse to turn to God! The child of God never gets into so difficult a place but that God is near to help. God said: "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me" (Psalm 50:15). In Job 5:19, 20 we read: "He shall deliver thee in six troubles: yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee. In famine he shall redeem thee from death: and in war from the power of the sword."

8 Then came in all the king's wise *men*: but they could not read the writing, nor make known to the king the interpretation thereof.

9 Then was king Belshazzar greatly troubled, and his countenance was changed in him, and his lords were astonished.

10 *Now* the queen, by reason of the words of the king and his lords, came into the banquet house: *and* the queen spake and said, O king, live for ever: let not thy thoughts trouble thee, nor let thy countenance be changed:

11 There is a man in thy kingdom, in whom *is* the spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of thy father light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, was found in him; whom the king Nebuchadnezzar thy father, the king, *I say*, thy father, made master of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, *and* soothsayers;

12 Forasmuch as an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, interpreting of dreams, and shewing of hard sentences, and dissolving of doubts, were found in the same Daniel, whom the king named Beltshazzar: now let Daniel be called, and he will shew the interpretation.

13 Then was Daniel brought in before the king. *And* the king spake and said unto Daniel, *Art* thou that Daniel, which *art* of the children of the captivity of Judah, whom the king my father brought out of Jewry?

14 I have even heard of thee, that the spirit of the gods *is* in thee, and *that* light and understanding and excellent wisdom is found in thee.

15 And now the wise *men*, the astrologers, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing, and make known unto

Belshazzar was facing war, but he had no chance for deliverance. He had worshiped and praised the gods of gold and silver, and they could not help him. What a dreary and hopeless world it would be if we had no God to turn to!

### **Daniel, the Man of God**

The queen remembered that there were some men in Babylon who believed and worshiped God. She told the king of the wisdom God had given Daniel during Nebuchadnezzar's reign. She said: "In the days of thy father light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, was found in him; . . . forasmuch as an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, interpreting of dreams, and shewing of hard sentences, and dissolving of doubts, were found in the same Daniel" (Daniel 5:11, 12). Belshazzar's drinking friends were no help when he was in trouble. Often we hear of people who have lost everything -- their homes, their families, their reputation -- through drink, and in their distress those who called them "a live one," "a pal," "the wit of the party," are nowhere to help them. At such a time they should look to someone who has "an excellent spirit, and knowledge," and the love of God in his heart.

Daniel was brought immediately. He was very much out of place at such a party, but he was willing to help when needed. He wanted to do it for the glory of God, not for any prize that the king might give him. He said, "Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation" (Daniel 5:17). Money and honour meant nothing to Daniel. He was not striving for a place in the government. He lived to honour and please God.

### **Daniel's Sermon**

Daniel was in no hurry to satisfy the frantic king. This was an opportunity to preach a sermon to a thousand of the most wealthy people in the nation, and he made the most of it. He reminded the king that it was God who had made his grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar, great; had given him majesty, and glory, and honour. Nebuchadnezzar had been so powerful that people in all nations trembled at his orders. He had power of life and death over them -- he could kill whom he would. When Nebuchadnezzar had become too proud, God had taken his glory and power from him. Daniel reminded Belshazzar that the king had lived in the field like an animal until he recognised God as the Ruler of the universe. When he had humbled himself, God had again exalted him.

Belshazzar had known all this and yet had refused to worship God, living a very wicked life instead. Daniel closed his sermon with these words "The God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified" (Daniel 5:23). It is a good thing to remember that God controls the very breath we breathe. There is only one breath between us, and eternity, and God can cut it off when He wills. Belshazzar was to know before this night ended that he could not prolong his life any longer than God permitted.

### **Doom Pronounced**

Belshazzar's last chance to repent was past. Now Daniel interpreted the doom, which God had written on the wall. These were the words: "God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians." Evidently Belshazzar never argued about the meaning of the writing. He gave Daniel the rewards he had promised, which included being made third ruler in the kingdom.

For many years people wondered about the meaning of the "third ruler". If Belshazzar was king, why would not the next in

me the interpretation thereof: but they could not shew the interpretation of the thing:

16 And I have heard of thee, that thou canst make interpretations, and dissolve doubts: now if thou canst read the writing, and make known to me the interpretation thereof, thou shalt be clothed with scarlet, and *have* a chain of gold about thy neck, and shalt be the third ruler in the kingdom.

17 Then Daniel answered and said before the king, Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation.

18 O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour:

19 And for the majesty that he gave him, all people, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him: whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down.

20 But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him:

21 And he was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling *was* with the wild asses: 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 ruled in the kingdom of men, and *that* he appointeth over it whomsoever he will.

22 And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this;

23 But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and

command be second ruler? In 1853, archaeologists uncovered the cornerstone of a temple to a heathen god of ancient times, with this inscription: "May I, Nabonidas, king of Babylon, not sin against thee. And may reverence for thee dwell in the heart of Belshazzar, my firstborn, favourite son." From other inscriptions it was learned that Nabonidas was in retirement outside of Babylon much of the time, and Belshazzar ruled as co-regent with his father. Nebuchadnezzar is spoken of as Belshazzar's father, but he was actually his grandfather, and Nabonidas was his father.

Belshazzar was willing to let Daniel be the third ruler, but the Medes and Persians took over that night. Daniel was given a place in their government, and was honoured and respected by the new kings.

### **Babylon**

Through most of Nebuchadnezzar's 45 years of rule he had built up the city of Babylon, making it the outstanding city of ancient times. The hanging gardens of Babylon were considered one of the seven wonders of the world. One inscription of Nebuchadnezzar that archaeologists have found reads: "I completed Imgur-Bel and Nimitti-Bel, the great walls of Babylon, the mighty city, the city of his exalted power. At the entrances of the great gates I erected strong bulls of bronze, and terrible serpents standing upright. My father did that which no previous king had done. With mortar and bricks he built two moat-walls about the city, and I, with mortar and bricks, built a third great moat-wall, and joined it and united it closely with the moat-walls of my father. I laid its foundation deep in the water level; I raised its summit mountain high. I constructed a moat-wall of burned bricks about the west wall of Babylon."

Ancient historians described the walls as being 300 feet high, 80 feet thick, extending 35 feet below the ground so that enemies might not tunnel under. One writer said the walls were double, each 24 feet thick with a space of 36 feet between which was filled with clay, forming an elevated road where several chariots might be driven abreast. One of the walls that has been excavated has on its sides brightly coloured glazed bricks which picture huge figures of bulls and lions, and still reaches to a height of 60 feet.

Belshazzar felt very safe behind those walls, but while the drunken party was going on in the palace, Cyrus and his soldiers were busy changing the course of the river which flowed through Babylon; and then they marched into Babylon on the river bed. That night Belshazzar was slain, as Daniel had said, bringing to an end the Babylonian world power.

No matter how high men exalt themselves today, God will bring them down when it is His time. "The powers that be are ordained of God" (Romans 13:1). "For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another" (Psalm 75:6, 7). God may let evil men prosper for a while to bring punishment to the wicked, but when He thinks it is enough, He can stop any man.

Many kingdoms have risen and gone down in the history of the world. One day Jesus is coming again, and He will put down all other kingdoms and will set up a kingdom that will never end. He will be the Ruler and will reign in righteousness, bringing peace to all the world.

### **QUESTIONS**

1. Who did Belshazzar invite to his big party?
2. What did they do to defy God?
3. What happened during the party that frightened Belshazzar?
4. What did the queen say about Daniel?

they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath *is*, and whose *are* all thy ways, hast thou not glorified:

24 Then was the part of the hand sent from him; and this writing was written.

25 And this *is* the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.

26 This *is* the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it.

27 TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.

28 PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.

29 Then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and *put* a chain of gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

30 In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain.

31 And Darius the Median took the kingdom, *being* about threescore and two years old.

5. What was the first thing Daniel did when he came into the palace?
6. How did Daniel translate the words that were written on the wall?
7. What kind of city was Babylon? Describe it.
8. What was Cyrus doing while Belshazzar felt secure in his city?
9. What was the next world kingdom after Babylon?
10. Who has all power over kings and nations?