



Rembrandt's The Handwriting On The Wall

The Fall Of
BABYLON
And
THE HANDWRITING ON THE WALL

Daniel Chapter Five
Daniel Series / Part Five
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THE PROPHECIES OF DANIEL STATESMAN FOR THE AGES

Session Five / Chapter Five
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THE HISTORIC COLLAPSE OF BABYLON

1 In chapter 2 of Daniel, we learned and read of the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar of
2 Babylon. In his sleep he envisioned a great figure with a head of gold, chest of silver,
3 belly of brass and legs of iron, standing on flawed feet of a clay and iron mixture.
4 Daniel revealed the meaning of the figure to the king:

5
6 Daniel 2:36-40

7 **This is the dream; and we will tell the interpretation thereof before the king. [37]**
8 **Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom,**
9 **power, and strength, and glory. [38] And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the**
10 **beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath he given into thine hand, and**
11 **hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold. [39] And after thee**
12 **shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee, and another third kingdom of brass,**
13 **which shall bear rule over all the earth. [40] And the fourth kingdom shall be strong**
14 **as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron**
15 **that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise.**

16
17 For several decades Nebuchadnezzar ruled Babylon - for the most part well, with the
18 exception of our last study when his pride brought about a seven-year downfall. Upon
19 his death, the empire survived with a number of kings. He died in 562 B.C. and was
20 succeeded by Amel-Marduk (562-560) who was in turn succeeded by Mergal Shar-usar in
21 560 (who ruled to 556). After him came his son Labasi-Marduk who was over thrown
22 after six months by a group of conspirators including Nabonidus. Nabonidus was the
23 father of Belshazzar, featured in our study tonight.

24
25 It is here that critics of Scripture have a field day, citing their belief that there never was a
26 king Belshazzar in Babylon. Well....they are exactly correct in that belief! Nabonidus,
27 somewhat of a flake, made his son Belshazzar **co-regent** of Babylon (in effect, the #2
28 ruler) while he himself vacated Babylon for ten years to pursue his own interests in
29 Arabia. This is the reason why Belshazzar could only offer Daniel the third-ranked
30 position of authority in Babylon, as he himself was only the second.

31
32 Belshazzar, certainly not the brightest bulb in the royal chandelier, had learned nothing

1 from his ancestor Nebuchadnezzar who for a time forgot God. Here is how Daniel
2 recorded this remarkable story:

3
4 Daniel 5:1-4

5 **Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine**
6 **before the thousand. [2] Belshazzar, while he tasted the wine, commanded to bring**
7 **the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the**
8 **temple which was in Jerusalem; that the king, and his princes, his wives, and his**
9 **concubines, might drink therein. [3] Then they brought the golden vessels that were**
10 **taken out of the temple of the house of God which was at Jerusalem; and the king,**
11 **and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, drank in them. [4] They drank wine,**
12 **and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone.**

13
14 Here is another case of booze shorting-out a man's brain. While Belshazzar throws his
15 drunken party, at that same time Gobryas, a general of the Medo-Persian army, under the
16 direction of Cyrus, the Great, was besieging the city of Babylon, throwing a mass of his
17 soldiers all around the great, walled city. Xenophon, the Greek historian, described how
18 they took the city by of the Euphrates River by detouring a canal back into its main
19 channel which allowed the armies of Persia to flow UNDER the walls of the city.

20
21 Belshazzar knew that a number of cities in the Babylonian Empire had already fallen to
22 the Medes. But, he thought, that won't happen to "my city!" He believed that Babylon
23 city was truly impregnable. Nebuchadnezzar had decades earlier built the city to be
24 invulnerable to any military attack.

25
26 *The city wall was fifteen miles square and was constructed of brick. It was 300 feet high*
27 *and wide enough for four chariots to race abreast around it. The city had supplies of*
28 *grain and water to last for years, in fact, there was a canal channeled off the Euphrates*
29 *River which went right through the city.*

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31
32 It was said of Roman Emperor Nero that he "fiddled" (played his violin) while Rome
33 burned. It could also be said of Belshazzar that he "booze" while the Medes infiltrated
34 his city.

35
36 Several historians have suggested that perhaps Belshazzar was openly defying the
37 gathering enemy outside the gates. Possibly. But, for sure, he was defying God!
38 Under the influence of wine he "brought out the golden vessels that were taken out of the
39 temple of God which was at Jerusalem." (Vs. 2) What vessels? When King Solomon
40 built the first great Temple in Jerusalem, it was equipped with many precious vases, pots,
41 etc., to expedite worship there. Some of these "vessels" were gold. It is believed that

1 Nebuchadnezzar (during his three military forays against the Holy City) had stolen well
2 over 5,000 of them from the Temple and housed them in warehouses in Babylon. Now,
3 years later, a drunken regent, Belshazzar, decides to retrieve them from storage and drink
4 his booze from them, along with his hundreds of inebriated buddies. This ruler knew
5 that Nebuchadnezzar, his great grandfather, had come to the knowledge of God and
6 praised and honored Him. (Daniel 5:22 **And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not**
7 **humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this;**) Yet Belshazzar deliberately
8 defied God. Not a good move on his part for: Proverbs 29:1 **He, that being often**
9 **reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.**

10
11 Belshazzar also did the sin that always angers God, he worshiped a false deity: Daniel
12 5:4 They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of
13 wood, and of stone.

14 15 THE OBITUARY ON THE WALL

16
17 Daniel 5:5-6

18 **In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the**
19 **candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the**
20 **part of the hand that wrote. [6] Then the king's countenance was changed, and his**
21 **thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees**
22 **smote one against another.**

23
24 There is a railroad system that carries passengers and freight between Baghdad and
25 Bassorah, Iraq. As the train chugs along, the passengers can look out the windows to see
26 a curious and enormous mound of earth. Probably very few of them are aware that they
27 are gazing upon the ruins of one of the world's most colossal cities, perhaps one of the
28 most splendid cities of all time.

29
30 Babylon! Jewel of the east. Place of sophisticated culture and incredible military
31 might. Occupying nearly 200 square miles at one time, Babylon controlled the destiny
32 of much of the world. There is no telling to what great heights that society might have
33 climbed – if not for the insistence of its leaders to flaunt God Almighty and to sin
34 exceedingly. But then, that's an old story, isn't it? It goes back to the Garden of Eden,
35 that paradise of unparalleled magnificence. God Himself walked with Adam and Eve
36 daily. There was no such thing as sickness or death or despair. No pain or
37 impossibility. But man made that utopian state a rendezvous with sin and Satan. And
38 the bottom fell out of everything, so much so that there is not a trace left of that once-
39 glorious garden.

40
41 It's the pattern of mankind. God has given you and me unlimited potential, but we have

1 consistently allowed sin to enter in and mar the plan. Then, as a heart-broken shepherd
2 turns to the last of his wolf-torn flock, God has had to gather us up again to begin back at
3 chapter one. But He will not always continue such redemption. The Bible says that
4 one day God will say, "Enough!" And everything that can be shaken will be shaken.
5 Then God will create all things new.

7 Perspective Lost

8
9 In the face of pending destruction, Belshazzar threw a party. What terrible timing!
10 Satan does that to a person. He ruins perspective. He destroys a sense of what's worth
11 living for. The king had a thousand of his buddies come. There were probably any
12 number of "hangers-on."

13
14 Belshazzar's father Nabonidus was not there - perhaps away on perfectly-needed work for
15 his kingdom. While he was gone, his son threw a party. The fall of Babylon was not
16 the fault of Nabonidus. No, it was the fault of Belshazzar. Everyone one of us is
17 responsible for our own lives. Stop blaming Dad. Or Mom. We call our own shots.
18 Belshazzar should have been at the walls of his city with his army, not belching his way
19 through a shindig, a Budweiser in each hand.

20
21

Unusual fact: It was in this same city and in the same palace two hundred years later that Alexander the Great lost his life in a drunken, debauched evening.
--

22
23 Let me revisit Daniel 5:4 **They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of**
24 **silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone.** Gods of gold, silver, brass, iron, wood
25 and stone. Notice the constant deterioration - from gold to a rock. Idolatry is always
26 headed backwards.

27
28 It is difficult to conceive of anyone challenging God as Belshazzar did. Desecrating
29 sacred things. Yet people today are doing the same thing. What about the Lord's Day?
30 God says it is holy. We set aside that opinion and make it like every other day. We
31 take a holy vessel, the Lord's Day, and profane it just as Belshazzar did the vessels of the
32 Temple. Do we think God will just wink at this and say, "Oh well, boys will be boys!"

33
34 The Bible further declares that your body is a sacred vessel. 1 Cor. 6:19 **What?**
35 **know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which**
36 **ye have of God, and ye are not your own?** Your body belongs to God. It is sacred to
37 Him. He designed it. He built it.

38
39 Belshazzar's party is just about to be ended - spectacularly!



An archaeologist's concept of ancient Babylon.

Belshazzar felt quite secure behind his massive walls. However, no one who flaunts God can ever be secure. Belshazzar would throw an orgy and flaunt his safety in the very face of the approaching Medo-Persian army. Some people never learn, apparently, that the real strength of a society does not lie in defense mechanisms or walls. Strength is not found on the outside, but rather the inside.

Then....it happened! The disjointed hand of a man began to write on the plaster of the wall: **And the king saw....** (verse 5)

Note this carefully: God was not giving Belshazzar an ultimatum, or a second chance. He was writing the King's obituary! Shortly thereafter, this "king" would be stone dead and the Medo-Persians would have conquered his great city, lock, stock and barrel.

Daniel 5:7-12

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

1 kingdom. [8] Then came in all the king's wise men: but they could not read the
2 writing, nor make known to the king the interpretation thereof. [9] Then was king
3 Belshazzar greatly troubled, and his countenance was changed in him, and his lords
4 were astonished.

5 [10] Now the queen, by reason of the words of the king and his lords, came into
6 the banquet house: and the queen spake and said, O king, live for ever: let not thy
7 thoughts trouble thee, nor let thy countenance be changed: [11] There is a man in
8 thy kingdom, in whom is the spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of thy father
9 light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, was found in him;
10 whom the king Nebuchadnezzar thy father, the king, I say, thy father, made master
11 of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers; [12] Forasmuch as an
12 excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, interpreting of dreams, and
13 shewing of hard sentences, and dissolving of doubts, were found in the same Daniel,
14 whom the king named Beltshazzar: now let Daniel be called, and he will shew the
15 interpretation.

16
17 Note again in verse 7 that the best verse Belshazzar could offer was “third” ruler in the
18 kingdom as he himself was only the second. Not much of an offer, was it? At its best it
19 would have been a mere several hours at the most that Daniel would have had his phony
20 place. Belshazzar’s days were numbered!

21 22 Who Was The Queen? 23

24 This woman was probably the widow of Nebuchadnezzar, the Queen Mother. She was
25 well aware of Daniel because of his association with her late husband. In verse 11 she
26 referred to “king Nebuchadnezzar, your father...”. It would be understood that “father”
27 in Old Testament scripture at times could refer to a father, a grandfather, a great-
28 grandfather or even a great, great grandfather. Word must have quickly surged through
29 the king’s palace that something had just happened in “the great hall,” and that the regent
30 king Belshazzar was having a fit. Remembering how Daniel had come to her husband’s
31 aid again and again, she sent word to Belshazzar to call Daniel at once “....and he will
32 shew the interpretation.”

33
34 Daniel 5:13-17

35 Then was Daniel brought in before the king. And the king spake and said unto
36 Daniel, Art thou that Daniel, which art of the children of the captivity of Judah,
37 whom the king my father brought out of Jewry? [14] I have even heard of thee, that
38 the spirit of the gods is in thee, and that light and understanding and excellent
39 wisdom is found in thee. [15] And now the wise men, the astrologers, have been
40 brought in before me, that they should read this writing, and make known unto me
41 the interpretation thereof: but they could not shew the interpretation of the thing:

1 **[16] And I have heard of thee, that thou canst make interpretations, and dissolve**
2 **doubts: now if thou canst read the writing, and make known to me the**
3 **interpretation thereof, thou shalt be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold**
4 **about thy neck, and shalt be the third ruler in the kingdom.**

5 **[17] Then Daniel answered and said before the king, Let thy gifts be to thyself,**
6 **and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make**
7 **known to him the interpretation.**

8
9 Verses 13 and 14 make it clear that Belshazzar had lost contact with Daniel. “Are you
10 that Daniel from Judea?” he asked. “I have heard of you.” How many people are there
11 just like that who have lost contact with Christ and His church?

12
13 How many people in America are truly born again? Who have a real and up-to-date
14 experience with the Lord? Our recent annual church ministries report (which we send to
15 Springfield headquarters every January) revealed there are over 12,000 people who call
16 First Assembly their home. For example, if they were hospitalized, they would name
17 this church as “their church.” Well....where are they? We see a little over half of them
18 over the course of a year.

19
20 Belshazzar had lost personal contact with Daniel. That’s why he was in such a world of
21 conflict. At this point of calling for the prophet, this regent-king had about 12 hours of
22 life left. His kingdom was about to collapse at the hands of the Medo-Persians. What
23 would have happened had Belshazzar called for Daniel years earlier?

24
25 He offered Daniel a chain of gold, a royal robe and the third position in Babylon (since he
26 himself was second). Daniel wanted none of it. “**Let thy gifts be to thyself and give**
27 **thy rewards to another.**” (Verse 17)

28
29 First, Daniel reminded Belshazzar what had happened to his (Belshazzar’s) ancestor,
30 Nebuchadnezzar: Daniel 5:18-24 **O thou king, the most high God gave**
31 **Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour: [19]**
32 **And for the majesty that he gave him, all people, nations, and languages, trembled**
33 **and feared before him: whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive;**
34 **and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down. [20] But when his**
35 **heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly**
36 **throne, and they took his glory from him: [21] And he was driven from the sons of**
37 **men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild**
38 **asses: they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of**
39 **heaven; till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that**
40 **he appointeth over it whomsoever he will. [22] And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast**
41 **not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this; [23] But hast lifted up thyself**

1 **against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before**
2 **thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in**
3 **them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and**
4 **stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath is,**
5 **and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified: [24] Then was the part of the**
6 **hand sent from him; and this writing was written.**

7
8 Belshazzar's faulty memory was a fatal one. Jesus told the story of the beggar Lazarus
9 and Abraham in paradise and the foolish rich man in Hell. The man begged for relief
10 but instead he heard: "Son...remember...remember...remember...." Remember what?
11 All the opportunities you had in life, but now it's too late.

12
13 On September 1, 1923, the island of Japan was ravaged by the most devastating
14 earthquake in history to that time. It began at 11:58 A.M. and continued for more than
15 three hours, creating casualty lists that stagger credulity. 143,000 were killed. More
16 than 100,000 lay maimed, wounded and dying in the streets of Yokohama alone. Out of
17 that rumbling, hissing holocaust came a frantic plea for help. America's heart was
18 touched and we responded immediately by sending an entire convoy of mercy ships to
19 Japan. Millions in cash gifts were also sent. As Japan began the huge process of
20 rebuilding itself, a famous five word telegram was received at our White House, signed
21 by the emperor himself. It read, "America, we will not forget!"

22
23 Less than a generation later the whole world was stunned by other tragedy,. December 7,
24 1941. Dawn was just breaking over Pearl Harbor in Honolulu, Hawaii. At anchor
25 there lay the vast American fleet. The drone of fighter planes was heard. Out of the
26 blue, hurtling at lightning speed on wings of death, came the bombers from Japan, bent on
27 destruction, annihilation, extermination. Battleship after battleship turned belly-up and
28 sank. Sailors were strafed as they swam for safety. Oil-soaked victims screamed and
29 perished in a cauldron of liquid fire. 2800 of our men were sent to their graves. Just 18
30 short years after our mercy ships steamed in to Tokyo Bay with American good will,
31 came Pearl Harbor.

32
33 **JAPAN HAD FORGOTTEN!** So had Belshazzar. And now he would pay.

34
35 Daniel 5:25-31

36 **And this is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.**
37 **[26] This is the interpretation of the thing: Mene; God hath numbered thy kingdom,**
38 **and finished it. [27] Tekel; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.**
39 **[28] Peres; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians. [29] Then**
40 **commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of**
41 **gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him, that he should be the**

1 **third ruler in the kingdom.**

2 **[30] In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain. [31] And Darius**
3 **the Median took the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old.**

4
5 In simple terms, God’s message to the stricken monarch was this: **YOU HAVE BEEN**
6 **WEIGHED ON MY SCALES - AND YOU ARE FOUND WANTING!** God had
7 numbered the hours the regent and his kingdom had left to exist - and it was a very, very
8 short time, indeed!

9
10 In that night Belshazzar died. The Persian king Darius (Cyrus) was now “king of the
11 world.” He happened to be a quite benevolent monarch, by the way, and Daniel assisted
12 him in many ways – although it almost cost Daniel his life in a lions’ den.

13
14 Which is the story we pick up next week. (Daniel 6)