

HANDWRITING ON THE WALL

Daniel 5:1-31

STRUCTURE

Key-persons: Daniel and King Belshazzar

Key-location: Babylon

Key-repetitions:

- Disrespect for the Lord God: King Belshazzar requested the gold and silver cups taken from the Lord's temple (Dan 5:2); the king and his guests drank wine from the cups taken from the Lord's temple (Dan 5:2-3); they praised gods made of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone (Dan 5:4).
- Fear: King Belshazzar turned pale, his knees knocked together, he was too weak to stand (Dan 5:6); the king was terrified; his face was pale (Dan 5:9); the king's nobles didn't know what to do (Dan 5:9).
- Daniel's greatness: the king's mother praised Daniel (Dan 5:11-12); Belshazzar confessed that he heard Daniel was wise (Dan 5:14); Daniel had no interest in the king's gifts (Dan 5:17); Daniel had courage to condemn the king (Dan 5:22-23); Belshazzar honored Daniel (Dan 5:29).

Key-attitudes:

- Belshazzar and his guests' irreverence.
- Daniel's disregard for power and riches.
- Belshazzar's fear/terror.
- Nobles' helplessness.

Initial-situation:

King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon invaded Judah and brought youths from the royal family to live in Babylon. He also took utensils from God's temple.

Daniel and three of his Israelite friends entered the king's service and served King Nebuchadnezzar with great wisdom. King Nebuchadnezzar died. Belshazzar became king. Seventy years had passed since King Nebuchadnezzar brought Daniel to Babylon.

Initial-problem:

King Belshazzar was drinking wine when he ordered his servants to bring in the gold and silver cups that his predecessor Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Lord's temple in Jerusalem.

Final-situation:

King Belshazzar of Babylon was slain, and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom.

BIBLE STORY

King Nebuchadnezzar died. Belshazzar became king. Seventy years had passed since King Nebuchadnezzar had brought Daniel to Babylon. King Belshazzar threw a big banquet for a thousand nobles. King Belshazzar was drinking wine when he ordered his servants, "Bring the gold and silver cups that Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple in Jerusalem." King Belshazzar, his nobles, his wives, and his concubines drank wine from the gold cups taken from the Lord's temple. They drank the wine and praised their gods made of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

Suddenly a human hand and its fingers wrote on the palace wall. King Belshazzar watched the hand as it wrote. Belshazzar's face turned pale and his knees knocked together. He was too weak to stand up.

King Belshazzar screamed to bring the psychics, astrologers, and fortune-tellers. The king told those wise advisors of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing and interprets its meaning will be famous and rich. He'll be dressed in purple, wear a gold chain around his neck, and become third in command in the kingdom."

All the king's wise advisors came in, but they could neither read the writing nor interpret its meaning. King Belshazzar was terrified. His face turned pale. His nobles didn't know what to do.

The king's mother heard the hysteria and came into the banquet hall and said, "Your Majesty, live forever! There's a man in your kingdom named Daniel who has the spirit of the holy gods. Your predecessor Nebuchadnezzar made Daniel head of his wise advisors. Daniel was famous for his insight, intelligence, and spiritual wisdom. Call for Daniel. He'll tell you what the writing means" (Dan 5:1-12).

Daniel was called in. King Belshazzar asked, "Are you Daniel, one of the Jewish captives my predecessor brought from Judah? I heard that you are incredibly wise. If you can read this writing and interpret its meaning, you'll be famous and rich. You'll be dressed in purple and wear a gold chain around your neck. You'll be third in command in the kingdom."

Daniel answered the king, "Keep your gifts or give them to someone else. Nevertheless, I'll read and interpret the writing for the king. The Most High God gave your predecessor Nebuchadnezzar a great kingdom. Nebuchadnezzar became so arrogant and stubborn that he became overconfident, and his royal throne and his glory were taken away. He was forced away from people, given the mind of an animal, and he lived with wild donkeys and ate grass like cattle. His body was soaked with dew. This happened until he recognized that the Most High God rules over the kingdoms of men, and God puts in charge anyone he wishes.

"You're Nebuchadnezzar's successor. You knew all this. Yet, you're arrogant and have set yourself up as greater than the Lord of heaven. You, your nobles, your wives, and your concubines drank wine from the cups from the Lord's temple. You praised your gods made of silver, gold, bronze, iron, wood, and stone. They're not really gods; these gods can't see, hear, or understand. You treat with contempt the living God who has power over your life. God sent the hand that wrote on the wall. These are the words that were written, 'Numbered, Weighed, and Divided.' These words mean:

- *“Numbered:* God numbered the days of your reign and will bring it to an end.
- *“Weighed:* You’ve been weighed on the scales and you weighed too little.
- *“Divided:* Your kingdom is divided and given over to the Medes and Persians” (Dan 5:13-28).

King Belshazzar kept his promise. Daniel was clothed in purple, a gold chain was placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed third in command.

That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was murdered. Darius the Mede took over the kingdom (Dan 5:29-31).

GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

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| 1. What catches your attention in the story? | 5. How did the characters face their problems? |
| 2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand? | 6. How have you faced similar problems? |
| 3. Who are the main characters in the story? | 7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you? |
| 4. What problems did the characters face? | 8. What does the story tell about God? |

SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What kind of banquet did King Belshazzar throw?
2. How did the king show that he had no respect for the Lord God?
3. How do people today show disrespect for God?
4. What happened at King Belshazzar’s banquet?
5. Who did King Belshazzar seek to explain the handwriting?
6. When you are confused, who do you seek to help you?
7. What did Daniel tell the king?
8. What risk did Daniel take in telling the king unpleasant news?
9. When does the unpleasant truth need to be told?
10. Why do people need to respect God, locations where God is worshiped, and instruments used in worship?

LIFE-LESSONS

1. **Truth should be told, regardless of the pressure one faces.** Daniel told Belshazzar the truth, even though kings often killed the bearer of bad news (Dan 5:22).
2. **A person should not use for selfish purposes that which has been dedicated to God.** Belshazzar used cups from God’s temple for his banquet and God condemned him (Dan 5:24).
3. **Alcoholic drink can provoke a person to mock and profane that which is sacred.** King Belshazzar became cheerful after drinking wine. He began to mock and profane religious things, using cups taken from the Lord’s temple to drink wine (Dan 5:2-4).

4. **The effects of the alcoholic drink may prove fatal.** The effects of alcoholic drink in the Bible often proved fatal: Noah lost his composure and exposed himself (Gen 9:20-22); Lot lost his awareness and committed incest (Gen 19:32-35); Amnon died victim of his drunkenness; drunk, he could not resist when attacked (2 Sam 13:28); Elah, king of Israel, died victim of his addiction; in a time when Israel was at war, he was at home in an alcoholic stupor and was murdered by his official (1 Kin 16:8-10); Belshazzar lost his sobriety, his kingdom, and his life (Dan 5:1-30).
5. **God’s people need their priority to be doing right instead of gaining power or rewards.** King Belshazzar offered Daniel gifts and great power if he would explain the writing, but Daniel turned him down. Daniel was not motivated by riches or power, but by doing right (Dan 5:17).

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

1. **Chant:**

Words in **bold and underlined** are stressed. Stress words by stretching them out instead of increasing volume.

Leader	
“Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him. But their idols are silver and gold, made by the hands of men. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but they cannot see; they have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but they cannot smell; they have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but they cannot walk; nor can they utter a sound with their throats. Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them” (Psalms 115:3-8 NIV).	
Group 1	Group 2
Our God <u>is</u> in heaven;	he <u>does</u> whatever pleases him.
But their idols are silver and gold,	<u>made</u> by the hands of men.
They have <u>mouths</u> ,	but <u>cannot speak</u> , nor can they utter a sound with their throats.
They have <u>eyes</u> ,	but they <u>cannot see</u> ;
They have <u>ears</u> ,	but they <u>cannot hear</u> ,
They have <u>noses</u> ,	but they <u>cannot smell</u> ;
They have <u>hands</u> ,	but they <u>cannot feel</u> ,
They have <u>feet</u> ,	but they <u>cannot walk</u> ;
Those who make them will be <u>like them</u> ,	will be <u>like the useless gods</u> they made.
Those who <u>trust</u> in them will be like them,	will be <u>like the useless gods</u> they trust.

2. **Twitter Prayers** (short, concise prayers):

Invite listeners to pray about the story in “twitter” length prayers. Tell God:

- How they feel about the story.
- How they are similar to or different from King Belshazzar.
- How they are similar to or different from Daniel.