

All the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or make known to the king the interpretation. (Daniel 5:8)

Heavenly Father, you have given us your Word, passed down from the prophets of long ago. Thank you for your holy Word that shines its light amidst the darkness of this world. Help us to walk in the way of your son Jesus, the Light of the world. Amen.

Introduction

Belshazzar had become the new King of Babylon. He threw a great feast for his nobles, serving drinks in the gold vessels that had been stolen from God's Temple in Jerusalem. Suddenly, a hand miraculously appeared and wrote a message from God on the wall of the palace.

Read: Daniel 5:1-30

On reading these verses, what are some of your initial impressions and questions? What stands out to you?

The Biblical Context

Israelite history is often broken down into three sections: the pre-exilic, exilic, and the post-exilic periods — referring to the time before, during, and after the exile to Babylon. There were prophets who taught in each of these periods.

The time of the Exile was a significant period in the history of Israel. God's people were first attacked and conquered in the north by the Assyrian Empire, then later in the south by the Babylonian Empire. Many of the people were carried away into exile in Mesopotamia, far from home. The Prophet Daniel was one who lived under the Babylonians, as well as under the rulers of the Medes and Persians.

Eventually God brought King Cyrus of Persia to power over the Babylonians. God's people were allowed to return home to rebuild their temple and their nation.

Discussion Questions

1. King Belshazzar of Babylon was a powerful man in his day. Why do you think he threw great parties and invited so many lords and nobles? How did that help him in his rulership of the country?
2. According to verses 2-4, what was so offensive to God about what Belshazzar did? Do you think the king had any idea that he was doing anything wrong? Why or why not?
3. They say, "Ignorance is no excuse." In our lives, do we always know when we are doing things wrong? In what way are we accountable for our actions regardless?
4. Verse 5 says: "The fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall." How do you picture this scene? Was the hand big or small? What do you imagine the marks looked like?
5. Prior to this story, Daniel had worked in the court of King Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian ruler who conquered Judah. According to verses 13-16, what was Daniel known for?
6. What sort of king had Nebuchadnezzar been? According to verses 20-21, what did God do to teach him a lesson? What lesson did Nebuchadnezzar finally learn? Does it seem like Belshazzar learned anything from his father's experience?
7. What did the three words on the wall mean?
 - a) Mene:
 - b) Tekel:
 - c) Parsin:
8. Was Daniel able to explain the words because he was smart or clever? Read 2 Peter 1:19-21. How does Peter describe the source and authority of biblical prophecy?