

Life Lesson 109
The Handwriting on the Wall
Text: Daniel 5

Introduction

Belshazzar the king was having a party – but the party came to an unexpected end!

The Story

Belshazzar, the son of Nebuchadnezzar, was the new king of Syria. He decided to throw a huge party, inviting a thousand of the most important men in the kingdom. It was a great feast, with plenty to eat and lots of wine to drink. While Belshazzar was drinking, he had an idea.

He called his servants to bring out the vessels of gold and silver that had been taken from the Temple of God. They drank wine out of those cups and vessels which had been dedicated to God. While they drank, they praised the gods of gold, silver, brass, iron, wood, and stone. They were doing this to show that they believed their gods were more powerful than the true God. They thought they were greater than God, and showed it by using things for themselves that were only meant to be used to God's service.

Something happened that stopped the king in his tracks!

Perhaps he still had the forbidden cup lifted to his lips when he saw something that terrified him and made him forget all about his party. He saw fingers, writing on the wall. That wouldn't have been scary, except that there was no hand, and no body attached to those fingers. The fingers were writing by themselves a message on the wall.

The king shook with fear so that his knees were knocking together. The message was in a strange language. He couldn't tell what the words meant! They must mean something, he thought. They must be an important message -- but what did they say?

“Call the wise men,” the king commanded. “Whoever can interpret this handwriting on the wall will receive a reward and shall be third in command of the kingdom.”

Everyone wanted the prize, but none of the wise men could tell what the writing said. The queen, Belshazzar’s mother, heard about the writing and came to talk with her son.

“You should ask Daniel about the handwriting,” she said. “He helped your father understand many hard things. He can help you with this problem.”

Belshazzar did as she suggested and called Daniel before him.

“If you can tell me what this writing says, I will give you a reward,” said the king.

“You can keep your reward,” Daniel replied. “But, I will tell you what the writing says. It was God, Oh King, who gave your father, Nebuchadnezzar, a great kingdom, glory, and honor. When his heart was lifted up against God, all his greatness was taken away. He became like the beast in the field until he knew that the Most High God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that He appoints whomsoever He wills. Even though you knew about this, you did not learn from your father’s mistake. You think you are greater than God. You have taken the vessels of His house and have dishonored them. You have given glory to idols of silver and gold instead of to the true God.

“He sent these fingers to write a message to you. The writing says, ‘Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin.’

“Mene – means God has numbered the days of your kingdom and finished it. It’s over.

“Tekel – means you have been weighed in the balance and found lacking.

“Upharsin – Your kingdom will be divided and given to the Medes and Persians.”

The king gave Daniel the promised reward, but he did not repent in his heart. That night Belshazzar was killed and Darius the Median took over the control of the kingdom.

The Life Lesson

God gave Belshazzar plenty of warning. He even sent a written message warning him. God has given you plenty of warning, too. He has written down in His Word warning against sin and instruction for salvation and for living a Christian life. How foolish it is to ignore God's warning and continue living as if there is no God! Perhaps you are not saved. What can you say to God when you have been warned so often to turn from your self and your sin and to surrender to the true God? Perhaps you are saved already. God wants you to have ears open to His instruction. Do not be foolish! Listen to God and obey!

Review Questions

Who was king when the story starts?

Belshazzar

What wicked thing did Belshazzar do at his party?

He used the special cups from the Temple to drink wine.

Why was it so bad to use the cups?

He was showing that he didn't believe God and had no respect for Him.

What stopped Belshazzar in the middle of the party?

He saw fingers writing on the wall.

What did the fingers write?

Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin

Who told the king what the message said?

Daniel

What did the words mean?

Mene -- numbering, God has numbered your kingdom and finished it

Tekel --weighing, because you have been weighed in a measure and found wanting

Upharsin -- divided, Your kingdom will be divided and given to the Medes and the Persians

What happened to Belshazzar that next night?

He was killed.