

# Daniel Interprets The Handwriting On The Wall I Daniel 5

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church  
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Today we have the privilege again of studying one of the great chapters of the Bible, the story of Babylon's fall predicted by flaming letters on a palace wall. Because of the important concepts contained in this chapter, we won't be able to cover it all in one week.

It interests me that people who have never heard of the Bible nevertheless "confess" it in their everyday language by using phrases that come from the Scriptures. Have you ever heard someone say they saw the "handwriting on the wall?" Did you realize that that phrase, and a host of others, comes from the Bible? I compiled a rather large list one time of such phrases, including "going the second mile," "a wheel within a wheel," "put your house in order," "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak," just to name a few.

The book of Daniel is a tale of two kings. In the first four chapters we've become acquainted with King Nebuchadnezzar and his struggles in the battle against self. This week we're introduced to King Belshazzar, who was his grandson. In many translations it refers to him in chapter 5 as being Nebuchadnezzar's "son," but remember that in the Hebrew language the word "son" doesn't have to mean what our word "son" means. It can include the idea of *more* than one generation of separation. In the same way, the word "father" in their language can also mean someone farther away than just one

generation. It can mean "progenitor." Both of these kings were of the same blood, both wore the crown of Babylon, but one king won and one king lost. One king learned submission and humility; the other persisted in pride and obstinacy. Only one chapter apart, yet one was saved and one was lost! What a difference!

This scenario is played out constantly in the hearts of men and women today. The same choice is ours as was theirs. We can give our hearts to Jesus and receive forgiveness and cleansing and gain the victory as did King Nebuchadnezzar and receive the assurance of eternal life, or we can resist His gracious offers and be left to our sinful selves and reap the reward of our ungodly thoughts and deeds and have nothing but ruin. What will your choice be?

"Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in the presence of the thousand." Daniel 5:1. "Belshazzar the king." How easily that title falls from our lips today, not knowing the controversy those very words had stirred for centuries! Who was Belshazzar? "Well," you reply, "he was king of Babylon. It says so in the Bible." You're right, but there's much more to the story than that! His name, by the way, sounds very much like the name given to Daniel, Beltshazzar. Their meanings are similar. "Belshazzar" means "may Bel ("Baal") protect the king," while "Beltshazzar" means "may Bel protect his (the king's) life." We've all heard about Belshazzar and the handwriting on the wall.

"What's the problem?" you ask. The problem is that if you lived before 1861, there was absolutely no record of Belshazzar being the last king of Babylon, outside of the Bible. Worse than that, there were plenty of king lists available, noting the rulers of Babylon, and every single one of them listed not Belshazzar, but Nabonidus as the last king. Well, as you can imagine, this gave opportunity for the critics of the Bible to poke fun at the Sacred Record, and ridicule those who placed confidence in a book "obviously" filled with errors. Christians could give no solid

answer to the charges brought by skeptics, but silently held on to their faith.

But then there came about a huge interest in archeology, in digging up the secrets of the ancient past. The "rocks" were about to "cry out." Scholars were able, with the help of the discovery and deciphering of the Rosetta Stone and other code breakers, to interpret tablets and artifacts, and new information came into the spotlight. So it was that in 1861 a scholar named Talbot published a translation of some texts that were found at the moon temple in Ur of the Chaldees, in which there was a prayer for King Nabonidus and his oldest son Belshazzar. That was the very first time his name had been found, apart from the Scriptures, which was great, but it didn't say anything about his being king.

Then twenty years later, in 1881, Theophilus G. Pinches published the "Nabonidus Chronicles," which described the attack and capture of Babylon by Cyrus. This text mentions that Nabonidus himself was not in Babylon but in Tema, Arabia, at the time of Cyrus' attack. Later, it was determined that Nabonidus had vacated his capital because of a political spat with the very powerful priestly faction, leaving his son Belshazzar in Babylon.

Progress was being made on the "Belshazzar the king" problem, but there was more to come. About a half a century after the name Belshazzar was first discovered, in 1916 Pinches published a translation of a text which invoked Nabonidus and Belshazzar jointly in an oath. "In the names of Nabonidus and Belshazzar, I solemnly swear..." We're getting closer!

In 1924 Sydney Smith translated and published the "Verse Account Of Nabonidus," which stated plainly that "Nabonidus entrusted the kingship to his oldest son." Now the story was complete. Believe me, that was a day of celebration and victory for Bible-believing Christians! Five years after that, just to summarize everything, in 1929, Raymond Dougherty published a

full discussion of the problem and its resolution. The Bible was vindicated, and the challenge defeated!

Discoveries that confirm the Bible are happening all the time, by the way. One year ago, July 11, 2007, the British Museum revealed a discovery within a modest clay tablet in its collection as a breakthrough for biblical archaeology; a dramatic proof of the accuracy of the Old Testament. The cuneiform inscription in a tablet dating from 595BC has been deciphered for the first time, revealing a reference to an official at the court of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, that proves the historical existence of a figure mentioned in the Book of Jeremiah.

The cuneiform inscription records how this official lavished a gift of gold, equivalent in today's value of the purchase price for a large townhouse, on the Temple of Esangila in the fabled city of Babylon. Irving Finkel, assistant keeper in the Department of the Middle East, said: "A mundane commercial transaction takes its place as a primary witness to one of the turning points in Old Testament history. This is a tablet that deserves to be famous."

The discovery was made by Michael Jursa, associate professor at the University of Vienna, on a routine research trip to the museum. "It's very exciting and very surprising," he said. "Finding something like this tablet, where we see a person mentioned in the Bible making an everyday payment to the temple in Babylon and quoting the exact date, is quite extraordinary."

The tablet, which is 2.13 inches (5.5cm) wide, was acquired by the British Museum in 1920. It was unearthed from the ancient city of Sippar, where there was a huge sun temple, just over a mile from modern-day Baghdad. It was part of a large temple archive excavated for the British Museum in the 1870s. See

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article2056362>.  
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The discovery of the name of Belshazzar brought great excitement. As mentioned, for us 100 years later, the applause has died down and we take all this for granted, but it caused no small stir when all of this played out. And not only was the Bible vindicated, it actually was proven to be **more accurate than originally thought!** How could that be? Let me ask you a question. When Daniel interpreted the message on the wall, what was the position that he was offered as a reward? Was it to be the "second ruler" in the kingdom, like Joseph in Egypt after he interpreted Pharaoh's dream? No! It's to be the "**third** ruler in the kingdom." Why is that significant? Because that was the *highest position Belshazzar could offer*, seeing he was second ruler himself, sharing the throne with his father Nabonidus.

Why should we spend time on this? "What does this have to do with prophecy?" you ask. Well, it's vital that we place our trust in this Book and what it has to say. We're making a choice that is "life or death" based on the information that this Book contains. God knows that. He wants us to be able to put our full weight of belief in what this Book says. And so He allows evidence to surface that strengthens the confidence in the believer. He doesn't ask us to have "blind faith." There is solid evidence available for the one who sincerely desires to believe the Bible.

So, when we hear how the Bible is confirmed by the discovery of the facts concerning Belshazzar, it bolsters our faith and leads us to believe that if there are a few knots that are still tangled, perhaps the time will come when more information will come to light and help us understand the Bible even better. But if not, our faith is strong enough to believe that this is indeed God's Word.

"Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in the presence of the thousand." Daniel 5:1. Archeologists believe that they have discovered the very room where this event took place, the throne room of the

southern palace, which was 173 feet long, 57 feet wide and 66 feet high, the only room large enough to house such a crowd. That's a room that's 9,881 square feet in size, and about six stories in height! A pretty big room! I don't know if I've ever been in a room like that, with a ceiling 66 feet away.

Usually monarchs ate separately from their guests, as is related in the story of Joseph and the banquet he spread before his brothers. So it is noteworthy that the Bible says that Belshazzar drank "before" the thousand.

In ancient times, it was common for large feasts to be held. The historian Ctesias says that when Alexander the Great was married, he had 10,000 at his wedding feast. More to the point, the historian Xenophon reports that at the time of Babylon's fall, there was a certain festival that came around each year, in which all Babylon was used to drinking and reveling through the night.

It seems a strange time to call for a banquet, given the military advances of Cyrus the Persian. It's not like the successes of Cyrus were a secret. Everyone knew the Persians were on the march, and just before this, the city of Opis on the Tigris River had fallen into his hands. Just two days before this feast Cyrus had conquered Sippur, a city only 35 miles north of Babylon. You could take your pencil and easily plot the course of Cyrus on a map and detect his goal. The line led steadily to Babylon! You might have thought that this would be the time for a "red alert," a time for doubling the guards and having the army on stand-by, not for throwing a party!

But such was the confidence that Belshazzar had in the invincibility of his fortress capital. Remember, it had double walls 24 and 26 feet thick at the top, and an abundant water supply with the mighty River Euphrates coursing through the city. It had 20 years worth of food in storage to withstand most persistent of sieges. Belshazzar had put his faith in things he could see and touch; the walls, the water and the food, but not in the prophecies of Yahweh. For the king, those predictions were as

worthless as the mounds of pottery shards that piled up in the trash dumps.

As they began to drink, the alcohol clouded his mind and impaired his judgment, giving him a “boldness” not based on reason, and Satan induced him to go a fateful step further. “While he tasted the wine, Belshazzar gave the command to bring the gold and silver vessels which his (grand) father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple which had been in Jerusalem, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them.” Daniel 5:2.

Two important things we need to see in this verse. The first has to do with what they drank; the second concerns what they drank from. The mind, the human brain is one of the most delicate and finely tuned instruments God invented. We still don't know exactly how the brain works. How does thought originate? How does reason work? How are events and memories stored and recalled? There are so many mysteries associated with the gift of the mind. It is through the mind that God communicates with the soul. Through His Holy Spirit He sends His impressions and convictions. The mind is the divinely appointed channel of communication. Anything we can do to improve our ability to think will enhance our ability to understand the mysteries of God's grace. Anything we do to inhibit our ability to think and reason correspondingly hinders our ability to appreciate the wonders of the unseen world. Reason and judgment are dethroned.

The enemy knows this, and bends untiring energy into devising ways to tempt man to engage in practices that will numb and cloud his reasoning powers. It is his desire to “jamb the signals” so that Heaven's Voice cannot be heard. Have you ever been frustrated because the communication on your cell phone is unintelligible due to signal loss? Among the tactics he's used, the drinking of alcohol has been one of the most successful.

The Sacred Record has preserved for us the sad history of drinking and its aftermath.

- Just after the Flood we're told that Noah became drunk, which resulted in an act of disgraceful misconduct. Genesis 9:20-24.
- Lot was made drunk when he fathered sons by his daughters. Genesis 19:31-38.
- The sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, had been drinking and sinned by mixing unconsecrated ("strange") fire with the holy. Leviticus 10:1, 2, 9, 10.
- The foolish Nabal died after a drinking spree. 1 Samuel 25:32-38.
- David's son Amnon was drunk when he was killed. 2 Samuel 13:28-29.
- The Persian monarch Ahasuerus was intoxicated when he commanded Queen Vashti to come. Esther 5:1-12.
- The book of Proverbs contains at least 11 references to the dangers of drinking.
- We are counseled to be filled with the Spirit, not with wine, and we're told that drunkards will not inherit the Kingdom. Ephesians 5:18, I Corinthians 6:10.

If you have more interest, see a list of 75 Bible references to drinking in the Bible at <http://www.scionofzion.com/drinking.htm>

While on the cross, though in unspeakable agony, Jesus refused an intoxicating beverage. He needed His mind to be clear and focused as He battled the devil and his temptations. So we, who now carry His cross, need also to have our minds unclouded by alcohol. Alcohol destroys brain cells, which do not replenish themselves, unlike most other body cells.

There's a reason it's against the law to "drink and drive." Alcohol impairs judgment and reaction time and makes it dangerous and deadly to drive "under the influence." In America, more than half the fatalities on the road are attributed to alcohol,

in car accidents involving two or more vehicles. With single car accidents the number rises to 65%.

- This year in America, 25,000 people will die in highway accidents related to alcohol
- 40% of all suicide attempts are alcohol-related
- 54% of all violent crimes are alcohol-related
- 60% of all emergency room admissions are alcohol-related
- 80% of all domestic disputes are alcohol-related (See DWI statistics at <http://www.nh-dwi.com/caip-206.htm>)

We know that it's unsafe to drink and drive. Should Christians attempt to navigate the road of life while having their minds hindered by the influence of alcohol? No! We're nearing the end of the journey! We're close to the end of the road! Now is not the time to cloud our minds with alcohol. We need to be able to think clearly to hear His voice and make proper decisions. Choose, by His grace, to never take one sip of an alcoholic beverage. You need your brain to be clear in these last days!

There was alcohol served at Belshazzar's feast, and that led him to take a further step in defiance against the Lord. He ordered that they bring out, from the temple museum, the vessels which had been taken from the temple of Jerusalem, the house of Yahweh, so that they could drink from them. Oh, what a statement was this! What a devil-inspired act of mockery was this! Belshazzar, do you know what you are doing? Do you know whose work you are doing?

Make no mistake about it: there was no shortage of drinking utensils in the royal cupboards that evening. In blasphemous boldness that approached insanity, Belshazzar issued the command to bring forth the implements taken from Jerusalem. These were the cups and bowls that would have been used in the drink offerings and the conveyance of sacrificial blood, some of them perhaps dating back nine centuries to the time of the wilderness sanctuary, crafted by Bezeleel and his colleague Aholiab.

I'm of the conviction that it wasn't only cups and bowls that were brought out, but other things as well, even the seven-branched lampstand (it wasn't really a "candlestick") because of the emphasis placed on it in verse 5. Belshazzar was making a statement, wasn't he. This was intentional. He was saying, in loudest tones, "I don't believe in the prophecies of Yahweh. I don't care what His prophets said. Look, isn't His city in ruins? And His temple demolished? After all, isn't Babylon the eternal city? Isn't its water supply unending, and its walls impregnable? Who cares what Yahweh said? Why should I worry about some dusty predictions of foreign soothsayers? My kingdom will never come to an end. And I will prove it by drinking from His cups."

Little did he know that he would indeed drink from the cup, the cup of judgment, in just a few short hours. In blasphemy and blindness, by this act Belshazzar said, "We will see what becomes of the predictions of Yahweh. We will see if the head of gold will be replaced by the chest of silver." It was like the Philistines bringing out blind Samson to make sport of him before their world came crashing down. There is an unseen line, the line between God's mercy and justice. Belshazzar was about to cross it.

Focus a minute on the vessels that Belshazzar brought out. They had been constructed for service to God. There were to dwell in His presence, in His temple. But through the effort of the enemy, they had been removed from His presence and now were being put to a use designed to mock God. Is there a lesson here? I believe there is. The Bible says that we are His vessels, His tools to be used in the service of His kingdom. Some of those vessels back then were forged in the fire, some beaten by the hammer. They represent us and our Christian experience. Sometimes God improves our characters by allowing us to pass through the fires of trial, or to be beaten by the hammer of experience.

But it is Satan's desire to remove us, His vessels, out of God's presence, out of His sanctuary, out of spiritual "Jerusalem," and

take us to his kingdom, to "Babylon" and put us to a use that will dishonor God's name. In that way, he can express his anger against the Lord. We should never allow that to happen. We should never bring shame upon the name of Jesus, Whose name we bear. Satan loves to point to professed Christians and make sport of them, after leading them into sin.

This party was Belshazzar's "last supper"—literally. In Babylon, his capital, it was Satan's version of the Thursday night feast Jesus celebrated with His disciples in Jerusalem. But what a difference! The contrasts begin with Belshazzar's intoxicating beverages, opposed to what Jesus served Thursday night. I realize that many churches today don't recognize this, but to think that the "cup of blessing" Jesus served that evening would have contained alcohol is sacrilege!

Why had Jesus and His disciples gathered that Thursday evening? It was to celebrate the Passover meal. "Now on the first day of the Feast of the Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying to Him, 'Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?'" Matthew 26:17. It was from the roots of the Passover that the ceremony we call "The Lord's Supper" or Communion, grew.

What was the specific requirement enjoined on participants of the Passover meal? It was that there be no leaven (or yeast) in the meal, or even in their households. "Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day **you shall remove leaven from your houses.**" Exodus 12:15. In that context, leaven was a symbol of sin, which begins small but spreads, something that breaks down and ferments or spoils, and so to enforce that lesson on their minds, the use of bread containing leaven was strictly forbidden. Leaven causes a process of fermentation, of which alcohol is a byproduct.

The whole event was given the name "the Feast of Unleavened Bread," as we see in the Matthew account. Jesus added to the meaning of the ceremony, indicating that the bread represented

His body and sinless life. To think that the unleavened bread (bread which had not undergone the fermentation process of leaven), which Jesus shared with His followers Thursday night, would be accompanied by a fermented beverage is outrageous! It is a theological contradiction! The symbols would be working at cross purposes with each other! If in ancient times, leaven was removed not just from their bread, but also *from their houses*, it would have been impossible for the beverage Jesus served to have contained alcohol. Jesus would be pleased if we employed, as a reminder of His sinless blood, a symbol that does not contain alcohol.

The contrasts between these two "Last Suppers" continue with the basic attitude toward God. The focus of Belshazzar's Last Supper was "My will, not His." It was, "I'm going to do it my way, I don't care what He says." The theme of the Last Supper of Jesus was "His way, not mine." Thursday night, it was "I'll follow and obey You even if it leads to the cross." At Belshazzar's last supper it was pride and defiance. At Jesus' Last Supper it was humility and submission.

It is the most fundamental question of life we face. Which way will we choose? Which king will we follow? Which supper reflects the decision we've made? Today, I invite you, I encourage you to choose the way of Jesus. What happened that night in Babylon is a small picture of where our world is headed now. Soon the "handwriting on the wall" will be plain enough for all to see, that God is going to bring judgment on sinners. The global kingdom of modern Babylon will come to its end, including all who persist in rebellion against Him. Those things that people have put their trust in will be shown to be worthless idols. We should be spending our time getting to know Him and allow His Spirit to prepare us for the coming of His kingdom.

Please join me in this prayer: Dear Lord, thank You for what You've done and are doing in my life. Please take every sin out of my heart and help me to overcome every selfish, destructive

practice. I invite Your Holy Spirit to take control of my thoughts.  
Prepare me for Your soon coming. In Jesus' name, amen.