

THE STORY OF DANIEL

by

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“Aunt Hattie’s Bible Stories” for Boys and Girls

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CHAPTER SIX

THE HANDWRITING ON THE WALL

BABYLON, the greatest city in the world in Daniel’s time, was fifteen miles square and had a wall around it three hundred and thirty-five feet high, eighty-five feet thick at the base and wide enough on top for a four-horse chariot to turn around upon it.

Resting upon this wall, certain distances apart, were two hundred and fifty towers, each a hundred feet high. Outside the wall was a moat, or deep trench, thirty feet wide, filled with water.

The Euphrates River ran through the midst of the city and was lined on either side by a wall. In these walls and in each side of the city walls were twenty-five folding brass gates, a hundred and fifty in all.

It has been said that at the time of our story the population of the city was over a million. The city contained the great temple of Bel, the famous hanging gardens and many beautiful residences, some of which were three and four stories high. In addition to these were the business sections and parks. Yet there was room enough within the walls to raise sufficient food to care for the people in time of siege.

When we think of all of these things we are not surprised that the Babylonians felt safe and secure.

East of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers were two small nations, the Medes and the Persians, who united their forces against the strong and seemingly invincible Babylon.

In the meantime King Nebuchadnezzar, after a reign of forty-three years, died, and his wicked son, Evil-Merodach, reigned for two years and then was slain.

In a short time Nabonidus, a son-in-law of Nebuchadnezzar, seized the throne and became king. He had a son by the name of Belshazzar, who shared the throne with his father, and thus was also called the king.

In course of time the Medes and Persians approached the city of Babylon and began digging a trench. The Babylonians from their watch-towers laughed in derision, for, was not Babylon safe? Could they not from the top of their walls hurl weapons down upon the heads of the enemy? And then there were supplies enough stored within the walls to keep her people in comfort for twenty years.

I think Belshazzar, the selfish, pleasure-loving king, paid little heed to the busy army outside the walls.

Perhaps sitting alone in his luxurious palace he fell to thinking of his position in the kingdom and wondered what he could do to impress his court with his importance.

“I know what I’ll do,” I think he “mused, “I’ll have a party and serve a banquet which, because of its splendor and extravagant appointments, will make the guests remember it forever.”

Invitations were sent to the princes, the lords and ladies, and to his own numerous family. A thousand in all were bidden to the feast.

For weeks preparations were made. The most elaborate service the kingdom possessed was displayed with great effectiveness.

The guests arrived in gay, and festive array, a dazzling company. I think I can see Belshazzar, boastful, proud and arrogant, as he took his place as a royal host, his voluptuous eyes scanning the brilliant and beautiful scene before him with unbounded satisfaction.

He drank freely of the wine that was served in abundance. As the meal progressed, the king, as well as many of his guests, became intoxicated and the old saying became true, “When wine goes in the wits go out.” His crazed mind sought some new and unique diversion.

“Ha! I have it!” I think he said to himself, and calling a servant he commanded, “Bring out the golden vessels that were brought from the Temple in Jerusalem. Let us drink to our gods from them.”

What blasphemy! Thus to use the vessels made for the sacrifices to Jehovah in the Jewish service!

The sacred cups were brought in, filled with wine, and passed from guest to guest. Lords, ladies, princes, the king, and his wives, in their drunken debauch, drank from them and praised not Jehovah, God, but the gods of gold, silver, brass, iron, wood, and stone.

It was enough. The cup of the wrath of Almighty God was full to the brim.

Look! What is that?

The fingers of a man's hand were writing upon the wall of the banqueting hall. Sobered for the moment, the king's face grew pale with fear, and his body shook with terror.

He arose from his seat, and with both hands holding his head, cried aloud for the wise men, the astrologers, and magicians to come and tell him the meaning of the writing.

Promptly they stood before him and the king said—

“Whosoever shall read this writing, and show me the interpretation thereof, shall be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about his neck, and shall be third ruler in my kingdom.”

Wise men though they professed to be, not one could read the writing. Perhaps it was in Hebrew and not in Chaldaic.

The countenance of the king betrayed his increasing fear. The guests were astonished and I imagine an awful hush fell upon the whole assembly. Just at this moment the queen, who had been told of the mysterious writing, entered the banqueting hall.

Very evidently this was the dowager queen, the widow of Nebuchadnezzar and grandmother of Belshazzar, who had refused to be present at the drunken orgy.

How gracious and beautiful she must have looked as she earnestly said,

“O king, live forever! Do not be troubled and do not be fearful. There is a man in your kingdom who can interpret the writing. When your father, King Nebuchadnezzar, was living, he made this man master of all of his wise men, for in him was a most excellent spirit of wisdom and understanding. He was especially good at interpreting dreams but also could explain hard sentences and clear away clouds of doubt. The king called him “Belteshazzar” but his name was Daniel.

“Call Daniel, and he can interpret the message upon the wall.”

I think Daniel, now an old man, was surprised to be called into the king's presence. Probably for some years he had been set aside because of his age and was not known to the younger members of the court.

I imagine I can see him as he enters the banqueting hall. Older? Yes, but alert, keen of mind, pleasant of face, and still possessing the same charming personality that so characterized his earlier years.

With a steady step he followed his escort into the presence of the king who addressed him thus:

“Now, here is this writing on the wall which none of my wise men can interpret for me, but I am told that you can do so. If you can read the writing and tell me what it means then I’ll clothe you with scarlet and put a gold chain around your neck and make you third ruler in my kingdom.”

Very modestly Daniel said, “Thank you, but keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to another. However, I will read the writing for you and make known the meaning.”

In the language of that day there was no word for grandfather, the word father being used for both. Nebuchadnezzar was Belshazzar’s grandfather but he called him father.

Daniel continued, *“O king, the most high God gave your father, Nebuchadnezzar, a kingdom, and majesty, and glory and honor; and for the majesty he gave him, all peoples, nations and languages trembled and feared before him; whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down.*

“When his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was put down from his throne and they took his glory from him;

“His reason was taken away and he imagined he was an animal of the fields. He ate grass like the oxen and lived under the open sky until the time came when he was willing to acknowledge that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men and that he appointed to rule whomsoever he chose.

“You, his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all of these things; but you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of God’s house in here this night and you, your lords, your wives, and all of your guests have drunk wine from them; not only that, but in open defiance you have praised the gods of gold, silver, brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not nor hear, nor know; and the God in whose hand is your very breath, and who controls all of your doings, you have not glorified.”

Just think of that, the breath of this wicked king, now foul not alone with wine but with blasphemous and filthy words was nevertheless in God’s hands. His wicked ways and ungodly doings were all to end in God’s own time.

Then Daniel read the writing on the wall. He said:

“God sent this hand and the writing is MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.

“Mene—interpreted means, God hath numbered your kingdom and finished it.

“Tekel—You are weighed in the balances and found wanting.

“Upharsin, or Peres—Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and the Persians.”

It was as though Daniel said, “Just at this time when you have set yourself to defy the God of heaven, even though your past experience taught you to know better, God has sent you a message. He says, ‘I have settled up the affairs of your kingdom and finished it. I have weighed your deeds in the balances and you are short. Your kingdom is even now divided and I have given it to the Medes and Persians.’”

Did Belshazzar believe these words from God? No, I do not think he did, for he gave commands for Daniel to receive all of the gifts promised him and to be made third ruler in his kingdom although God has just told him that he had no kingdom. It had been given to another.

The days of Belshazzar’s reign were filled with wickedness of every kind and yet the king and all of his subjects boasted of prosperous times. They felt secure behind their walls. They had great wealth and were pleasure mad. They defied the God of Daniel and believed not His word.

Now let us look at the army that is encamped around the great city wall of Babylon. The trench they have been digging is finished. It began north of the wall where the River Euphrates entered the city.

“General, why are we waiting? Is not all in readiness for the last move?”

“Yes, the trench is done and I heard today that King Belshazzar is having a big celebration tonight, and that is the opportunity for which I have been waiting. He drinks liquor like a fish, and he and his guests will be in a drunken stupor by midnight. Our armies will enter the city tonight.”

As darkness settled, the soldiers opened the flood-gate and turned the course of the river away from the city, and in a few hours the tile-bottomed bed of the Euphrates, as it passed through the city, was dry. Some careless gatekeeper had forgotten to close the gate over the river and thus, swiftly and without hindrance, the army of the Medes and Persians entered and took possession of Babylon. True to God’s word, whether they believed it or not, in that night was King Belshazzar slain and his kingdom given to another.

Today, as the end of the age approaches, men are doing much as King Belshazzar did, living in self-gratification and pleasure, regardless of God’s warnings.

And yet, this story may not be finished until the Lord Jesus calls His Church to meet Him in the air. Then tribulation, sorrow, and wretchedness will fall upon those left upon the earth.

~ end of chapter 6 ~

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