

# STRANGERS + EXILES: THE HANDWRITING IS ON THE WALL

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We've heard it said, "the more things change; the more things stay the same". Although it may be difficult at times to understand the culture that Daniel lived in and especially as an exile in a pagan kingdom. But in reality the challenge is the same that we experience today in our world. Namely, how do we live righteously and faithfully before God in a culture that is so opposed to God and our faith?

Daniel was absolutely convinced that despite being in exile, God was still sovereign, all powerful, fully in control and would use the worst of circumstances for his purposes. Daniel knew, no matter what he was seeing or experiencing, God was faithful and he could be trusted.

For Daniel and the others who stayed faithful to God, the result was clear and simple; they experienced persecution and had great influence.

King Nebuchadnezzar is now dead and his Grandson King Belshazzar is on the throne. He had a front row seat to his Grandfathers rule, the glory, the overwhelming power and dominance as well as his pride and arrogance and the consequences. Most believe that Daniel is probably in his 70's and he has served God and this kingdom faithfully. He has a flawless reputation and will be called on one more time to interpret for another king.

The powerful armies of the Medes and Persians are outside their walls, so what do they do, they throw a drunken orgy... this tells us volumes about this king and those around him, let's read:

*"King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them. While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. So they brought in the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.*

*Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote. His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his legs became weak and his knees were knocking.*

*The king summoned the enchanters, astrologers and diviners. Then he said to these wise men of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing and tells me what it means will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around his neck, and he will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom." (Daniel 5:1-7)*

*Then Daniel answered the king, "You may keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else. Nevertheless, I will read the writing for the king and tell him what it means.*

*"Your Majesty, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendor. Because of the high position he gave him, all the nations and peoples of every language dreaded and feared him. Those the king wanted to put to death, he put to death; those he wanted to spare, he spared; those he wanted to promote, he promoted; and those he wanted to humble, he humbled. But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory. He was driven away from people and given the mind of an animal; he lived with the wild donkeys and ate grass like the ox; and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and sets over them anyone he wishes.*

*"But you, Belshazzar, his son, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this. Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. You had the goblets from his temple brought to you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines drank wine from them. You praised the gods of silver and gold,*

*of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways. Therefore he sent the hand that wrote the inscription.*

*"This is the inscription that was written:*

*mene, mene, tekel, parsin*

*"Here is what these words mean:*

*Mene: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end.*

*Tekel: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting.*

*Peres: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians."*

*Then at Belshazzar's command, Daniel was clothed in purple, a gold chain was placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom.*

*That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, at the age of sixty-two." (Daniel 5:17-31)*

If there wasn't enough pending tragedy outside their walls, now they took; "silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them" not a good idea!

Suddenly fingers of a human appears and writes on the wall. The king's reaction tells it all, he was terrified, the passage implies that he lost more than his balance, this is very common in extreme cases of terror for humans.

So Daniel will interpret the writing, it not only applies to this king but says volumes for all of us.

## **1. WE HAVE A LIMITED AMOUNT OF DAYS ON THIS EARTH**

### **Mene: "Numbered"**

We need to look at every day as a gift. When we have a lot (or think we do) we can squander, but when we don't have much it will usually be more precious to us. The Psalmist told us to: "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom".

**"The issue isn't about how much time we have, but what we do with it"**

Daniel's telling this king, you watched this happen to your Grandfather, yet you didn't learn from it. You knew the penalty that he paid and now you will too.

It is a precious thing to have people with white and gray hair in our gatherings. (Okay I'm not objective on this one) It's so important to learn from the lessons of the past that will help us with the opportunities that are in front of us.

*"Gray hair is a crown of splendor; it is attained in the way of righteousness." (Proverb 16:31)*

**"All the lessons are in the past and all the opportunities are in the future".**

*"LORD, remind me how brief my time on earth will be. Remind me that my days are numbered, and that my life is fleeing away. My life is no longer than the width of my hand. An entire lifetime is just a moment to you; human existence is but a breath." (Psalm 39:4-5 NLT)*

## **2. THE SUM OF OUR DAYS WILL BE MEASURED**

### **Tekel: You have been weighed in the balance and found wanting**

Even for those of us who have come to faith in Jesus and are walking in his righteousness, we still need to hear this question: What are you doing with the time you have been given.

*"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."  
(Matthew 6:33)*

### 3. HEEDING GOD'S WORD LEADS TO LIFE

#### Peres: Broken

We see the "finger of God" throughout the scriptures. It doesn't matter what God writes on, a stone tablet, a wall, in the dirt, on our hearts, or on paper. It is his Word which is powerful and we need to take heed and obey, because his Word leads to life.

*"The Lord said to Moses, "Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke." (Exodus 34:1)*

*"But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger." (John 8:6b)*

*"But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." (Luke 11:20)*

*"You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts." (2 Corinthians 3:3)*

*"In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation." (2 Corinthians 6:2)*

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss any similarities you may see with Daniel living in this pagan culture and what you're experiencing in your life. As they walked faithful to God they experienced two things; persecution and had great influence, what does this say to you?
2. Maybe you have pondered this before, but discuss what point #1 means to you, both personally and spiritually; "we have a limited amount of days on this earth".
3. Tied to question #2, does this quote challenge you in any way; "The issue isn't about how much time we have, but what we do with it"
4. Point #2, was sobering to me, I know that my name is written in the Book of life because of God's grace and the sacrificial blood of Jesus. But again it was sobering to think about; "the sum of our days will be measured", your thoughts or response?
5. King Belshazzar, did not learn from the lessons of the past, neither did he heed God's Word. As you think about people you have seen in your life, identify those who heeded God's Word and those who did not. What were some of the consequences or blessings in their lives?