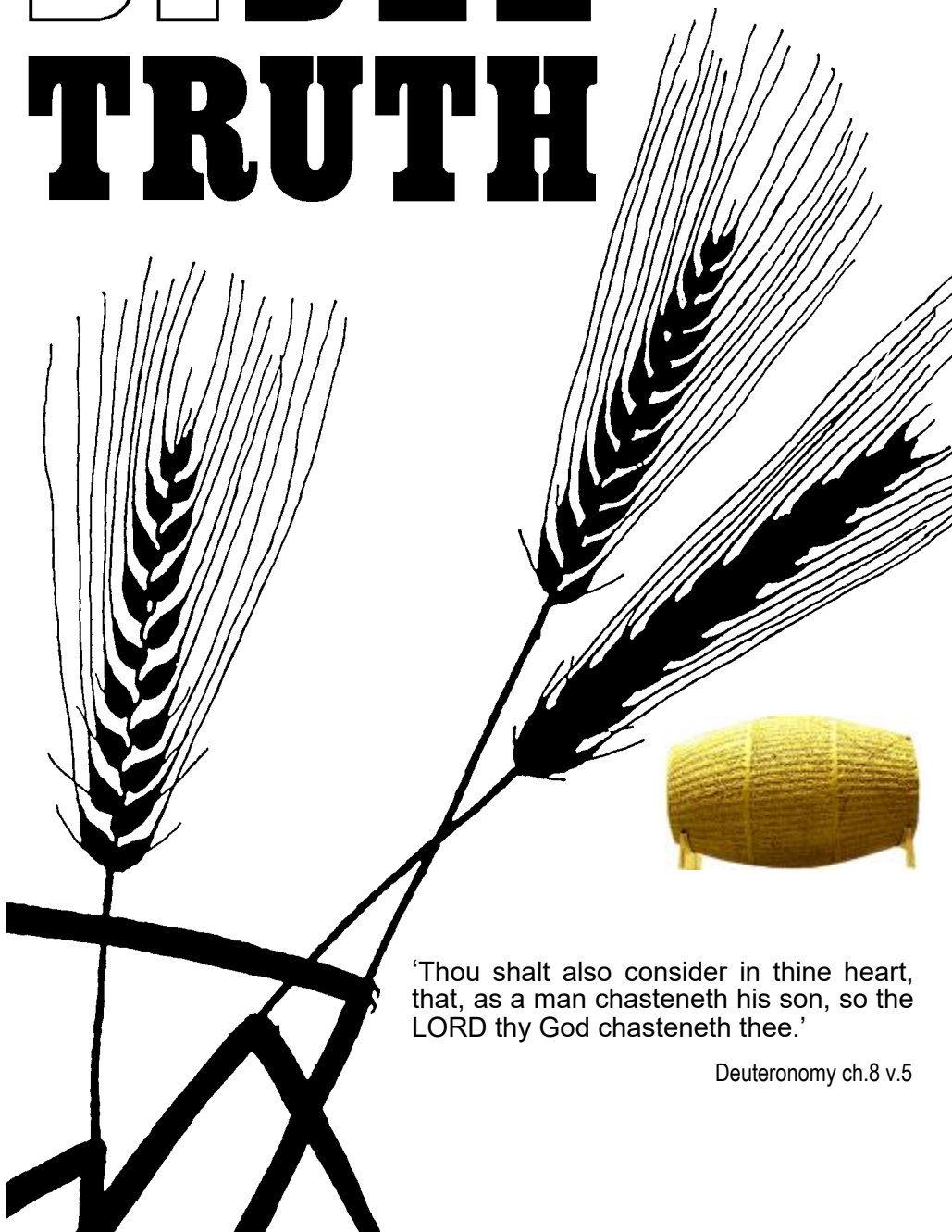


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‘Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the LORD thy God chasteneth thee.’

Deuteronomy ch.8 v.5

The Writing on the Wall

by Audrey Harrison
(from *Latter Rain* N° 59)

(Read Daniel chapter 5)

The banquet was in full swing as Belshazzar and his 1000 nobles drank wine. The golden goblets and dishes gleamed on the tables - these were the treasures pillaged from the temple in Jerusalem when that city was invaded and left in ruin by the victorious Babylonian army some years earlier. These treasures from the Temple which had been used in the worship of the Jewish God Jehovah were now being desecrated by king Belshazzar who with his guests was in a high mood of celebration and self-exultation as he and his lords 'drank wine, praised the gods of gold, of silver, of brass, of wood, and of stone' from these vessels.

But, suddenly the king looked. He couldn't believe it! A disembodied hand, the fingers of a human hand, had suddenly appeared and it was writing on the wall and the king watched it in disbelief as it wrote. The king's knees shook and knocked together and he turned pale. The message completed, the hand disappeared, but the writing remained. Four words and only four words were written.

MENE MENE TEKEL UPHARSIN

Strange words! What did they mean? He ordered his astrologers, the Chaldeans, the enchanters and the diviners to interpret the message, promising great rewards to the person who could do so.

But these 'wise' men were as baffled as the king who was becoming more and more frustrated and terrified.

The Queen overheard what was happening and at the risk of disfavour, or even the loss of her life, told the king about a man named Daniel whom his father King Nebuchadnezzar had made master over the magicians and advisers. So Daniel was brought to the king and the king said to Daniel,

‘And I have heard of thee, that thou canst make interpretations, and dissolve doubts: now if thou canst read the writing, and make known to me the interpretation thereof, thou shall be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about thy neck, and thou shalt be the third ruler in the kingdom.

Then Daniel answered and said before the king, Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation.’

Daniel ch.5 vv 16-17

He then reminded Belshazzar how his father had been proud but had been humbled and had come to recognise God. Despite knowing this he, Belshazzar, had ignored the facts.

‘But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified:’.

Daniel ch.5 v.23

- MENE - God hath numbered thy Kingdom and finished it. This word is repeated to emphasise the point.
- TEKEL - Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.
- UPHARSIN - Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.

Three charges were brought against Belshazzar.

- He sinned not through ignorance but through pride and disobedience;
- He defied God by using the sacred vessels;
- He did not honour God but praised idols.

The charges brought against Belshazzar are still very prevalent in the world today and could be brought against us especially that of pride which can be a real barrier to obedience.

What an ending to a feast! Daniel was rewarded as Belshazzar had promised but in that night was Belshazzar king of the Chaldeans slain and Darius the Median took the kingdom.

The Book of Daniel Chapter 5 records this event very well and is interesting reading. It also gave rise to the popular saying 'The writing is on the wall' when it is the end of a situation.

Some Facts about Belshazzar

His name is also Belsharusur in the Neo-Babylonian language, Baltasar and Balthasar in the Greek language. Belshazzar died in 539 BC killed by the Persians. References to Belshazzar were found in Babylonian cuneiform inscriptions discovered in 1854. The Cylinder of Nabonidus at the British Museum mentions Belshazzar.



Another cuneiform inscription known as the Verse Account of Nabonidus also mentions Belshazzar and the events specifically recorded in the Book of Daniel.

Referred to as the son of Nebuchadnezzar he was actually the eldest son of Nabonidus (king of Babylon from 555-539 and his wife Nitocris who was a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar) thus making Nebuchadnezzar Belshazzar's maternal grandfather. Daniel records that at the end of his reign his kingdom was affected by famine and economic problems. Babylon fell to the Persian general Gobyras on 12th October, 539 and the Persian king Cyrus II entered the city 17 days later.