

The Very Scary Hand

by Susan Verstraete



A long time ago in a city called Babylon, there lived a rich and powerful king named Belshazzar. Belshazzar's grandfather had been a rich and powerful king, too. His name was Nebuchadnezzar. Long before our story begins, King Nebuchadnezzar had sent his army to a place called Judah, where the people worshipped the one true God. Nebuchadnezzar commanded his army to take away all the riches in Judah, the gold and silver, the fine clothing, and even the smartest and strongest young men

to become servants of the king. Sometime after King Nebuchadnezzar died, his grandson Belshazzar became king. All the riches and servants his grandfather had gathered now belonged to him.

Now I'm sorry to tell you that Belshazzar behaved badly as king. Instead of thanking the one true God for his great riches, his kingdom and his family, he held a feast in honor of the gods that his country worshipped. (They weren't really gods at all, of course, only statues made of gold, silver, wood or stone that couldn't hear or see or know anything.) At the feast, Belshazzar told his servants to bring the special cups and dishes that his grandfather's army had taken from the temple of the one true God in Judah. In front of 1,000 guests at his feast, Belshazzar used these very cups to drink wine in honor of the false gods.

Suddenly, Belshazzar saw something so frightening that his knees knocked together, his legs became weak and all the color drained from his face. A hand (just a hand with no body attached) began to write on the wall opposite the lamp in the room where the feast was held. Wouldn't you be frightened to see such a thing? The fingers of the hand wrote four words on the wall, and then disappeared.

Belshazzar called for the wise men of the kingdom to tell him what the words meant, but none of them could read the message left by the hand! Now the king was even *more* frightened and his face became white as snow. He called for Daniel, a very old wise man who was, long ago, one of the young men kidnapped in Judah. Daniel had not forgotten the one true God; he worshipped and prayed to Him even though he was far from home and from the temple of God.

God told Daniel what the handwriting on the wall meant, and Daniel told the king. God saw what the king had done at his feast and had judged him. God would take his kingdom away. That very night, the king was murdered and someone else became the king of Babylon.

King Belshazzar had a very good reason to be afraid of the hand that wrote on the wall, didn't he? When I was a little girl, I remember being afraid of lots of things that were not real, like a monster in my closet or a wild animal under my bed. I also remember being frightened of things that couldn't hurt me, like loud noises and bad people on television. It's silly to be afraid of those things, isn't it? But it isn't silly to be afraid of God, if you are not obeying Him. The Bible says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

But there is good news for people who try hard to please God because they love Him and believe in Him. They know that they could never be perfect. They know they will still sin, even though they work hard not to. But they trust that God's Son Jesus has taken away the punishment for all the bad things they do against God. Jesus died on the cross to pay for those sins in their place. Because of Jesus, they do not need to worry about God destroying them for their wickedness, like He did King Belshazzar. Because of Jesus, they do not need to worry about going to hell.

To people who love and obey Him, who believe that Jesus saves them even though they are not perfect, God said, "Do not fear, for I am with you. Do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

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