

# BY THE WATERS OF BABYLON

*A Play for Third Grade*

by

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**Author's note:**

This play is one of a group of plays written for the classes I taught at the Rudolf Steiner School in New York from 1982–1991 and at The Hartsbrook School in Hadley, MA from 1991-1999. The theme of each play was chosen to address a particular class's issues and interests, and the characters were rendered with specific students in mind.

When other teachers and classes have performed my plays, I have encouraged them to adapt or revise the play as necessary to derive the maximum pedagogical value from it. Other class's performances have showed me artistic dimensions of my plays that I could not have imagined, and I have always been grateful to see that my work has taken on new life.

I have posted my plays on the Online Waldorf Library as Microsoft Word documents so that they can easily be downloaded and changed. I have purposely given few stage directions so that teachers and students will make the plays more their own.

Dear Colleagues: I hope that these plays will serve you well as inspiration, as a scaffold on which to build your own creation, or as a script to make your own. Please don't hesitate to take whatever liberties you wish so that the play may serve you in your work. If you have questions, don't hesitate to phone or email me.

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## **Cast of Characters**

(in order of appearance)

Nebuchadnezzar, King of Chaldea

Captain

First Counselor

Second Counselor

Third Counselor

Fourth Counselor

Daniel

Shadrach

Meschach

Abednego

Nebuchadnezzar's Queen

The Son of God

Belshazzar, King of Chaldea

First Soldier

Second Soldier

Third Soldier

Fourth Soldier

First Lady

Second Lady

Third Lady

Fourth Lady

King Belshazzar's Queen

Darius, King of the Medes

First Counselor

Second Counselor

Third Counselor

Fourth Counselor

Assorted Lions

King Darius's Queen

The Angel of the Lord

(The Company enters and sings "By the Waters of Babylon.")

By the waters of Babylon  
We lay down and wept  
And wept for thee, Zion.  
We remember, we remember,  
We remember thee Zion.

Chorus:           Judea lay in ruins,  
                    Her temple treasures gone,  
                    Her people scattered or enslaved  
                    And brought to Babylon.

                    And there in bitter bondage  
                    God's chosen people wept,  
                    Yet they did not forget their Lord  
                    But His commandments kept.

                    The king of all Chaldea  
                    Rejoiced in victory,  
                    Until one night he had a dream  
                    That fled his memory.

## ACT I

In the palace of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Chaldea.

### Scene 1

First Priest:       What did'st thou dream, O noble king,  
                    That does torment thee so?

Second Priest:     Pray tell us quick, leave nothing out  
                    That we might need to know.

Third Priest:       Trust us to see what troubles thee,  
                    What weighs upon thy mind.

Fourth Priest:      No doubt the cure we will procure,  
                    The remedy we'll find.

First Priest:       So tell us now  
Second Priest:      What thou did'st dream,  
Third Priest:       And we shall say  
Fourth Priest:      What it doth mean.

Nebuchadnezzar:  I cannot tell.

Four Priests:      Thou can'st not tell?

Nebuchadnezzar: I do not know.

Four Priests: Thou dost not know?

Nebuchadnezzar: I can't recall

Four Priests: Nothing at all?

Nebuchadnezzar: What are ye—parrots in a cage  
To chatter in this wise?  
Or are ye priests and counselors  
We trust us to advise?

Begone! But if not one of you  
Can solve this mystery,  
Then every wise man in my land  
Shall executed be.

to the Captain: Go summon every counselor  
Who has not yet appeared,  
And find those captive Hebrew youths  
And quickly bring them here.

## Scene 2

(The Captain brings Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego before the king.)

Daniel and boys: O Nebuchadnezzar, King of Kings,  
Behold thy servants true;  
We came in haste, your majesty,  
What would'st thou have us do?

Nebuchadnezzar: A dream had I in darkest night  
From which I woke with fear,  
My wisest men have naught to say,  
Thus have we called thee here.

Daniel: The dream the king cannot recall,  
That wise men cannot know,  
Can only be revealed by God,  
For all things can He show.

Chorus: Mighty the image that stood tall before thee—  
Beautiful, brilliant, and bright,  
Red shone the gold of its terrible visage  
Gleaming with radiant light.

The breast and the arms were of sparkling silver  
Of brass were the thighs and the waist;  
The strong, sturdy legs had been fashioned of iron,  
The feet were of iron and clay.

Then forth came a stone that no hand had yet sculpted  
And smote the clay feet asunder;  
And the image of iron, brass, silver, and gold,  
Fell down with the sound of thunder.

And the pieces, like chaff on a threshing-room floor,  
Were blown by the wind far and nigh;  
And the stone was transformed to a mountain peak  
That towered as high as the sky.

Nebuchadnezzar: How can this be, O Daniel,  
That thou dost know our dream?  
Thou hast done what no other could—  
Now tell what it doth mean.

Chorus: The head of bright gold is a sign of thy kingdom  
Which shines with such splendor and grace,  
But even as silver than gold is less precious,  
A lesser king shall take thy place.

The brass and the iron are realms that will follow  
Then slowly grow weak and decay,  
And the realm that comes last will be full of division  
Like feet made of iron and clay.

But the stone of the Lord that can conquer all others  
And fills all the earth with its height,  
Is a sign that God's kingdom and rule are eternal  
And fill all the earth with His light.

Nebuchadnezzar: Now can we see why thou dost call  
Thy god the Lord of Kings,  
For great must be the strength and power  
Of him who knows all things.

For that thou hast served me so well  
This ring take from my hand,  
And from this day, thou and thy friends  
Shall help me rule my land.

(Nebuchadnezzar, the Captain, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego exit.)



Scene 2

Second Priest: Hast thou not proclaimed,  
O most steadfast of kings  
To all who abide in this land,  
That everyone must to thy gold statue bow  
Or be slain by the king's command?

Third Priest: But if thou only knew, O king,  
Who dares to disobey—  
Thou would'st indeed not hesitate  
To punish them today.

First Priest: Slighted art thou, O king, every morn,  
Dishonored art thou every day;  
Thy four Hebrew counselors treat thee with scorn,  
Because they don't care what you say.

Nebuchadnezzar: Take care that thou dost not accuse  
Unless thou speakest true,  
For if thy words be proved false  
Thou shalt have much to rue.

Fourth Priest: Indeed, O royal majesty,  
Most righteous of all kings!  
We would not deign to trouble thee  
With vain imaginings!

Nebuchadnezzar  
to the Captain: Bring Shadrach here to me at once  
And Meshach and Abednego;

to the Queen: If only Daniel were here  
That I the truth might know.

(The Captain fetches the three youths.)

Scene 3

Nebuchadnezzar: Prove now thy loyalty and love  
That I my trust regain;  
Come bow before the statue high  
That stands upon the plain.

Shadrach: Ask not for what we may not give;  
Pray set another task.

Meschach: Our God forbids us, as we live,  
To do what thou dost ask.

Nebuchadnezzar: Thy God, thy God, what can he do?  
Can he protect thee now?  
For in the fire thou shalt burn  
If ye refuse to bow.

Abednego: Yet we may not thy will fulfill  
Nor do what thou command.

Three boys: May God on high deliver us  
And shield us from thy hand.

(The Captain takes away Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.)

Second Priest: Was it not as we said to thee?

Third Priest: These men thy will do spurn.

Fourth Priest: They disobey the king's decree.

First Priest: And for that they must burn!

#### Scene 4

(Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are put into the fire. As the fire rages, the Son of God appears and raises his hand in a gesture of protection.)

Captain: Did we not cast but three bound men  
Into the furnace hot?  
Yet there a fourth I see as well;  
My eyes deceive me not!

Queen: It is the very Son of God  
Who raises up his arm;  
So that his servants do not burn  
Nor suffer any harm.

Nebuchadnezzar: Come forth, come forth, ye righteous men,  
Come forth from out the flames!  
For lo, thy God reveals himself  
And thus his might proclaims.

Let all who witness here this sight  
Forever know and tell—  
No greater God can be than this:  
The God of Israel.

Who shall His chosen folk defend  
By His almighty arm.  
And save all those who worship Him  
And shield them from all harm.

ACT III

In the palace of Belshazzar, king of Chaldea.

Scene 1

First Soldier: Hail to the king of Chaldea!

All: Hail!

Second Soldier: Ever our king shall prevail!

All: Hail!

Third Soldier: Hail to our strong fearless leader!

All: Hail!

Fourth Soldier: Hail all ye people, say hail!

All: Hail!

(The guests drink the toast.)

First Lady: Hail to the lord of our nation!

All: Hail!

Second Lady: Hail to the darling of Baal!

All: Hail!

Third Lady: Hail to the lord of creation!

All: Hail!

Fourth Lady: Hail all ye people, say hail!

All: Hail!

(The company drinks the toast.)

Belshazzar: My loyal subjects, good and true,  
Assembled in this hall—  
I thank thee for thy loving praise,  
I thank thee one and all.

Though modesty might make me shun  
Such gross exaggeration,  
My sense of truth compels me to  
Accept thy adulation.

So let us feast and celebrate  
Our recent victories,  
With might and main we have prevailed  
And crushed our enemies.

First Soldier: This victory feast now brings to mind  
Those glorious former days,  
When Nebuchadnezzar too fought wars  
And won his share of praise.

Second Soldier: His armies conquered Judah's land  
And garnered wealth untold,  
They even took the temple cups  
Of silver and of gold.

Third Soldier: And did their mighty Hebrew god  
Come to his folk's defense?  
He could not even stop our men  
Who brought his treasures hence!

Fourth Soldier: I know how we can show those Jews  
Whose God has greater might—  
Come let us drink our victory toast  
From those same cups tonight.

Belshazzar: Ah, what an insult that would be  
To this God of the Jews,  
Who cannot keep his treasures safe  
Or stop them being used.

(Belshazzar gestures to the servants to bring in the vessels.)

Queen: Beware, O king, that thou dost not  
Bring down upon thy head  
The wrath of the Judah's god on high  
By all that thou hast said.

Belshazzar: Be not ridiculous, my queen,  
For we have naught to fear;  
I shall be first to drink the wine  
From these gold vessels here.

(The servants pour the wine and Belshazzar leads the toast.)

Belshazzar: Hail to the gods of Chaldea!

All: Hail!

Belshazzar: None can be greater than Baal!

All: Hail!

Belshazzar: Cursed be the god of Judea!

All: Hail!

Belshazzar: Hail all ye people, say hail!

All: Hail!

(All start to drink the toast but stop as soon as they see the Angel entering the hall.)

First Lady: Behold, O king! What god is this  
That comes into our hall?

Second Lady: Behold, O king! What holy hand  
Is writing on wall!

Third Lady : Behold the letters writ in flame,  
Behold their blinding light!

Fourth Lady: Behold the message they proclaim,  
Behold this holy sight!

Belshazzar: But who can read these letters strange,  
The like we've never seen;  
For sure this is a holy sign,  
But O, what can it mean?

Queen: I fear that these words writ flame  
Portend the very worst:  
That Judah's God proclaims our doom  
And that our king is cursed.

(The guests leave. Belshazzar and the Queen are alone.)

Queen: I know a man, O noble king,  
Who might this message read,  
Perhaps he can relieve thy mind  
And help us in our need.

(The Queen exits and brings in Daniel.)

Belshazzar: Behold the writing on the wall,  
O thou whom men call wise;  
Dost thou know what is written here?  
Can'st these words recognize?

(Daniel nods.)

Belshazzar: If thou wilt tell what here is writ  
And its interpretation,  
I promise to reward thee well  
And raise thy humble station.

Daniel: Thou mayest keep thy kingly gifts  
For I need no reward,  
But I shall read the holy script,  
The words of God, our Lord.

Chorus: O haughty Belshazzar, high king of Chaldea  
Who rules with such power and might,  
The God of our fathers, who reigns in the heavens  
Announces thy doom here tonight.

For thou hast rejected the Lord for thy idols,  
And thou hast insulted His name,  
Defiling the vessels that served in His temple  
So hear what the Lord doth proclaim:

Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin  
So the words do state!  
Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin,  
God proclaims thy fate!

Belshazzar: What does this mean? Pray tell me more,  
Though now I ask in fear.

Daniel: I will say what the Lord hath writ  
And make their meaning clear.

Mene: Thy days are numbered.  
Tekel: Thou hast been judged.  
Upharsin: Thy realm will be destroyed.

(Belshazzar falls to his knees and raises his arms to the Lord.)

Belshazzar: O Lord, O Lord, I do implore  
And pray thee stay thy hand;  
From this day forth I will thee serve  
If thou preserve my land.

(Daniel shakes his head and walks away, leaving Belshazzar alone. Soldiers of King Darius come and take him away.)

ACT IV

In the palace of Darius, king of the Medes and ruler of Chaldea.

Scene 1

Daniel: Hail Darius, victorious,  
Behold thy servant true.  
Why am I summoned here today?  
What would'st thou have me do?

King Darius: We know that thou can'st prophesy,  
And that thou art most wise.  
So we would have thee use thy gifts  
Thy new king to advise.

Daniel: I will thee serve as best I can,  
Yet I must make it clear,  
That my first duty is to God  
For Him I hold most dear.

(Daniel, the King, and the Queen exit.)

Scene 2

First Counselor: Now did ye hear that pretty speech,  
And did ye mark it well?  
The king now spurns his own wise men  
And honors Daniel!

Second Counselor: The treasures of rich Babylon  
From our hands soon shall slip,  
If Daniel serves Darius,  
And gets him in his grip!

Third Counselor: I've had my share of masters,  
But this will never do;  
I never thought I'd have to take  
My orders from that Jew!

Fourth Counselor: Words will not help this matter more,  
Let actions take their place;  
We shall discredit Daniel  
And bring him to disgrace.

(The four Counselors confer together until the King enters.)

Scene 2

First Counselor: O Darius, we have a plan  
To honor thee today:

Second Counselor: Let us proclaim thou art a god  
To whom all men must pray.

Third Counselor: For thou would'st not be less a king  
Than Belshazzar of late,

Fourth Counselor: Whom all men worshiped as their god  
And paid him honor great.

First Counselor Thy subjects would all worship thee  
And all would thee adore.

Second Counselor: Thou shalt be god as well as king,  
No man could ask for more!

Third Counselor: And those who pray to other gods  
Shall their false gods deny.

Fourth Counselor: Or in a lion's den be cast  
And there be left to die!

King Darius: No king this honor could refuse  
A god thus to be named;  
So we will do as ye do suggest  
And it shall be proclaimed  
That Darius, the conqueror  
Declares his first decree;  
From this day forth it is the law,  
Which never changed shall be.

Scene 3

(The four Counselors bring Daniel before the King.)

Four Counselors: Come see, O king, come see the man  
Who will not pray to thee;  
But worships still his Hebrew God  
And spurns the king's decree.

King Darius to his Counselors:

I now perceive thy subtle trick  
My friend thus to betray;  
Ye knew when ye suggested it  
One man who would not pray.

to Daniel:           So blinded was I by my pride  
I simply did not see  
That thou could'st not both serve thy God  
And follow my decree.  
Yet I am bound by my own law  
And I must thee condemn;  
I pray thy God will thee protect  
Within the lion's den.

(Daniel is led into the lion's den. The lions rage around him, but when the Angel of the Lord raises his arm, they become calm and Daniel stands safely among them.)

Queen:               Behold, O king, the righteous man  
Who would his God obey;  
The lions lie down at his feet  
And seek him not to slay.

King Darius:        Come forth, come forth, O faithful friend,  
Come forth, O Daniel!  
For God this day has saved thy life  
Thy love rewarded well.

As for my faithless counselors,  
Who did me so mislead,  
Let them be cast into the den  
To rue their evil deed!

King Darius:        Hear now the word of Darius,  
My subjects, one and all;  
And this decree shall not be changed  
Whatever might befall.

Chorus:             Let every person in this land  
Forever honor well  
The Lord of heaven and of earth:  
The God of Israel.

Who shall His chosen folk defend  
By His almighty arm.  
And save all those who worship Him  
And shield them from all harm.

(The Company exits singing "Shalom Chaverim.")

Shalom chaverim, shalom chaverim,  
Shalom, shalom,  
Lehit rahot, lehit rahot,  
Shalom, shalom.