

Daniel 5:1-31
The Writing on the Wall

NKJ Daniel 5:1 Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in the presence of the thousand.

2 While he tasted the wine, Belshazzar gave the command to bring the gold and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple which had been in Jerusalem, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them.

3 Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken from the temple of the house of God which had been in Jerusalem; and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them.

4 They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone.

5 In the same hour the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote.

6 Then the king's countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other.

7 The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. The king spoke, saying to the wise men of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing, and tells me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around his neck; and he shall be the third ruler in the kingdom."

8 Now all the king's wise men came, but they could not read the writing, or make known to the king its interpretation.

9 Then King Belshazzar was greatly troubled, his countenance was changed, and his lords were astonished.

We will be covering Chapter 5 of Daniel in two separate sermons, this sermon will consider God's working in this chapter in terms of its broader application to Babylon and to Israel, and how these events fit into the history of redemption. In the next sermon I will be focusing more on King Belshazzar, and the personal applications of these events.

So with that said, let's spend some time this morning looking at the historical context for the events we read about in this chapter, because I think you'll find that not only are they fascinating, they shed a lot of light on what is happening here, and the more you know about what is going on, the sharper the application of these events will become.

As you read this account, keep in mind you are reading history, not some legend or morality tale. And along those lines, did you know that at one time scholars who doubted that the Bible is the word of God used to use the events of this chapter as evidence that the Bible was in error? They used to say, "look the Bible says that at this time Belshazzar was king. Well we know from other historical works that the ruler of the Babylonian empire in 539 BC was a man by the name of Nabonidus. There was no Belshazzar, the Bible must have gotten it wrong! See, see, what did we tell you! Yet more proof there is no God!" Then archeologists began to dig up Babylonian cuneiform tablets from this period with the name Belshazzar, and the inscription, SON OF THE KING.

What actually turned out to be the case, was that yet again, the Bible was correct and the historians had been wrong.

You see, we know the year of these events exactly, it is 539 B.C. Daniel has been an exile in Babylon for 47 years. Nebuchadnezzar the great, whose amazing conversion we read about in the last chapter

has been dead since 563 B.C. He was succeeded on the throne by his son-in-law, a man by the name of Nabonidus. Nabonidus, had a son Belshazzar, whose name meant "Bel (the Babylonian false god) protects the King." The Cuneiform histories tell us that this Nabonidus went on a long military campaign into Arabia against the Akkadians, but before he left the same histories tell us that he made his son ruler in his stead in Babylon. Co-regent so to speak, Belshazzar is second in the empire only to his father, which will explain to us why he can only offer to make the successful interpreter of the writing third in the kingdom.

Nabonidus' campaign against the Akkadians was successful and he established his new residence in their capital Tema, in the same way that Constantine moved his residence from Rome to Constantinople. Nabonidus reigns in Tema, His Son reigns in Babylon, everything seems to be going very well for the Babylonians.

But God had other plans, and this is an even greater proof that the Bible is the word of God. You remember he had warned the children of Israel that if they did not repent and turn from their idolatry that he would bring a nation from the north, a boiling pot, which he tells them is Babylon, down upon them to destroy them, and in time he surely did. Babylon was used as God's rod of correction.

But God did not stop there he told them almost 200 years before that happened through Isaiah the prophet that they would be taken away into exile, but then via Jeremiah he told them their exile would only last 70 years.

Jer. 25:11 'And this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

12 ' Then it will come to pass, when seventy years are completed, that I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity,' says the LORD; 'and I will make it a perpetual desolation.

Jer.29:10 For thus says the LORD: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place.

So God promises to destroy Babylon, yes he will use them as his rod of correction against his own apostate people, but he will eventually destroy them for their own pride and their idolatry. The amazing thing is that God even told them who would destroy them:

Isaiah 13:17 " Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, Who will not regard silver; And as for gold, they will not delight in it.

18 Also their bows will dash the young men to pieces, And they will have no pity on the fruit of the womb; Their eye will not spare children.

19 And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, The beauty of the Chaldeans' pride, Will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.

Now weren't those amazingly lucky guesses, almost 200 years before it happened? Oh but it gets better, he also promised in Isaiah that Jerusalem would be rebuilt, and names the King who would rebuild it:

Isaiah 44:28 Who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd, And he shall perform all My pleasure, Saying to Jerusalem, "You shall be built," And to the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid." '

And what was the name of the Persian king who sent Ezra to begin rebuilding Jerusalem and the Temple 70 years after they went into exile? CYRUS the Persian.

Well obviously, I'm being sarcastic, these aren't luck guesses, God who knows the beginning from the end, decreed that these things should come to pass, and He was gracious to tell his prophets to tell the people about them in advance so that they would know what was going on and be comforted and know that while all of these things may seem overwhelming they are all part of God's master plan. In a little while we will read how Daniel reads Jeremiah and is comforted to know, even while he was still in exile in Babylon that after 70 years have passed, Israel will be released from her bondage and Jerusalem will be rebuilt. It is this that gives him the strength to pray and persevere.

And if I can make my first application from that that point, God's word should give you the same kind of confidence in times like these. Yes, the world seems to be boiling over at present, and all the time I hear people dismayed and dispirited or simply fearful that we will utterly destroy ourselves. But Christians, YOU don't have to fear as the world does. YOU, like Daniel, know the end from the beginning because God has told it to you in His Word. Bird-Flu, Meteors, Terrorist Nukes, none of them will bring the world to an end. This world will end at exactly the time God has appointed when His Son, Jesus Christ returns in glory, and while we don't know *when* it will happen *we* do know THAT it will happen, and that that day is nearer with every passing moment.

Well, in Daniel chapter 5, the writing is on the wall for Babylon and Belshazzar both literally and figuratively. Even as they are celebrating this banquet, which was a religious feast dedicated to the false gods of Babylon, the Persian army is at the gates. Although they probably didn't yet know it, the Medo-Persians have already defeated the army of Belshazzar's father Nabonidus and taken Tema. And this very night, God is going to allow them to take mighty Babylon as well.

But why? God tells us that as well, turn in your bibles to Isaiah 14:

Isaiah 14:3 It shall come to pass in the day the LORD gives you rest from your sorrow, and from your fear and the hard bondage in which you were made to serve,

4 that you will take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say: "How the oppressor has ceased, The golden city ceased!

5 The LORD has broken the staff of the wicked, The scepter of the rulers;

6 He who struck the people in wrath with a continual stroke, He who ruled the nations in anger, Is persecuted and no one hinders.

7 The whole earth is at rest and quiet; They break forth into singing.

8 Indeed the cypress trees rejoice over you, And the cedars of Lebanon, Saying, 'Since you were cut down, No woodsman has come up against us.'

9 "Hell from beneath is excited about you, To meet you at your coming; It stirs up the dead for you, All the chief ones of the earth; It has raised up from their thrones All the kings of the nations.

10 They all shall speak and say to you: 'Have you also become as weak as we? Have you become like us?

11 Your pomp is brought down to Sheol, And the sound of your stringed instruments; The maggot is spread under you, And worms cover you.'

12 " How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations!

**13 For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north;
14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.'
15 Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, To the lowest depths of the Pit.**

You remember the pride and idolatry of Nebuchadnezzar? How he exalted himself to the heavens? How he was brought low and repented, and became a believer. Well unfortunately, his people, and his descendents, although they knew of what had happened did not follow him in that.

Instead they turned their back on the God that Nebuchadnezzar had pointed them to in his decrees. They trusted instead in their false gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone. They trusted in their wealth and the mighty walls of Babylon. It is said they had enough supplies in the city, that they thought they could withstand a siege of ten years, surely longer than the Persians could afford to sit outside their massive walls. They even poured their contempt on the true God who had saved Nebuchadnezzar. They called for the sacred vessels from his house and toasted their own idols with them. Their pride and wickedness knew no bounds.

But brothers and sisters, ***do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.*** You see, the Euphrates river flowed through the center of Babylon, it entered into the walls and flowed through a channel. Even as they were partying the Persians were damming the Euphrates before it flowed into the city, redirecting it into other canals, and in a little while the Persian army will march into the city on the dry river bed, and then using ladders they easily scaled the low walls of the canal. Later that evening as the historian John Abbot puts it: ***“Belshazzar was thunderstruck with the announcement made to him in the midst of one of his feasts that the Persians were in complete and full possession of the city.”***

Brothers and Sisters, God can cast down any nation that chooses to trust in its own strength and in created things rather than in the creator of all things. Babylon was a superpower, they believed themselves to be invincible. And yet in one evening, Belshazzar and his empire were destroyed and cast down to hell. They would not turn to the God of their forefather.

Brothers and Sisters, I say this with fear and trembling, but there are far to many similarities between Babylon and modern day America. How many decrees of our forefathers directed us to the God of creation, and yet now we are told that while we may praise any other idol in the public square, all mention of His name and His son, must not happen. [*Foothill High School valedictorian Brittany McComb*]

What does America trust in? Our strength, our pride, gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone. Is the writing on the wall for us? Europe does not have enough faith to long withstand militant Islam, they are being conquered from within. Will we? Does anyone seriously think that Secular Humanism can stand against Islam?

Well there is hope for this nation, and for all of them. But if there is real hope for this nation, it cannot come from legislation or even vigorous military action. It will have to come through people turning heart by heart to God, to revival and reformation in the church, we should be praying for that.

What is your trust in?