

Writing on the Wall

Daniel 5:1-12

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Daniel 4:19-37 Summary: Daniel explains the 2nd dream of Nebuchadnezzar which was bad news for him. God would humble Nebuchadnezzar by making him like a beast of the field for 7 years. But God restores him to power after that time and Nebuchadnezzar praises God and certainly looks like he became a genuine believer.

What principles come to mind that we can apply to our own lives in the here and now?

- God has a way of humbling the proud; be humble before the Lord.
- Don't underestimate God... even His hardened enemies can be saved.

Belshazzar's Feast, Daniel 5:1-12

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.*

¹⁰ *The queen, because of the words of the king and his lords, came to the banquet hall. The queen spoke, saying,*

"O king, live forever! Do not let your thoughts trouble you, nor let your countenance change. ¹¹ There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God. And in the days of your father, light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, were found in him; and King Nebuchadnezzar your father—your father the king—made him chief of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers. ¹² Inasmuch as an excellent spirit, knowledge, understanding, interpreting dreams, solving riddles, and explaining enigmas were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar, now let Daniel be called, and he will give the interpretation."

What do we know about King Belshazzar?

King Nebuchadnezzar reigned over Babylon for forty-three years, and was succeeded by his son when he died in 562 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar's son reigned for two years and died at the hand of his brother-in-law because his rule was to arbitrary and licentious (2 Kings 25:27).

- The brother-in-law ruled for four years when he died a natural death then was succeeded by his son, a child, who reigned for only nine months before he was beaten to death by Nabonidus, who had married another of Nebuchadnezzar's daughters and was the last king of the Babylonian Empire.
- He resided in Arabia and he appointed a co-regent, his eldest son, Belshazzar, to govern the affairs of the Empire in Babylon. King Belshazzar reigned for seventeen years in Babylon.

How was King Belshazzar mentioned in the prophecy of Jeremiah 27:6-7?

Jeremiah 27:6-7 – And now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant; and the beasts of the field I have also given him to serve him. So all nations shall serve him and his son and his son's son, until the time of his land comes; and then many nations and great kings shall make him serve them.

Belshazzar was Nebuchadnezzar's grandson (his son-in-law's son). After him, a coalition of nations led by the Medes and Persians conquered the Babylonian empire.

Who do we expect to succeed the king of Babylon?

King Cyrus of Persia and King Darius of the Medes joined forces to make war against King Belshazzar of Babylon

- They developed a unique military strategy to conquer the city of Babylon and with it the mighty Babylonian Empire

What was King Belshazzar doing when the Persians and Medes attacked his city?

King Belshazzar was having a lavish party and feast for the Babylonian gods, seemingly unaffected by the threat that war and disaster was at his very door

King Belshazzar had to know the Persians and Medes threatened them because their army was hard to hide... why was he not concerned about them?

He was confident that their city was protected by a substantial wall... The walls around Babylon were wide enough for seven chariots to travel abreast (87 feet) and high enough that ladders could not be used to scale the heights of 350 feet. There was also a 150-foot-wide moat around the outside walls on the larger portion of the city.

- The city of Babylon, was located on both banks of the Euphrates River so it had plenty of water
- The city was stocked with supplies that would last for twenty years, negating an effectual prolonged siege

What was the Persian and Mede strategy for conquest?

Divert the water of the Euphrates River, which ran under the wall gates and through the city – the river gates were unguarded! They could then literally march up the dry riverbed into the city

What mistakes did King Belshazzar make?

- He presided over an opulent Babylon with misplaced confidence in their defenses and leaders who misjudged their enemy
- Many of the Babylonian military officers were drunk having joined in the spirit of the king's banquet
- King Belshazzar was drunk revealing him to be an immature, poor leader
- They had no regard for God as revealed in the violation of God's sacred Temple vessels

What do we know of Cyrus, the king of Persia?

Cyrus the Great, king of Persia, was unique in Bible prophecy in that he was named in Scripture approximately 175 years before he conquered Babylon.

- His role was foretold as the deliverer of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity and the issuing of authorization for restoring the Temple in Jerusalem

Isaiah 44:28 – *“who says of Cyrus, “He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, “Let it be rebuilt,” and of the temple, “Let its foundations be laid”*

God foretold this about Cyrus even though the Persian king did not know about the God of the Jews:

Isaiah 45:4 – *“For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me”*

What do we know about the party King Belshazzar hosted the night of his demise?

- They had a great feast (and perhaps an orgy for there were wives and concubines, among the men)
- It had to be an important large event for thousands of nobles to be present
- Some have suggested that it could have been an annual tribute to the Babylonian gods... There is merit to this theory because of what King Belshazzar did regarding the Hebrew Temple goblets

Given that Nimrod was the original founder of Babylon, what insight does that give us about King Belshazzar?

- Nimrod, the King and founder of Babylon, was not only its political leader, he was its religious leader also. He was a priest-king.
- From Nimrod descended a line of priest-kings: Belshazzar was one.
- Thus, the Feast that Belshazzar held in Babylon was more than a social gathering... It was a celebration of the “Babylonian mysteries” of which Belshazzar was the head at that time...

Daniel 5:4 – *They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, and of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone.*

How was Belshazzar's call for the Hebrew temple vessels a disrespectful affront to God?

- He is in a situation where the city was besieged, the enemy is at the gates, his life and kingdom are at stake, and he is out of control because he is drunk!
- His intent was to brag/show that the Babylonian gods were more powerful than the Hebrew God--- showing contempt, condescension, and disrespect toward God!

How was Belshazzar able to call for the Temple vessels?

- King Nebuchadnezzar physically took the Temple vessels from the Hebrew Temple in Jerusalem many years before.
- The Hebrew holy vessels were housed in the Babylonian temple of Bel. To remove them from that place, so that they could be used in a drunken feast, was sacrilege and blaspheming to God

What interrupted Belshazzar's party?

- A mysterious hand writing something on the wall.
- He possibly sobered up instantaneously since the writing on the wall was directly for his benefit and plainly in sight!
- He could not read it and did not know its meaning!

Why was this unsettling to Belshazzar?

It obviously was not the work of 'man' and was likely...

- a) A rebuke for sin of revelry and debauchery
- b) For sacrilege in irreverent use of consecrated vessels
- c) Perhaps an indication of some approaching calamity
- d) All of the above

NOTE: The crime of sacrilege was regarded among the pagans as one of the most awful that could be committed. They are alarmed at the possibility!

v6 – What does it mean that the king's continence changed when he saw the writing on the wall?

He was racked with fear

- The party was over for the king & his guests
- His knees knocked
- Possibly his beard, drenched in wine from the vessels, was trembling from the fear

v7 – Who did the king call on to interpret the writing on the wall?

His "wise" men, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers – A large reward was offered; purple robe, gold chain, prestige

Why would the winner of the interpretation challenge become the third ruler of the kingdom?

Belshazzar was only the second ruler, his father Nabonidus was first ruler.

v9 – How did the king react to the "wise" men not being able to interpret the writing on the wall?

The inability of the Babylonian wise men to read the words made King Belshazzar even more terrified.

v10 – Who came to Belshazzar's rescue?

The queen (probably the queen-mother) who suggested Daniel. Evidentially King Belshazzar had not used Daniel in his service; Daniel's service seems to have ended with Nebuchadnezzar's death.

What applications do we see from this discussion?

- God has a way of humbling the arrogant and blasphemers.
- God's will be done and He makes sure prophecy will be fulfilled exactly as foretold.