

The Writing Was On The Wall

Series: The Book of Daniel

Daniel 5

July 11, 2021

Thank you again for being part of worship today.

We are continuing our series on the Book of Daniel. We have found that Daniel is just as relevant today as it was 2,500 years ago.

Today, we are going to look at Daniel 5, so turn in your bulletin to page 4, or if you are online, pull out your spiritual notebook and your Bible and turn to Daniel 5.

Now, up to this point, one of the main characters in the first 4 chapters has been Nebuchadnezzar. But Nebuchadnezzar died in 562 BC, after reigning 43 years. Within 20 or so years of his death, all was lost. Nebuchadnezzar's son, Evil-Merodach, followed his father on the throne for around a year, but was assassinated by his brother-in-law, who reigned for about 4 years and was succeeded by his son, who was "liquidated" within a month. One of the conspirators was king for 14 years, but it was his son Belshazzar who functioned as de facto king in Babylon. So there is a chronological gap between chapters 4 and 5 of approximately 20 years.¹

Let's look at verse 1:

*Many years later King Belshazzar gave a great feast for 1,000 of his nobles, and he drank wine with them.*²

I want to stop there, because in this verse, we learn the kind of man Belshazzar. He was a spoiled brat, party animal. He decided to throw a party. The word "orgy" is probably more appropriate. This feast was for a thousand of his nobles, and while they are partying, his enemy Darius was at the city gates about to invade Babylon and bring the Babylonian empire to a swift end. The foolishness of the moment is quite shocking. He was having a huge party while the enemy was at the gate.

However, his foolishness did not stop here. He decided to add blasphemy, mockery, and idolatry to the list. Verses 2-4:

*While Belshazzar was drinking the wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver cups that his predecessor, Nebuchadnezzar, had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem. He wanted to drink from them with his nobles, his wives, and his concubines. So they brought these gold cups taken from the Temple, the house of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. While they drank from them they praised their idols made of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.*³

While Belshazzar was getting drunk, he "gave orders to bring in the gold and silver vessels that his predecessor Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem" so that his fellow party animals might drink from them. It was blasphemy. Not interested in stopping here, they added idolatrous worship to their debased behavior as they "praised their idols made of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone."⁴

¹ Christ-Centered Exposition - Exalting Jesus in Daniel 5:1-31

² Daniel 5:1 (NLT2)

³ Daniel 5:2-4 (NLT2)

⁴ Christ-Centered Exposition - Exalting Jesus in Daniel 5:1-31

Here is the first point: **God Sees Our Sin**. God sees our sin when we mock His glory.

There is a dangerous notion around today that comes from a corruption of one of the basic beliefs in Christianity, and that is that God loves us. God loves you and me so much that He gave His only Son. We all know that. The corruption is “if God loves us, He would never punish us.” He would ignore our sins as if they never happened. Therefore, people can do whatever they want to do because God will not judge them.

My friends, you cannot get farther from the truth. Yes, God is a loving God, and He is equally a Holy God. You cannot diminish His holiness in favor of His love. He does not say “I will become less holy so that I can be more loving.” God is just as much holy as He is loving, and that holiness demands – I’ll say it again – demands judgment.

At the very end of the Book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon, the wisest king of Israel, summed up all wisdom. Here is what he said:

*Here now is my final conclusion: Fear God and obey his commands, for this is everyone’s duty. God will judge us for everything we do, including every secret thing, whether good or bad.*⁵

My friends, God will not hold back His judgment forever. His holiness demands it. Your sin. My sin. Our nation’s sin. We will face the consequences of our sin, and it may be as immediate as tonight, as in the case of Belshazzar. So, do not assume that God doesn’t know what’s going on; He does. God sees our sin.

Second, **God Confronts Our Sins**. He confronts our sins and we should tremble when He does. Verses 5-9:

*Suddenly, they saw the fingers of a human hand writing on the plaster wall of the king’s palace, near the lampstand. The king himself saw the hand as it wrote, and his face turned pale with fright. His knees knocked together in fear and his legs gave way beneath him. The king shouted for the enchanters, astrologers, and fortune-tellers to be brought before him. He said to these wise men of Babylon, “Whoever can read this writing and tell me what it means will be dressed in purple robes of royal honor and will have a gold chain placed around his neck. He will become the third highest ruler in the kingdom!” But when all the king’s wise men had come in, none of them could read the writing or tell him what it meant. So the king grew even more alarmed, and his face turned pale. His nobles, too, were shaken.*⁶

The fingers of a mysterious hand wrote on the plaster of the palace wall near the lampstand, where its message could be clearly seen, though not easily understood. The king’s response was abject terror: “his face turned pale with fright. His knees knocked together in fear and his legs gave way beneath him.”

The king called the “wise guys” as I like to call them. He called them to tell him what the words meant. We learn in verse 25 what the words were: Mene, Mene, Tekel, and Parsin. These are in fact Aramaic, a language understood by Babylonians⁷, but the wise guys could not determine their prophetic significance.

Let me put it into perspective. I looked at a website yesterday and decided to pull the first four words I saw that started with the letter “D”. I found detail, Dallas, decision, dismantled. Imagine those 4 words suddenly appeared on the wall. You can read the

⁵ Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 (NLT2)

⁶ Daniel 5:5-9 (NLT2)

⁷ See Daniel 2:4

words, yes, but they do not mean anything. They did in the context of the website, but they mean nothing to you. And if they were some divine predictions, they would mean even less, and you too would be scared out of your wits.

But ignore the four words for the moment. The key of this second point for us today is one word: suddenly. “Suddenly, they saw the fingers of a human hand writing on the plaster wall.” Suddenly, God confronted their sin.

God will suddenly confront our sin. There will be no notice, no advanced warning, no letter saying, “Please appear in court.” It will come suddenly.

Listen to what Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians:

For you know quite well that the day of the Lord’s return will come unexpectedly, like a thief in the night. When people are saying, “Everything is peaceful and secure,” then disaster will fall on them as suddenly as a pregnant woman’s labor pains begin. And there will be no escape.⁸

When God confronts your sin, there will be no escape.

Third, **God Exposes Our Sins**. God exposes our sins and we are found wanting. Verses 10-28:

But when the queen mother heard what was happening, she hurried to the banquet hall. She said to Belshazzar, “Long live the king! Don’t be so pale and frightened. There is a man in your kingdom who has within him the spirit of the holy gods. During Nebuchadnezzar’s reign, this man was found to have insight, understanding, and wisdom like that of the gods. Your predecessor, the king—your predecessor King Nebuchadnezzar—made him chief over all the magicians, enchanters, astrologers, and fortune-tellers of Babylon. This man Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar, has exceptional ability and is filled with divine knowledge and understanding. He can interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means.”

So Daniel was brought in before the king. The king asked him, “Are you Daniel, one of the exiles brought from Judah by my predecessor, King Nebuchadnezzar? I have heard that you have the spirit of the gods within you and that you are filled with insight, understanding, and wisdom. My wise men and enchanters have tried to read the words on the wall and tell me their meaning, but they cannot do it. I am told that you can give interpretations and solve difficult problems. If you can read these words and tell me their meaning, you will be clothed in purple robes of royal honor, and you will have a gold chain placed around your neck. You will become the third highest ruler in the kingdom.”

Daniel answered the king, “Keep your gifts or give them to someone else, but I will tell you what the writing means. Your Majesty, the Most High God gave sovereignty, majesty, glory, and honor to your predecessor, Nebuchadnezzar. He made him so great that people of all races and nations and languages trembled before him in fear. He killed those he wanted to kill and spared those he wanted to spare. He honored those he wanted to honor and disgraced those he wanted to disgrace. But when his heart and mind were puffed up with arrogance, he was brought down from his royal throne and stripped of his glory. He was driven from human society. He was given the mind of a wild animal, and he lived among the wild donkeys. He ate grass like a cow, and he was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he learned that the Most High God rules over the kingdoms of the world and appoints anyone he desires to rule over them.

⁸ 1 Thessalonians 5:2-3 (NLT2)

“You are his successor, O Belshazzar, and you knew all this, yet you have not humbled yourself. For you have proudly defied the LORD of heaven and have had these cups from his Temple brought before you. You and your nobles and your wives and concubines have been drinking wine from them while praising gods of silver, gold, bronze, iron, wood, and stone—gods that neither see nor hear nor know anything at all. But you have not honored the God who gives you the breath of life and controls your destiny! So God has sent this hand to write this message.

“This is the message that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, and PARSIN. This is what these words mean: Mene means ‘numbered’—God has numbered the days of your reign and has brought it to an end. Tekel means ‘weighed’—you have been weighed on the balances and have not measured up. Parsin means ‘divided’—your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and Persians.”⁹

I don’t want to get bogged down with too many details, but there are some interesting things going on here.

First, the queen mother. She was either Belshazzar mother or the wife of one of his predecessors, possibly even of Nebuchadnezzar. She was not Belshazzar’s wife, because his wives were with him in the banquet hall.¹⁰

She remembered Daniel. That’s key because Daniel had been forgotten. Belshazzar did not address him as the chief of the wise men, the title given by Nebuchadnezzar, but as one of the exiles brought from Judah by Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel had been demoted – probably for his loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar – and was brought back only because of his ability to interpret mysteries. But he had no allegiance to Belshazzar.

Verse 17:

Daniel answered the king, “Keep your gifts or give them to someone else, but I will tell you what the writing means.”¹¹

Daniel’s blunt response omitted the usual deferential politeness of the Babylonian court like he had done towards Nebuchadnezzar. He really didn’t care for Belshazzar and his evil ways.

Now, to the real point. Because Belshazzar had not learned the lessons of his predecessors, because he was an evil, immoral king, and because he defiled the sacred instruments from the Temple of the Lord, God exposed his sin with this message:

“MENE, MENE, TEKEL, and PARSIN. This is what these words mean:

- *Mene means ‘numbered’—God has numbered the days of your reign and has brought it to an end.*
- *Tekel means ‘weighed’—you have been weighed on the balances and have not measured up.*
- *Parsin means ‘divided’—your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and Persians.”¹²*

That would have been a real party pooper, I’m sure. God exposes Belshazzar’s sins and found him wanting.

⁹ Daniel 5:10-28 (NLT2)

¹⁰ Life Application Study Bible, Daniel 5:10

¹¹ Daniel 5:17 (NLT2)

¹² Daniel 5:25-28 (NLT2)

Finally, **God Deals with Our Sins of Unrepentance**. God deals with our sins of unrepentance with appropriate judgment. Verses 29-31:

*Then at Belshazzar's command, Daniel was dressed in purple robes, a gold chain was hung around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom. That very night Belshazzar, the Babylonian king, was killed. And Darius the Mede took over the kingdom at the age of sixty-two.*¹³

The text tells us what Belshazzar did and did not do. He did not repent of his sins. He did give an order – maybe one of his last orders – to give Daniel royal gifts and position. Once again God has honored his faithful servant in this hostile and pagan world. After Belshazzar and his father, no one was more powerful than the Judean exile.

Of course, Daniel's ascendancy in the empire was short-lived. It was like getting a promotion the day before the company goes bankrupt, or getting a medal on the day your side lost the war. His title lasted only a night. However, Darius will wisely recognize the value of this man of God in the days that follow, but that's for next week.

According to the Greek historians Herodotus and Xenophon, the Medo-Persian army did not attempt to storm the impregnable Babylonian walls, which were at least forty feet high and twenty-five feet in width. Instead, they diverted water from the Euphrates River (which ran under the walls of Babylon) into a marsh. With the level of the water lowered, the soldiers were able to wade the river under the walls and enter the city.¹⁴

My friends, God deals with our sins of unrepentance with appropriate judgment.

Jack Nicklaus is considered by most as the greatest golfer who has ever played the game. Once, when he was at the top of his game, he quit playing for 30 days to correct something with his game. He couldn't correct it. He tried but to no success. Then he went back to his coach that taught him golf – and his game straightened out. He went on to win more major tournaments than any golfer in history.

What's repentance? It is going back to the Lord and the cross. It's telling Him you are absolutely dependent on Him to change and be forgiven. When the Prodigal Son came back home he didn't just get a ring, a robe and shoes. The greatest thing he got back was his father.¹⁵

¹³ Daniel 5:29-31 (NLT2)

¹⁴ Christ-Centered Exposition - Exalting Jesus in Daniel 5:29-31

¹⁵ From a sermon by Ed Sasnett, Guard Your Heart, 4/13/2011, downloaded from sermoncentral.com