



FAITHFUL IN THE FACE OF LIONS

A STUDY ON DANIEL – CHAPTER 5

OPENING PRAYER

Lord of armies, lead us to trust in your mighty right hand. When we see those who insult us for our faith, remind us to do what Jesus taught and turn our cheeks. Teach us to be humble and loving towards the lost. In all things, lead us to trust that you command all things for our eternal good. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

Luther on Daniel 5:

"Another example against the tyrants...The hardened and unrepentant tyrant [Belshazzar] is punished mercilessly for his evil. At one blow he loses everything, land, people, and his own life. This is surely written to terrify all similar tyrants."

HISTORY

About 30 years have passed since Nebuchadnezzar's madness. Nebuchadnezzar was Belshazzar's royal predecessor, not his physical father. Belshazzar was a son of Nabonidus, who had usurped the throne of Babylon in 556 BC. As was the practice for usurpers, Nabonidus very likely had married a woman from Nebuchadnezzar's family (one of his daughters or granddaughters, or one or more of his wives) to promote the fiction that he was a legitimate successor to the throne. During much of his reign, Nabonidus was absent from Babylon, and his son Belshazzar acted as king—likely also a sort of "co-regent". Belshazzar can promote Daniel only to the third highest position in the kingdom because he himself is only in the second position after his father.

KEY VERSE

5:25 – "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin..."

KEY THEMES

1. God is in control
2. We are citizens of two kingdoms
3. Seek peace

DANIEL 5

King Belshazzar made a great feast for a thousand of his nobles, and in front of the thousand he drank wine. ²When he had tasted the wine, Belshazzar said to bring the gold and silver vessels that his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines could drink from them. ³Then they brought the gold vessels that they had taken from the temple, that is, the House of God in Jerusalem. So the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. ⁴They drank wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

⁵At that moment the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, opposite the lampstand, and the king saw the back of the hand that was writing. ⁶Then the king's cheerful appearance changed, his face grew pale, and his thoughts troubled him. His legs went limp, and his knees knocked together.

⁷The king called out loudly to bring the spell casters, the astrologers, and the diviners. The king said to the wise men of Babylon, "Whoever is able to read this writing and explain its meaning will be clothed in purple, with a gold chain around his neck, and he will rule as third highest in the kingdom."

⁸Then all the king's wise men came in, but they were not able to read the writing or tell the king what it meant. ⁹Then King Belshazzar was really terrified. He grew even paler, and his nobles were perplexed.

¹⁰The queen came to the drinking party because of the words of the king and his nobles. The queen said, "Your Majesty, may you live forever! Do not let your thoughts trouble you, and do not look so frightened. ¹¹There is a man in your kingdom in whom is a spirit of the holy gods. In the days of your father, enlightenment, insight, and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods were found in him. So King Nebuchadnezzar your father, your father the king, appointed him chief of the magicians, spell casters, astrologers, and diviners, ¹²because an outstanding spirit and knowledge and insight in interpreting dreams and explaining riddles and solving knotty problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar. Now let Daniel be summoned, and he will explain the meaning of the writing."



1. The first time you read through these words, it appears as if everything is going well in the kingdom. In reality, however, the Persian empire and the its army is at the gate of the city (take a look at the last verse of the chapter). Both Herodotus and Xenophon (Greek historians) record that there was feasting and celebrating in Babylon when it fell to the Persians. So, if it's true that the Persians are at the gates, how does that shade your understanding of this "drinking party" (verse 10)?
2. The queen (perhaps Nebuchadnezzar's granddaughter or maybe even a widow) remembered Daniel. What does that tell you about her? What does that tell you about King Belshazzar?

Daniel Interprets the Writing

¹³Then Daniel was brought before the king. The king said to Daniel, “Are you Daniel, one of the Judean exiles whom my father the king brought from Judah? ¹⁴I have heard about you that a spirit of the gods is in you, and enlightenment and insight and outstanding wisdom are found in you. ¹⁵Now, those wise men who are the spell casters were brought before me to read this writing and to make its meaning known to me, but they were not able to explain the meaning of the message. ¹⁶Yet I have heard about you that you are able to explain meanings clearly and to solve knotty problems. Therefore, if you are able to read the writing and make its meaning known to me, you will be clothed in purple, with a gold chain around your neck, and you will rule as the third in the kingdom.”

¹⁷Then Daniel answered the king:

Keep your gifts for yourself, or give your rewards to someone else! Nevertheless, I will read the writing to the king, and I will make its meaning known to him. ¹⁸As for you, Your Majesty—the Most High God gave the kingdom, greatness, splendor, and glory to Nebuchadnezzar, your father. ¹⁹So because of the greatness that he gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and were afraid in his presence. He killed whomever he wanted, and he let live whomever he wanted. Also, he promoted anyone he wanted, and he demoted anyone he wanted. ²⁰But when he thought too much of himself, and his spirit became hardened in pride so that he acted arrogantly, he was deposed from the throne of his kingdom, and his splendor was taken away from him. ²¹He was driven away from humans, and his mind was changed to that of an animal. So his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. He was fed grass as bulls are fed, and his body was wet with dew from the sky, until he knew that the Most High God rules the kingdoms of men, and he raises up over them anyone he desires.

²²But you, his son, Belshazzar, did not humble your heart although you knew all this. ²³Instead, you lifted yourself against the Lord of Heaven. The vessels from his house were brought before you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines drank wine from them. Then you praised the gods of silver, gold, bronze, iron, wood, and stone, who do not see and do not hear and do not know. But you did not honor the God who holds your breath in his hand and who controls all your ways. ²⁴So the back of the hand was sent by him, and this writing was inscribed.

²⁵Now this is the writing that was inscribed:

MENE MENE TEKEL and PARSIN

²⁶This is the meaning of the message:

Mene means that God has counted up your kingdom and paid it out or spent it.

²⁷*Tekel* means that you have been weighed in the scales, and you are too light.

²⁸*Parsin* means that your kingdom has been broken in two and given to the Medes and the Persians.

²⁹Then Belshazzar spoke, and they dressed Daniel in purple, with a gold chain around his neck, and they made him the third highest ruler in the kingdom.

1. What change in attitude do you note from Daniel in how he talks to this king?
2. Verse 17. In other times, Daniel accepted accolades for his work. Here he does not. How does Daniel treat the king's offer and why?
3. Look closely at verse 23, especially the second half of it. What reason does Daniel give for God's judgment against Belshazzar?

4. Agree/Disagree: Just like Daniel preached judgment against his king, so also should pastors preach sermons condemning the actions of senators, congressmen, and presidents.

5. Daniel rose to incredible heights under Nebuchadnezzar. There were two power struggles after his death and, likely, other kings raised up their own advisers who were considered more loyal to them. Daniel was brushed aside and forgotten. Then, Daniel is raised up again (this time by the queen). And we'll see Daniel brought low in chapter 6 in the lion's den. Then, by the end, he will be raised up again. Sometimes, Christians today can feel that same back and forth as the pendulum of politics swings. What advice would Daniel give you?

Darius Receives the Kingdom

³⁰That very night, King Belshazzar the Chaldean was killed.

³¹Then Darius the Mede received the kingdom, when he was about sixty-two years old.

1. The Greek Historian Xenophon records that Cyrus' general Gobryas executed him. According to Xenophon, the soldiers entered the palace, where they found the king holding a dagger, about to take his own life. They overpowered him and "avenged themselves upon the wicked king."

2. Then Darius the Mede (Cyrus the Great) "received the kingdom." Note that it does not say that Darius the Mede "took over the kingdom." What does that tell you?

3. This account ends with powerful law and powerful gospel. Explain.