

08.02.2019 FROM ARROGANCE TO DESTRUCTION: Daniel 5

“And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding” Daniel 2:21

Arrogance: offensive display of superiority or self-importance; overbearing pride.

Hubris: excessive pride and self-confidence.

Introduction:

Daniel chapter 5 is the story of the judgement of another king – Belshazzar, grandson of king Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar’s pride led to his temporary downfall and ultimate repentance. Belshazzar however, despite knowing of the way God had dealt with his grandfather, chose to defy God. In his arrogance, he brought out the vessels of the Temple in Jerusalem (which had been ‘sanctified’ i.e. set apart for God’s use) and used them to pay homage to his gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone. This defiance closed probation for the kingdom of Babylon and both ruler and kingdom were utterly ruined that very night.

The judgment of Babylon brought deliverance to God’s people. King Cyrus, the victorious Persian king fulfilled God’s promise to release the Jews after 70 years to return to Jerusalem.

Historical Context:

The reason for this palace feast and its aftermath are not evident in Daniel 5. Our background information, facts that would be known to Chaldean readers, comes from a Greek historian, Herodotus and other ancient sources. He reported that about 539BC a new power was threatening Babylon from the North. A Persian army under Cyrus had routed Nabonidus, king of Babylon, from a distant city (Teima) and had come to encircle Babylon. Nabonidus had left Babylon in the hands of his son Belshazzar as co-regent and had been living in Teima (modern day Iran).

Realizing that the city wall was massive and that the inhabitants had food stores for years, Cyrus partially withdrew. He left a garrison south of the city and went up the Euphrates River. He took advantage of the fact that the Euphrates ran through the city of Babylon. He diverted the River into a swamp, and ordered his Babylon force to go into the City through the stream when the water was below the waist. The troops encountered no resistance and surprised Belshazzar and his nobles having a party. Babylon was conquered by his general, Darius the Mede, with little blood-shed.

Belshazzar’s Feast: Daniel 5:1-4

Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in the presence of the thousand. 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... 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. They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone.

Three characteristics mark the great world empire of Babylon:

1. Idolatry (Daniel 3)
2. Pride and self-exaltation (Daniel 4)
3. Arrogance and Defiance of God (Daniel 5)

Despite Babylon being besieged by the Medo-Persians, Belshazzar sat down to feast and drink, confident in the knowledge that the city of Babylon was impregnable with its 350 foot high and 80 foot wide walls (wide enough for 4 chariots to ride abreast) and the river Euphrates running through the city.

With the wine of Babylon dulling his senses, he was moved to defiance of the Most High God whom his grandfather had acknowledged. He called for the vessels of the Jerusalem Temple, set apart for the worship of Jehovah and he defiled them by filling them with wine. He then added insult to injury by praising the gods of Babylon; gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone of whom the Psalmist had said, *“Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands. They have mouths, but they do not speak; eyes they have, but they do not see. They have ears, but they do not hear; noses they have, but they do not smell. They have hands, but they do not handle; feet they have, but they do not walk...Those who make them are like them; so is everyone who trusts in them.”* Psalm 115:4-8

His grandfather Nebuchadnezzar had been guilty of pride and self-exaltation. Belshazzar was full of arrogance and hubris; it was this attitude that made think he could defy and mock God.

The Writing on the Wall and the King’s Response: Daniel 5:5-9

In the same hour the fingers of a man’s hand appeared and wrote opposite the lamp stand on the plaster of the wall of the king’s palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. 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. (5:5, 6)

The defiant king was so terrified that *‘the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other.’* He called for all the wise men of his kingdom (except Daniel) but they were able to give him the interpretation.

The Queen Mother’s Testimony about Daniel: Daniel 5: 10-12

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. 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... 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.”

As we will see in verse 22, Belshazzar knew the history of Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel. And yet he chose to defy God.

The Queen mother has much to say about Daniel:

1. *‘There is a man in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God (s)...’* the Holy God – she was not referring to the pantheon of Babylonian gods but to the holy God of the monotheistic Jews.
2. This Holy God had put His Spirit in Daniel... *in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God.*
3. The result of the in-dwelling Spirit in Daniel... *“light and understanding and wisdom... an excellent spirit, knowledge, and understanding”*

We live in end-time Babylon – it is all around us. Are we like Daniel in Babylon? Do those we come in contact have the same testimony about us? We were given the Holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts when we accepted Jesus. Does the world see the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives? This will only occur as we surrender ourselves to Him daily.

The wise men of Babylon could not interpret the dream, but Daniel could. What made the difference? The Babylonian wise men were reasoning men who depended on their intellect. Daniel was a spiritual man; instead of trusting his intellect, he waited upon God for revelation. Revelation is the process by which God reveals

knowledge of Himself, His will, and His divine plans and provisions. His Spirit communicates with our spirit... *'the spirit of man is the candle of the Lord'* Proverbs 20:27.

There is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives him understanding. Job 32:8

For what man knows the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knows no man, but the Spirit of God... the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned ! Corinthians 2:11, 14

God's Indictment of Belshazzar: Daniel 5:13-23

But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this (5:22)

And you have lifted (exalted) yourself up against the Lord of heaven. They have brought the vessels of His house (Temple) before you, and you and your lords, your wives and your concubines, have drunk wine from them (5:23)

And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know; and the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified (5:23)

Pride, defiance and refusal to give glory to God by worshipping substitute gods was the sin of Belshazzar. He had no excuse because he was not ignorant of Jehovah and His dealings with King Nebuchadnezzar.

*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who [d]suppress the truth in unrighteousness, **because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse**, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image (idol) made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Romans 1:18-23*

Interpretation of the Writing on the Wall - sentence pronounced on Babylon: Daniel 5:25-29

This is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.

This is the interpretation of each word. MENE: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it; 27 TEKEL: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; PERES: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians."

Literal Reading	Mene	Mene	Tekel	U Pharsin (literal words)
Noun forms (money)	Mina	Mina	Shekel	and a half shekel
Verb forms	Numbered	Numbered	Measured	and Divided

The code words (line 2) as nouns are names of money. With slight adjustment (line 3) they are verb-forms and can be read as a sentence. Daniel interpreted the code: **The days of the kingdom have been numbered by God and the kingdom is at an end. Belshazzar has been weighed in the balance and found wanting. The kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.**

The Judgment on Babylon: Daniel 5:30, 31

That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.

"Belshazzar's grave is made, his kingdom passed away,
He, in the balance weighed, is light and worthless clay;
The shroud, his robe of state, his canopy the stone;

The Mede is at his gate! The Persian on his throne!" *George, Lord Byron.*

"Therefore hear this now O daughter of the Chaldeans (Babylon), you who are given to pleasures, who dwell securely, who say in your heart, 'I am, and there is no one else besides me; I shall not sit as a widow, nor shall I know the loss of children'.

But these two things shall come to you in a moment, in one day: the loss of children, and widowhood. They shall come upon you in their fullness because of the multitude of your sorceries, for the great abundance of your enchantments.

*For you have trusted in your wickedness; you have said, 'No one sees me'. Your wisdom and your knowledge have warped you; and **you have said in your heart, 'I am, and there is no one else besides me.'***

Therefore evil shall come upon you; you shall not know from where it arises. And trouble shall fall upon you; you will not be able to put it off. And desolation shall come upon you suddenly, which you shall not know."
Isaiah 47:8-11

For Reflection:

Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication. Rev 14:8

And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. Rev 17:3-5

And I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. Render to her just as she rendered to you, and repay her double according to her works; in the cup which she has mixed, mix double for her. In the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment and sorrow; for she says in her heart, 'I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow.' Therefore her plagues will come in one day—death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God who [f]judges her. Rev 18:4-8

Let us beware of the false gods of Babylon. We do not bow down to idols of gold and silver today, but the idols of the heart are more deeply entrenched than images of wood and stone – the lust for popularity, power, sex and wealth, to name but a few.

Let us not drink the wine of Babylon which is spiritual adultery and unfaithfulness to God. Let us ask God to humble us under His mighty hand that we may not be guilty of pride and self-glory.

And let us make sure we are truly citizens of Jerusalem – a people who live only for the honour and glory of God.

Conclusion:

Throughout this book we see the themes of Judgment and Grace. In chapter 4, we saw God's judgment and grace upon king Nebuchadnezzar. In this chapter we see judgment upon Babylon and deliverance (grace) for God's people, the Jews.

This is very relevant to us, God's end-time people, for the book of Revelation also has the themes of Judgment and Grace. It also uses Babylon symbolically to describe every person or system that sets its face against God (Babylon, the 'great city') and refuses to acknowledge His sovereignty. In contrast, Jerusalem is the Holy city; its citizens are a holy people who follow the Lamb wherever He goes (they acknowledge His sovereignty and do His will).

And I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. Revelation 18:4

"He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Rev 3:12
