

I Connect Sunday School Lesson for 17Jan2021

Comment: A Bit of History

Empires throughout history traditionally operate in similar ways, and this period was no different:

1. *Endless wars*
2. *Control of the people, both subjects and those conquered.*
3. *Problems controlling the people*
4. *Desire to tax the people*
5. *Desire to impose the imperial culture on all people*

We can see most of this throughout the Book of Daniel.

Now, some context for the Jewish circumstances in the times of Babylon that will help us to understand what was going on with them.

(In this connection, Ron will read excerpts from a book, Out of Babylon by Walter Brueggemann)

Chapter 5

Commentary: There were 4 kings after Nebuchadnezzar and before Belshazzar, the last king of Babylon who co-reigned with his father, Nabonidus. Belshazzar's reference to his father below has created controversy, explained by some that the word "father" was a general reference to fathers of the past, similar to referring to sons of Abraham. The party described below occurred while the city was besieged.

Belshazzar's party

1 King Belshazzar threw a huge party for a thousand of his princes, and he drank a lot of wine in front of them.

2 While he was under the wine's influence, Belshazzar commanded that the gold and silver equipment that his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem's temple be brought to the party so that the king, his princes, his consorts, and his secondary wives could drink wine out of them.

3 So the gold equipment that had been carried out of the temple, God's house in Jerusalem, was brought in; and the king, his princes, his consorts, and his secondary wives drank out of it.

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

Commentary: *The king flaunts Babylon supremacy, now badly eroded, and flouts all respect for the conquered people and their religion.*

Comment: Sounds like this king is cruisin' for a bruisin'.

Writing on the wall

5 Right then the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the king's palace wall in the light of the lamp. The king saw the hand that wrote.

Commentary: *Just as the telling of an ominous dream was thought to corral its negative power, so having the writing read and explained publicly might mitigate evil influence.*

6 The king's mood changed immediately, and he was deeply disturbed. He felt weak, and his knees were shaking.

7 The king yelled, calling for the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the diviners. The king told these sages of Babylon: "Anyone who can read this writing and tell me its meaning will wear royal robes, will have a gold chain around his neck, and will rule the kingdom as third in command."

8 Then all the king's sages arrived, but they couldn't read the writing or interpret it for the king.

9 At that point King Belshazzar was really frightened. All the color drained from his face, and his princes were also very worried.

10 Upon hearing the commotion coming from the king and his princes, the queen entered the banqueting hall and declared, "Long live the king! Don't be so disturbed. Don't be so frightened."

11 There is a man in your kingdom who has the breath of holy gods in him! When your father was alive, this man was shown to possess illumination, insight, and wisdom like the very wisdom of the gods.

Your father King Nebuchadnezzar appointed this man as chief over the dream interpreters, enchanters, Chaldeans, and diviners. Yes, your father did this

12 because this man—Daniel, the one the king named Belteshazzar—possesses an extraordinary spirit, knowledge, and insight into the meaning of dreams. He can explain ambiguities and resolve mysteries. Now in light of all that, summon Daniel! He will explain the meaning of this thing."

Comment: *Seems like the children did not learn the lessons that the father(s) learned.*

13 So Daniel was brought before the king. The king said to him, "So you are Daniel, the Daniel from the exiles that my father the king brought from Judah?

14 I have heard that the breath of the gods is in you and that you possess illumination, insight, and extraordinary wisdom.

15 Now, the sages and the dream interpreters were brought before me to read this writing and interpret it for me, but they couldn't explain its meaning.

16 But I've heard that you can explain meanings and solve mysteries. So if you can read this writing and interpret it for me, you will wear royal robes, have a gold chain around your neck, and will rule the kingdom as third in command."

Comment: *Even today, this experience would spook us.*

Note that the king does not seem to know who Daniel is. So Daniel's position in the kingdom might have been downgraded over time, which would explain why he had not come to the attention of the king.

Daniel interprets the writing

17 Daniel answered the king: “Keep your gifts. Give the rewards to someone else. But I will still read the writing to the king and interpret it for him.

Comment: Maybe Daniel knows what a mess this king has allowed to develop in the kingdom and wants no part of managing it.

18 Listen, Your Majesty: The Most High God gave kingship, power, glory, and majesty to your father Nebuchadnezzar.

19 Because of the power God gave Nebuchadnezzar, all peoples, nations, and languages were terrified of him. He did whatever he wanted, whenever he wanted: killing or sparing, exalting or humbling.

20 But when he became arrogant, acting in stubborn pride, he was pulled off his royal throne and the glory was taken from him.

21 He was driven away from other humans, and his mind became like an animal's. He lived with wild donkeys, he ate grass like cattle, and dew from heaven washed his body until he realized that the Most High God dominates human kingship and sets over it anyone he wants.

22 “But you who are his son, Belshazzar, you haven't submitted, even though you've known all this.

23 Instead, you've set yourself up against the Lord of heaven! The equipment of God's house was brought to you; and you, your princes, your consorts, and your secondary wives drank wine out of it, all the while praising the gods of silver, gold, bronze, iron, wood, and stone—gods who can't see, hear, or know anything. But you didn't glorify the true God who holds your very breath in his hand and who owns every road you take.

24 “That's why this hand was sent from God and why this message was written down.

25 This is what was written down: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, and PARSIN.

Commentary: These words mean “numbered”, “weighed”, and “divided” but have double meanings. “Parsins” is plural and alludes to Persians about to take over Babylon. The words are also weights used in buying and selling and refer to Babylonian kings from the most weighty to the least. It is underground political humor as if one described one’s recent rulers as *Fiver, fiver, dime, pennies.*”

26 "This is the meaning of the word MENE: God has numbered the days of your rule. It's over!

27 TEKEL means that you've been weighed on the scales, and you don't measure up.

28 PERES means your kingship is divided and given to the Medes and the Persians."

29 Then Belshazzar commanded that Daniel be dressed in a purple robe, have a gold chain around his neck, and be officially appointed as third in command in the kingdom.

Comment: Once again, the one who offers disastrous news to a king is rewarded. There must have been an acceptance at that time of the possibility of negative or positive dreams, so the interpreter was not at risk for bringing bad news to the king. Daniel is now in the highest position that he has held.

30 That very same night, Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed.

Comment: The Chaldeans had really established themselves in this culture, one of them rising to be king.

31 Darius the Mede received the kingdom at the age of 62.

Commentary: “Darius” may refer to a non-Babylonian vice-regent who ruled Mesopotamia on behalf of Cyrus around 539 BCE, not Darius I, who ruled 522-486 BCE.

Chapter 6

Plot against Daniel

1 Darius decided to appoint one hundred twenty chief administrators throughout the kingdom,

2 and to set over them three main officers to whom they would report so that the king wouldn't have to be bothered with too much. One of these main officers was Daniel.

3 Because of his extraordinary spirit, Daniel soon surpassed the other officers and the chief administrators—so much so that the king had plans to set him over the entire kingdom.

Commentary: *The chief administrators are provincial governors charged with protecting the territory and income of their region, each reporting to one of the three presidents within the system of law of the Medes and Persians. Most bureaucracies are marked by rivalry, and when Daniel is picked for elevation to the top spot, the plot forms, arising from envy and not simply from religious persecution. Because his rivals could not find fault in Daniel, they manipulate the law to target his devotion to God. Daniel is naive not to recognize this.*

4 As a result, the other officers and the chief administrators tried to find some problem with Daniel's work for the kingdom. But they couldn't find any problem or corruption at all because Daniel was trustworthy. He wasn't guilty of any negligence or corruption.

5 So these men said, "We won't find any fault in Daniel, unless we can find something to use against him from his religious practice."

6 So these officers and chief administrators ganged together and went to the king. They said to him, "Long live King Darius!"

7 All the officers of the kingdom, the ministers, the chief administrators, the royal associates, and the governors advise the king to issue an edict and enforce a law, that for thirty days anyone who says prayers to any god or human being except you, Your Majesty, will be thrown into a pit of lions.

8 Now, Your Majesty, issue the law and sign the document so that it cannot be changed, as per the law of Media and Persia, which cannot be annulled."

9 Because of this, King Darius signed the document containing the law.

Daniel prays

10 When Daniel learned that the document had been signed, he went to his house. Now his upper room had open windows that faced Jerusalem. Daniel knelt down, prayed, and praised his God three times that day, just like he always did.

Commentary: *The story humorously pictures the two rivals and their gaggle of governors – 122 in all – thronging in upon Darius, then Daniel, then Darius again, noisily carrying out their plan.*

11 Just then these men, all ganged together, came upon Daniel praying and seeking mercy from his God.

12 They then went and talked to the king about the law: "Your Majesty! Didn't you sign a law, that for thirty days any person who prays to any god or human being besides you, Your Majesty, would be thrown into a pit of lions?" The king replied, "The decision is absolutely firm in accordance with the law of Media and Persia, which cannot be annulled."

13 So they said to the king, "One of the Judean exiles, Daniel, has ignored you, Your Majesty, as well as the law you signed. He says his prayers three times a day!"

Commentary: *The king is tormented by his ruling and virtually prays for Daniel's deliverance.*

14 When the king heard this report, he was very unhappy. He decided to rescue Daniel and did everything he could do to save Daniel before the sun went down.

15 But these men, all ganged together, came and said to the king, "You must realize, Your Majesty, that the law of Media and Persia, including every law and edict the king has issued, cannot be changed."

Daniel in the lions' pit

16 So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and hurled him into the pit of lions. The king said to Daniel: "Your God—the one you serve so consistently—will rescue you."

Commentary: *The Babylonian kings are known to have kept lions for hunting on their estates and for brutal execution.*

17 A single stone was brought and placed over the entrance to the pit. The king sealed it with his own ring and with those of his princes so that Daniel's situation couldn't be changed.

18 The king then went home to his palace and fasted through the night. No pleasures were brought to him, and he couldn't sleep.

19 At dawn, at the first sign of light, the king rose and rushed to the lions' pit.

20 As he approached it, he called out to Daniel, worried: "Daniel, servant of the living God! Was your God—the one you serve so consistently—able to rescue you from the lions?"

21 Then Daniel answered the king: "Long live the king!"

22 My God sent his messenger, who shut the lions' mouths. They haven't touched me because I was judged innocent before my God. I haven't done anything wrong to you either, Your Majesty."

23 The king was thrilled. He commanded that Daniel be brought up out of the pit, and Daniel was lifted out. Not a scratch was found on him, because he trusted in his God.

24 The king then ordered that the men who had accused Daniel be brought and thrown into the lions' pit—including their wives and children. They hadn't even reached the bottom of the pit before the lions overpowered them, crushing all their bones.

New decree

25 Then King Darius wrote the following decree: To all the peoples, nations, and languages inhabiting the entire earth: I wish you much peace.

26 I now issue this command: In every region of my kingdom, all people must fear and revere Daniel's God because: He is the living God. God stands firm forever. His kingship is indestructible. God's rule will last until the end of time.

27 He is rescuer and savior; God performs signs and miracles in heaven and on earth. Here's the proof: He rescued Daniel from the lions' power.

Commentary: *Daniel is forced to decide whether his ultimate loyalty will be to his God or his king, his calling or his career, his faith or his flag. Jesus defines it as the choice between God and Caesar, That choice still confronts us, with or without the lions.*

Comments: *How does "That choice" confront us today?*

Commentary: *Darius's words about God go beyond any of the book's previous utterances. He promotes reverence and worship towards God and celebrates God's everlasting rule.*

The six narratives of Chapters 1-6 thus hold out the vision of earth's monarchs moving toward recognition of the God of the believers who have come into their realm, if not conversion. This matches the global nature of those realms that call upon earth's monarchs to praise and celebrate the Lord, the Creator (e.g., Psalm 67).

28 And so Daniel was made prosperous during the rule of Darius and during the rule of Cyrus the Persian.

Comment: *So Daniel succeeded even after the Persians took over Babylon.*