

Daniel.08. Chapter 5

This morning, we continue in the series on the Book of Daniel looking at chapter 5

- Daniel chapter 5 records the events of the last night of the Kingdom of Babylon, with the idolatrous feast of the King, the writing on the wall, and Daniel interpreting its meaning

Outline of Chapter

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1:1 - King Belshazzar Makes a Great Feast

Daniel 1:1 = King Belshazzar made a great feast for a thousand of his lords and drank wine in front of the thousand.

The year is 539 B.C., 66 years after Daniel was taken as a "youth" from Jerusalem and brought to Babylon (Dan. 1:1-4)

- "Belshazzar" is "king" of Babylon, and at that time, along with his physical father, Nabonidus, is one of two rulers of Babylon
- He gives a "great feast" in "the banqueting hall" (v.10) of his "palace" (v.5) in the capital city of Babylon for "a thousand lords," who are "his" nobles and chief officials
- It included not on "his lords" but also "his wives, and his concubines" (v. 2)
- At the appropriate time during the "feast," he "drank wine," which means he gave a "toast"
- It was the beginning of the "ritual" of drinking wine as he "tasted the wine" (v. 2)
- This would not have been initiating the party to get "bombed," but a religious act of being grateful to their "gods" for the blessings they had given, symbolized in the drinking of wine

While this statement is simple and clear, during that very day the armies of the Medes and Persians, which have been conquering the Babylonians, are gathered outside the city walls

- One likely reason why Belshazzar holds the "great feast" on this day is not because he believes they are going to be conquered and so throws a party in the doomed despair of "eat, drink, for tomorrow we die"
- Rather it is the opposite, that because the city of Babylon has huge, fortified walls and a food supply that will last for years, his "feast" is intended to give "his lords" a sense of security

1:2-4 - He Commands the Vessels of God's Temple Be Brought to Worship His Gods

Daniel 1:1 = Belshazzar, when he tasted the wine, commanded that the vessels of gold and of silver that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple in Jerusalem be brought, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. ³ Then they brought in the golden vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God 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, iron, wood, and stone.

Daniel 1:2 states that Nebuchadnezzar had taken “the vessels of the temple in Jerusalem” and put them in “the house of his god” as a symbolic demonstration that “his gods” were greater and more powerful than the “god” (God) of “the temple” in Jerusalem

- After the toast to begin the wine-drinking ritual, Belshazzar “commanded that the vessels be brought that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them”
- Then “they drank wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone”
- Belshazzar does this, not because he was drunk from too much wine and thought it would “cool,” but because the captured “vessels of the temple” are symbolic of the power of his “gods,” and this would be another bold act giving “his lords” assurance that their “gods,” who had empowered their empire to conquer other nations and their gods, would continue to give powerful protection to them and their city
- Belshazzar, whose name means “Bel,” a title for Marduk, the chief god of Babylonians, “protect the king,” is confident in the power of his “gods”
- Just as Muslims seek to conquer other nations declaring “Allah Akbar” to demonstrate their god is greater, so Belshazzar and “his lords” were doing as they “praised” their “gods”

1:5-9 - A Hand Appears, Writes Words on the Wall, and Wise Men Can’t Interpret It

- **Daniel 1:5-9** = *Immediately 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 hand as it wrote. ⁶ Then the king’s color changed, and his thoughts alarmed him; his limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together. ⁷ The king called loudly to bring in the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers. The king declared to the wise men of Babylon, “Whoever reads this writing, and shows me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around his neck and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.” ⁸ Then all the king’s wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or make known to the king the interpretation. ⁹ Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, and his color changed, and his lords were perplexed.*

As they are enjoying their idolatrous ritual, suddenly “fingers” of a “hand” manifest “out of nowhere” from the spiritual realm and write four words on the wall behind the king

- While the “hand” looks “human,” it would not have been that of a “ghost” of an actual human but a “hand” of an angel that looks like a man (Ps. 91:12), for many angels look like humans
- This is a “supernatural” event, as the spiritual realm “breaks into” the earthly, physical realm
- Being illuminated by the “lampstand,” the “hand” and words written on the wall are seen by the physical eyes of the king and “his lords,” and the king is seized with a “panic attack” as “his limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together”

Verse 25 shows that the words are in Aramaic, and while, for the matter of it, they would have been able to “read the writing,” they were not able to interpret the meaning

- Because of this, “the king” immediately summons “the wise men of Babylon,” his spiritual advisors, and promises a huge reward to the one who can explain “its interpretation”
- The reward is to be “clothed with purple,” the color of royalty, “have a chain of gold around his neck,” the emblem the high office, and become “the third ruler in the kingdom”
- Despite this incentive, none can “make known the interpretation” - it’s a terrifying mystery

- So, “*the king*” becomes even more alarmed, and, as he and “*his lords*” have “*words*” (v. 10) to discuss it together, they have no idea what it means or what they are to do

1:10-12 - The Queen Informs the King About Daniel

- **Daniel 1:10-12** = *The queen, because of the words of the king and his lords, came into the banqueting hall, and the queen declared, “O king, live forever! Let not your thoughts alarm you or your color change. ¹¹ There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the spirit of the holy gods. 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, enchanters, Chaldeans, and astrologers, ¹² because an excellent spirit, knowledge, and understanding to interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar. Now let Daniel be called, and he will show the interpretation.”*

Since Belshazzar’s “wives” are present at the banquet (1:2), “the queen” would have been “the queen” mother of Belshazzar

- Somehow knowing their “*words*” and that they have no idea what to do, she enters the “*hall*” and, after the formal courtly greeting ironically saying “*O king, live forever,*” she, in effect, tells him to stop worrying about what to do because she knows what he can do
- She tells him about “*a man*” in his “*kingdom in whom is the spirit of the holy gods*”
- It is evident Belshazzar has no idea who this “*man*” is, undoubtedly because after a series of previous kings before him, he didn’t know who were their own spiritual counselors
- Knowing the previous history of the kings and their officials, she tells Belshazzar that this “*man*” has such extraordinary spiritual gifts of “*light, understanding and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods,*” with “*knowledge, and understanding to interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve problems,*” that the great king Nebuchadnezzar promoted him to be “*chief*” of all the wise men
- She identifies Nebuchadnezzar as “*his father,*” not because Nebuchadnezzar was his physical father but because he was his ancestor, as we speak of a “*Founding Father*” of our nation
- After providing this remarkable resume, she says his Babylonian name is “*Belteshazzar*” and his Hebrew name is “*Daniel,*” thus informing “*the king*” that Daniel is an “*exile of Judah*” (v.13)
- Then she confidently tells him to “*call*” Daniel because he will give “*the interpretation*”

1:13-16 - Daniel Summoned, Asked to Interpret the Meaning, Promised a Reward

- **Daniel 1:13-16** = *Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king answered and said to Daniel, “You are that Daniel, one of the exiles of Judah, whom the king my father brought from Judah. ¹⁴ I have heard of you that the spirit of the gods is in you, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you. ¹⁵ Now the wise men, the enchanters, have been brought in before me to read this writing and make known to me its interpretation, but they could not show the interpretation of the matter. ¹⁶ But I have heard that you can give interpretations and solve problems. Now if you can read the writing and make known to me its interpretation, you shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around your neck and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.”*

Clearly, Daniel was a resident of the city of Babylon, for he is quickly summoned by the king inside the banqueting hall where the words are written on the wall

- It is evident that Daniel had given “*the king*” the traditional greeting and asked “*the king*” why he was summoned, for v. 16 says, “*the king answered and said to Daniel*”

The king begins answering Daniel, not with his Babylonian name “*Belteshazzar,*” but his Hebrew name “*Daniel,*” and that he is “*one of the exiles of Judah*”

- We cannot be certain why he does this because the Bible does not explicitly tell us
- However, we need to understand the worldview and cultural context of all involved, which is completely different from the secularized, materialistic worldview of our Western culture
- It is a worldview in which the spiritual realm, with the “*gods*” and “*the spirit of the holy gods*” (v. 14), interface, interact, and influence the earthly realm, and people with powerful gifts from “*the holy gods*” are highly valued and greatly honored, respected and revered, and “*the king*” has been told by “*the queen*” that this Daniel had been the greatest of them all
- Because of this, it seems the king is not “*putting down*” Daniel but addressing him with respect
- This seems evident from what he goes on to say to Daniel, not asserting his authority as king by giving him a command (see v. 2), but by what he says to him and how he says it
- He tells Daniel that he has “*heard*” about his extraordinary gifts (vv. 14, 16), that “*my father brought him from Judah,*” thereby identifying with Nebuchadnezzar, then making the request “*if you can read and make known to me its interpretation,*” he would be given the promised reward being made, along with him, “*the third ruler in the kingdom,*” an astonishing promise to a Jew

1:17-21 - Daniel Tells the King How God Humbled King Nebuchadnezzar

- **Daniel 1:17-21** = *Then Daniel answered and said before the king, “Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another. Nevertheless, I will read the writing to the king and make known to him the interpretation.”* ¹⁸ *O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father kingship and greatness and glory and majesty.* ¹⁹ *And because of the greatness that he gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whom he would, he killed, and whom he would, he kept alive; whom he would, he raised up, and whom he would, he humbled.* ²⁰ *But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit was hardened so that he dealt proudly, he was brought down from his kingly throne, and his glory was taken from him.* ²¹ *He was driven from among the children of mankind, and his mind was made like that of a beast, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. He was fed grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, until he knew that the Most High God rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he will.*

Daniel answers the king’s request and promised reward by saying three things

- (1) **He has no interest in the promised “*gifts*” and “*rewards*” and turns them down**
 - These worldly, earthly incentives were not in any way a motivation or incentive to Daniel to corruptly “*use*” the spiritual gifts God had graciously given to him (contrast the prophet Balaam)
- (2) **He does not say, “*if I can read and interpret it,*” but “*I will read the writing to the king and make known to him the interpretation*” (v. 18)**
 - Having been personally used of God and experienced Him powerfully manifesting his spiritual gifts over the decades, Daniel’s faith is so strong that he knows God will give him the interpretation
 - He was also spiritually sensitive and discerning what was happening in these moments

(3) He then informs the king of the past history of his “father” Nebuchadnezzar, and how “the Most High God” humiliated and then restored him to his place of kingdom rule

- The purpose of this was so that “*he knew that the Most High God rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he will*” (v. 21)

There are significant things Daniel says in these words, among them being:

(1) The Most High God gives governmental rule to those whom He wills

- This is not a very happy reality for unbelievers, let alone many Christians, for this means that God gives “*kingship, greatness, glory and majesty*” not only to people like “*Nebuchadnezzar*” (v. 18), but people like Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Putin, Biden, Trump, and whoever else He chooses
 - And this authority can be like Nebuchadnezzar, that “*whom he would, he killed, and whom he would, he kept alive; whom he would, he raised up, and whom he would, he humbled*”

(2) The “heart” and spirit” of the ruler can be “hardened” against God so that he/she becomes “lifted up” and “proud” and does evil

- As the account in chapter 4:30 records, this is manifested in a ruler, or any person, giving glory to him or herself for their accomplishments, and not to God, which is one of the greatest sins

(3) Because human pride opposes God, God resists the proud (1 Peter 5:5)

- He will execute His judgment against the proud as He demonstrated with Nebuchadnezzar

1:22-24 - Daniel Tells Belshazzar He Has Acted in Pride Against the Most High God

- **Daniel 1:22-24** = *And you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this,* ²³ *but you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven. And the vessels of his house have been brought in before you, and you and your lords, your wives, and your concubines have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see or hear or know, but the God in whose hand is your breath, and whose are all your ways, you have not honored.* ²⁴ *“Then from his presence the hand was sent, and this writing was inscribed.*

As a true prophet, Daniel exposes and declares to Belshazzar the sinful pride of his “heart”

- Surprisingly, he says Belshazzar “*knew all this,*” which makes him even more culpable
 - The height of his wicked arrogance against “*the God in whose hand is his breath*” is that, far from “*honoring*” God, he used the holy “*vessels*” of God to worship his “*gods*” who “*do not see, hear,*” or even “*know*” anything, as demonstrated by the inability of the “*wise men*”
 - Rather than learning from the acts of the Most High God with his “*father*” Nebuchadnezzar so as to fear and honor “*the Most High God Who rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he will,*” Belshazzar acts in the rebellious pride of his sinful, corrupt “*heart*”
 - Because his sin, as well as that of the kingdom of Babylon, has brought his “*iniquity*” to “*fullness*” (Gen. 15:16), God “*sent this writing*” (v. 24)
 - Verse 24 says it came “*from his presence,*” literally “*from before Him,*” which indicates the decision of the divine council and court in heaven (Ps. 82:1)
 - **Daniel 4:17** = *The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, the decision by the word of the holy ones*
 - **Daniel 7:9** = *As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat*

1:25-26 - Daniel Interprets the Writing, God Has Judged the Kingdom of Babylon

- **Daniel 1:25-26** = *And this is the writing that was inscribed: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, and PARSIN.*
²⁶ *This is the interpretation of the matter: MENE, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end;* ²⁷ *TEKEL, you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting;* ²⁸ *PERES, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians."*

The mysterious riddle of "the writing" is 4 Aramaic words, "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Uparsin," the "U" means "and"

- The 3 words, read as nouns, are measurements of decreasing weight, like "ton, pound, ounce"
- This is probably how the "wise men" assumed it be read, thus with no understanding
- But Daniel reads them as verbs, "numbered, numbered, weighed, and divided"
- Like Joseph's words to Pharaoh after he told Joseph his dream, "God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do" (Gen. 41:25), so now God reveals to Belshazzar "what He is about to do"
- Also, as Joseph told Pharaoh, "the doubling of Pharaoh's dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about" (Gen. 41:32), so Daniel tells Belshazzar that "the doubling" of "Mene, Mene/ numbered, numbered" means God has numbered the days of "your kingdom" and it has been "fixed by God" that He has "brought it to an end"
- "Tekel," Belshazzar has been "weighed" in the "balance," meaning his heart and actions have come before God for judgment, and, as indicted by the decreasing weights, it has become worthless
- "Uparsin," "and" the judgment is Belshazzar and his kingdom is "divided"
- Because the word "parsin" sounds like "Persia," it is a divine "pun" that Daniel interprets to mean "your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians"
- As verse 30 states, there was no more time to repent
- "That very night" God executed His word of judgment

1:29-31 - Daniel Honored, Belshazzar Killed, Darius Receives the Kingdom Rule

- **Daniel 1:29-31** = *Then Belshazzar gave the command, and Daniel was clothed with purple, a chain of gold was put around his neck, and a proclamation was made about him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.* ³⁰ *That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed.* ³¹ *And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.*

This is now the fulfillment of the first stage of the prophetic dream, recorded in chapter 2, that was given to Nebuchadnezzar and interpreted by Daniel

- The head of gold, representing the kingdom of Babylon (2:37-38), has now been conquered by the silver chest and arms, representing the kingdom of the Medes and Persians
- Just as this historical event in Daniel 5 records the fulfillment of the first stage of the dream, so every stage will be fulfilled, with the ultimate fulfillment of the dream and destiny of the kingdoms of the earth being ruled by the kingdom of God represented by the "stone" that will utterly destroy all the kingdoms represented in the "statue" (2:44-45)

WHEN THAT HAPPENS, IT WILL BE THE SUPREME FULFILLMENT OF THE THEME OF DANIEL CHAPTERS 4 AND 5: THE MOST HIGH GOD RULES THE KINGDOM OF MANKIND AND SETS OVER IT WHOM HE WILL (4:17, 25; 5:21)

➔ *To Him be all praise, glory, and honor, "for from Him, through Him, and to Him are all things" (Romans 11:36)*