

Theme: God brought mighty Babylon and her arrogant king to a swift end as He had promised, and this is a warning to all who arrogantly trust in themselves rather than Christ.

I. Intro - Two Popular Idioms from Daniel 5

- A. Handwriting on the wall & days are numbered
- B. Both refer to impending doom and are from Daniel 5
- C. Iron Maiden released “The Writing on the Wall” on 7/15/21 after “inviting” everyone to Belshazzar’s feast!
- D. What is happening in this chapter? What do we learn?

II. The Historical Background

- A. We have jumped forward about 40 years from chapter 4
King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them. Daniel 5:1
 - 1. Nebuchadnezzar had died in 562 after a long reign
 - 2. Then 3 kings with short reigns; then Nabonidus began to reign in 556 BC
 - 3. Belshazzar is his son and vice-regent. He was unknown until 150 years ago or so - **After Hours**
 - 4. Less than 2 weeks prior the Persian army defeated the Babylonian army at Opis, 50 miles away
 - 5. Nabonidus fled after the battle and the Persian forces surrounded Babylon
 - 6. Secular sources give the date October 12, 539 BC
- B. We have thus jumped forward to a critical event
 - 1. This is the end of the Babylonian empire
 - 2. Daniel is probably around 80 years old

- 3. Cyrus and the Medo-Persian empire will now enter
- 4. This is the moment the head of gold gives way to the chest and arms of silver (Daniel 2)

III. Belshazzar’s Banquet

- A. Belshazzar gives a huge banquet
King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them. ² While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. ³ So they brought in the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. ⁴ As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone. Dan 5:1–4
 - 1. Huge banquet - 1,000 nobles, his wives, concubines
 - 2. This might be a last hurrah, but he may well have still felt secure inside Babylon
 - a. Ancient cities sometimes withstood long sieges
 - b. Babylon had the largest walls in the world
 - c. Babylon has a river to give it plenty of water
 - d. Babylon had huge sources of food
 - 3. Herodotus and Xenophon both note a feast was underway on this night as well
- B. Belshazzar commits a terrible blasphemy (vv2-4)
 - 1. He calls for the temple articles to be used as cups for wine! (First mention since Daniel 1:2)

2. This was a great sacrilege for anyone to do to any holy articles from any religion
3. To explain this unheard-of sacrilege some scholars say this was a drunken orgy type event
4. He even uses the temple articles for pagan worship!
 - a. His name means “Bel protect the king”
 - b. He may be trying to win back the favor of Babylonian gods since Nabonidus preferred the moon god
 - c. He uses the Temple articles to praise idols
 - d. Also note gold, silver, bronze, iron - Daniel 2 statue!!

C. The handwriting on the wall disrupts the banquet

Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote. ⁶ His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way. Daniel 5:5–6

1. SUDDENLY a hand appears and writes
2. Belshazzar is terrified - pale; knees knock; joints loosed (may mean he wet his robes!)
3. The wise men fail - again!!
The king called out for the enchanters, astrologers and diviners to be brought and said to these wise men of Babylon, “Whoever reads this writing and tells me what it means will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around his neck, and he will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom.” ⁸ Then all the king’s wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or tell the king what it meant. ⁹ So King Belshazzar became even more terrified and his face grew more pale. His nobles were baffled. Daniel 5:7–9

- a. He shouts/screams for the wise men
- b. He promises great rewards for the interpretation
- c. NOTE: 3rd in the kingdom - AfterHours
- d. They can’t read or interpret (probably all letters run together without vowels as often in Aramaic)
- e. This makes Belshazzar even more terrified

D. The ‘queen’ comes and suggests Daniel

The queen, hearing the voices of the king and his nobles, came into the banquet hall. “O king, live forever!” she said. “Don’t be alarmed! Don’t look so pale! ¹¹ There is a man in your kingdom who has the spirit of the holy gods in him. In the time of your father he was found to have insight and intelligence and wisdom like that of the gods. King Nebuchadnezzar your father — your father the king, I say — appointed him chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners. ¹² This man Daniel, whom the king called Belteshazzar, was found to have a keen mind and knowledge and understanding, and also the ability to interpret dreams, explain riddles and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means.” Daniel 5:10–12

1. Queen - not his wives (v2); probably Queen mother
2. Daniel can read and interpret it - call for him!
3. Nebuchadnezzar (‘father’ often means ancestor or previous ruler in Aramaic) knew Daniel’s value!
4. Queen seems familiar with Daniel (knows Hebrew name!) and the events surrounding him during Nebuchadnezzar’s time!
5. Daniel apparently had been sent away & ignored by Belshazzar - a sign of foolishness!

IV. The Message - Your Days Are Numbered!

A. Belshazzar's rude greeting to Daniel

So Daniel was brought before the king, and the king said to him, "Are you Daniel, one of the exiles my father the king brought from Judah? ¹⁴ I have heard that the spirit of the gods is in you and that you have insight, intelligence and outstanding wisdom." Daniel 5:13–14

1. He points out that Daniel is a captive exile - which the Queen did not say!
2. He may be trying to 'put Daniel in his place'
3. He also does not say 'holy' gods as the Queen had
4. He asks if he can interpret it & promises rewards (vv15-16)

B. Daniel's response to Belshazzar

1. Daniel rejects the rewards but promises to interpret
Then Daniel answered the king, "You may keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else. Nevertheless, I will read the writing for the king and tell him what it means." Daniel 5:17
 - a. Probably to be clear he can't be bribed
 - b. But he does not use verbal niceties either - he clearly does not think much of Belshazzar
 - c. He also knows that the gifts are useless because of the message!
2. Daniel contrasts Belshazzar & Nebuchadnezzar (18-24)
 - a. He recounts the story of Daniel 4
 - b. He reminds him that Nebuchadnezzar had accomplished much but was humbled when he became arrogant

- c. Belshazzar has not really done anything but is arrogant and will not humble himself
- d. He is like those "famous for being famous"
- e. Daniel rebukes Belshazzar directly

But you his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this. ²³ Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. You had the goblets from his temple brought to you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines drank wine from them. You praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways. Daniel 5:22–23

1. You knew this - and refused to humble yourself
2. Even worse you directly defied God tonight!
3. Belshazzar, prepare to be humbled

C. The message and its meaning

"This is the inscription that was written: mene, mene, tekel, parsin ²⁶ "This is what these words mean: Mene: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. ²⁷ Tekel: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting. ²⁸ Peres: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians." Daniel 5:25–28

1. Three different words or three consonants
2. He reads them as nouns but interprets them as verbs; also depths of wordplay going on
3. Mene - your days are numbered and at an end
4. Tekel - You have been weighed and found wanting
5. Peres/Parsin - Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians

D. The message fulfilled

That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, ³¹ and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, at the age of sixty-two. Daniel 5:30–31

1. The message was fulfilled that very night!
2. Apparently Nabonidus his father was spared - but Belshazzar died in his arrogance and sin
3. Herodotus and Xenophon say the Persian army diverted the river, snuck into the city, killed the king, and took the city without a fight!
4. Thus ends Babylon the great - the head of gold from the statue is gone, and the silver arms and chest have arrived!

V. Applying the Word

A. The Word of God is true!

1. God's Word is true! (After Hours)
2. Everything Daniel said came true that night!
3. But this had all been predicted by Isaiah almost 200 years before! (see Isaiah 44 and 45)
4. People doubt, denigrate, and deny the Word of God, but it stands firm forever!
5. Read, learn, and trust the Word of God!!

B. The Kingdoms of this world are passing away

1. Babylon thought she would last forever!
2. To the exiles, it seemed like Babylon would reign forever!

3. But Babylon fell in a night - never to rise again!
4. The kingdoms of this world are all passing away, like mist in the morning!
5. Only the kingdom of God lasts forever!
6. Do not fear or trust in the kingdoms of this world - they are passing away, for they are Babylon!
7. Live for and seek God's Kingdom!

C. The Banquet Table of the King

1. Belshazzar had a banquet and invited people - but they were weighed and found wanting, and the feast led to death
2. Jesus also has prepared a banquet, and He invites us to come
3. Belshazzar's banquet was set for people who were esteemed in Babylon
4. Jesus' banquet is for those who are often despised by Babylon, but who humble themselves, confess their sin, and are thus exalted by God and given access to the banquet
5. Come, humble yourself, and feast and the Banquet Table of the Lord

The Handwriting On the Wall

Daniel 5

August 22, 2021

Communion

1 Timothy 1:17 paraphrase

Teaching keywords: Sovereignty of God; judgment; humility and pride; the Word of God

May the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, bless you to overflowing so that you may be a blessing in the land our your exile until you give Him honor and glory in the eternal Kingdom. Amen! (Based on 1 Timothy 1:17)

King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them. ² While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. ³ So they brought in the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. ⁴ As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.

⁵ Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote. ⁶ His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way. ⁷ The king called out for the enchanters, astrologers and diviners to be brought and said to these wise men of Babylon, “Whoever reads this writing and tells me what it means will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around his neck, and he will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom.” ⁸ Then all the king’s wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or tell the king what it meant.

⁹ So King Belshazzar became even more terrified and his face grew more pale. His nobles were baffled. ¹⁰ The queen, hearing the voices of the king and his nobles, came into the banquet hall. “O king, live forever!” she said. “Don’t be alarmed! Don’t look so pale!” ¹¹ There is a man in your kingdom who has the spirit of the holy gods in him. In the time of your father he was found to have insight and intelligence and wisdom like that of the gods. King Nebuchadnezzar your father — your father the king, I say — appointed him chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners.

¹² This man Daniel, whom the king called Belteshazzar, was found to have a keen mind and knowledge and understanding, and also the ability to interpret dreams, explain riddles and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means.” ¹³ So Daniel was brought before the king, and the king said to him, “Are you Daniel, one of the exiles my father the king brought from Judah? ¹⁴ I have heard that the spirit of the gods is in you and that you have insight, intelligence and outstanding wisdom. ¹⁵ The wise men and enchanters were brought before me to read this writing and tell me what it means, but they could not explain it.

¹⁶ Now I have heard that you are able to give interpretations and to solve difficult problems. If you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around your neck, and you will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom.” ¹⁷ Then Daniel answered the king, “You may keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else. Nevertheless, I will read the writing for the king and tell him what it means.

¹⁸ “O king, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendor. ¹⁹ Because of the high position he gave him, all the peoples and nations and men of every language dreaded and feared him. Those the king wanted to put to death, he put to death; those he wanted to spare, he spared; those he wanted to promote, he promoted; and those he wanted to humble, he humbled. ²⁰ But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory.

²¹ He was driven away from people and given the mind of an animal; he lived with the wild donkeys and ate grass like cattle; and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and sets over them anyone he wishes.

²² “But you his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this. ²³ Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. You had the goblets from his temple brought to you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines drank wine from them. You praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways. ²⁴ Therefore he sent the hand that wrote the inscription.

²⁵ “This is the inscription that was written: mene, mene, tekel, parsin ²⁶ “This is what these words mean: Mene: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. ²⁷ Tekel: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting. ²⁸ Peres: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.”

²⁹ Then at Belshazzar’s command, Daniel was clothed in purple, a gold chain was placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom. ³⁰ That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, ³¹ and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, at the age of sixty-two.

Daniel 5:1–31