

Life in the Lion's Den
“The Hand Writing on the Wall”
(Daniel Chapter 5)
Lesson #6

Scripture: Proverbs 16:18 *“Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before stumbling.”*

Introduction:

A recent news release told of a Charlotte, North Carolina, woman who set a world record while playing a convenience store video game. After standing in front of the game for fourteen hours and scoring an unprecedented seven and a half million points on the game called "Tapper," the woman was pleased to see a TV crew arriving to record her efforts for posterity. She continued to play while the crew, alerted by her fiancé, prepared to shoot. However, she was appalled to see the video screen suddenly go blank. While setting up their lights, the camera team had accidentally unplugged the game, thus bringing her bid for ten million points to an untimely end! The effort to publicize her achievement became the agent of her ultimate failure.

Sermonillustrations.com

Transitional Statement:

Church, pride will be the ultimate downfall of Babylon, and in so many ways it stands as one of the devils greatest tools against us.

I. The setting for chapter 5

A. Captivity had begun in 606 BC

1. Nebuchadnezzar was Babylon's king until he died in the year 562 BC
2. His son Evil-Merodach became king from 562 to 560 (2 years)
3. Then a guy named Nabonidus (who married Neb's daughter Creasis) becomes king in 560 BC
 - a. 7 years later (553 BC) he appoints his son Belshazzar as a co-regent king (in-other-words he and his son will reign together).

B. So as we begin chapter 5 it's important to note:

1. The year...539 BC and Belshazzar is the reigning king of Babylon under his father Nabonidus
2. Also that Israel had been in captivity for some 67 years
 - a. Captivity began in 606 BC and would end in 536BC

C. So Daniel along with most of the captives are now getting old

1. Here I stop and wonder if God's people in captivity have learned their lesson and grown closer to God at this point or merely acclimated to life in Babylon.

II. The story begins

Daniel 5:1-4

1 "Belshazzar the king held a great feast for a thousand of his nobles, and he was drinking wine in the presence of the thousand. 2 When Belshazzar tasted the wine, he gave orders to bring the gold and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. 3 Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God which was in Jerusalem; and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. 4 They drank the wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.

A. King Belshazzar held a great feast for a 1000 of his nobles.

1. Feasts, many times throughout history, are used to celebrate or mark special occasions.
2. But here the occasion or purpose, while not clearly stated, seems to be implied.
 - a. This was just a big self glorification block party complete with woman and wine.

B. After tasting the wine, King Belshazzar remembered the vessels of silver and gold that were taken from God's temple in Jerusalem by his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar.

1. He ordered that they be brought out to drink from
 - a. After all this was his party and bringing out anything from the treasures of Babylon was simply an arrogant display of power.
2. And as they drank from the holy, consecrated vessels of the living God, they praised the false god's of gold...silver...bronze...iron....wood & stone
 - a. Question: How do you think it makes God feel when things that are dedicated to him are used for sinful purposes?

III. Then God crashes Belshazzar's party

Daniel 5:5-9

5 Suddenly the fingers of a man's hand emerged and began writing opposite the lamp stand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, and the king saw the back of the hand that did the writing. 6 Then the king's face grew pale and his thoughts alarmed him, and his hip joints went slack and his knees began knocking together. 7 The king called aloud to bring in the conjurers, the Chaldeans and the diviners. The king spoke and said to the wise men of Babylon, "Any man who can read this inscription and explain its interpretation to me shall be clothed with purple and have a necklace of gold around his neck, and have authority as third ruler in the kingdom." 8 Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read

the inscription or make known its interpretation to the king. 9 Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, his face grew even paler, and his nobles were perplexed.

A. In the midst of this great party a man's hand emerged (came forth)

1. I'm not sure if the hand just appeared out of thin air or floated through the crowd, till it began to write on the wall near King Belshazzar.
2. Historical indications are that this crowd was very drunk by this time
 - a. You know drunk people are quick to make light and even laugh about any old matter that comes along.
 - b. But this hand floating in the air was better than 50 gallons of coffee for Belshazzar as he immediately sobered up.
 - 1) Now I've seen a decapitated chicken run around the barn yard after meeting the hatchet...but I've never seen a man's hand unattached to a body appear out of no-where and start writing on the wall....and neither had King Belshazzar.
 - 2) All that to say that this was no party trick...and he knew it !

B. You know God has a way of speaking to us in a language that we understand. Historical records indicate that an idol of Marduk was set up in Babylon and that idol was served meals daily. After the meal special attention was given to the idols hands and fingers by washing them with a basin of water.

C. But this hand that appeared was not made of gold, silver, bronze, iron, stone or wood.

1. So the great and mighty King Belshazzar:

- a. Grew pale
- b. His thoughts alarmed him
- c. His hip joints went slack
- d. And his knees began to knock.

* Just a few moments ago King Belshazzar was beating his chest with pride...and now his knees are knocking with fear.

D. So he called for his wise royal entourage...the conjurers, Chaldeans and diviners.

1. Offers a reward to the one who can read and interpret the writing.
 - a. The reward included having the next line of authority under him.
2. But the wise men couldn't read or interpret the writing.
3. So King Belshazzar's face grew even paler.

IV. The Queen offers advice

Daniel 5:10-12

10 The queen entered the banquet hall because of the words of the king and his nobles; the queen spoke and said, " O king, live forever! Do not let your thoughts alarm you or your face be pale. 11 "There is a man in your kingdom in whom is a spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of your father, illumination, insight and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods were found in him. And King Nebuchadnezzar, your father, your father the king, appointed him chief of the magicians, conjurers, Chaldeans and diviners. 12 "This was because an extraordinary spirit, knowledge and insight, interpretation of dreams, explanation of enigmas and solving of difficult problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belshazzar. Let Daniel now be summoned and he will declare the interpretation."

- A. The queen here is probably King Nabonidus' wife....and Belshazzar's mother because his wives were already at the party...Verse 2
 - 1. The queen mother was thought to be the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar.
 - 2. The queen tells Belshazzar not to be alarmed or let your face be pale.
- B. There is a man named Daniel who served King Nebuchadnezzar.
 - 1. He can interpret dreams, explain the most impossible things.
 - 2. Summon him and he will declare the interpretation.

V. So Daniel is called in before the King

Daniel 5:13-16

13 Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king spoke and said to Daniel, "Are you that Daniel who is one of the exiles from Judah, whom my father the king brought from Judah? 14 "Now I have heard about you that a spirit of the gods is in you, and that illumination, insight and extraordinary wisdom have been found in you. 15 "Just now the wise men and the conjurers were brought in before me that they might read this inscription and make its interpretation known to me, but they could not declare the interpretation of the message. 16 "But I personally have heard about you, that you are able to give interpretations and solve difficult problems. Now if you are able to read the inscription and make its interpretation known to me, you will be clothed with purple and wear a necklace of gold around your neck, and you will have authority as the third ruler in the kingdom."

- A. King Belshazzar begins by verifying Daniel's connection with Nebuchadnezzar
- B. He tells Daniel that his wise men couldn't help him, but he had heard that Daniel had extraordinary abilities to interpret and solve difficult problems.
- C. So King Belshazzar lays out the same offer for Daniel.
 - 1. Clothed in purple...the connection of royalty
 - 2. Necklace of gold....untold wealth
 - 3. And given the highest authority under him and his father.

VI. Daniel rejects the reward and explains the purpose of the hand

Daniel 5:17-24

17 Then Daniel answered and said before the king, " Keep your gifts for yourself or give your rewards to someone else; however, I will read the inscription to the king and make the interpretation known to him. 18 " O king, the Most High God granted sovereignty, grandeur, glory and majesty to Nebuchadnezzar your father. 19 "Because of the grandeur which He bestowed on him, all the peoples, nations and men of every language feared and trembled before him; whomever he wished he killed and whomever he wished he spared alive; and whomever he wished he elevated and whomever he wished he humbled. 20 "But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit became so proud that he behaved arrogantly, he was deposed from his royal throne and his glory was taken away from him. 21 "He was also driven away from mankind, and his heart was made like that of beasts, and his dwelling place was with the wild donkeys. He was given grass to eat like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until he recognized that the Most High God is ruler over the realm of mankind and that He sets over it whomever He wishes. 22 "Yet you, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this, 23 but you have exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines have been drinking wine from them; and you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which do not see, hear or understand. But the God in whose hand are your life-breath and all your ways, you have not glorified. 24 "Then the hand was sent from Him and this inscription was written out.

A. Daniel rejects the reward offered by the king...

1. He wants no connection with such ungodliness.

a. In our world of blue light specials we will stand in line to get what is free, without hardly a consideration of whether we need it or whether it is good for us.

b. Not Daniel....he still refuses to defile himself before God.....

1) A continued message for Israel and us today.

B. Then Daniel explains the overall purpose of the hand.

1. He reminds King Belshazzar that God made Nebuchadnezzar great

a. But his heart became arrogant and his kingdom was taken away.

2. Then Daniel says even though you knew all this....you have not humbled your heart.

a. In arrogance you have drank from the holy vessels of God.

1) Not giving Him any glory at all.

b. The lessons taught to Nebuchadnezzar the father should have also been learned by the son Belshazzar.

V. The exact interpretation given

Daniel 5:25-29

25 *"Now this is the inscription that was written out: 'MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.'* 26 *"This is the interpretation of the message: 'MENE' — God has numbered your kingdom and put an end to it. 27 " 'TEKEL' — you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient. 28 " 'PERES' — your kingdom has been divided and given over to the Medes and Persians."* 29 *Then Belshazzar gave orders, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a necklace of gold around his neck, and issued a proclamation concerning him that he now had authority as the third ruler in the kingdom.*

- A. These words combined point to a valuation of gold or silver.
 - 1. Mene has to do with numbering.
 - a. Gold is marked by number according to its purity.
 - b. Here Babylon's number doesn't make the cut.
 - c. It is repeated for emphasis.
 - 2. Tekel has to do with being found deficient on the scales.
 - a. Weighing things on a balance scale means putting a standard block of some weight on one side and putting enough gold or silver on the other side to balance the scales.
 - b. Here the message is that Babylon doesn't measure up to the standard of God.
 - 3. Peres simply being the plural of Upharsin points to the division of things using scales.
 - a. The point being that Babylon will be divided up among the Medes and the Persians.

VI. The sentence of God was carried out that same night.

Daniel 5:30

30 *That same night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain. 31 So Darius the Mede received the kingdom at about the age of sixty-two.*

- A. King Belshazzar was slain
- B. History records that the Babylonians were so drunk that night that they offered no resistance
- C. So the silver arms and breasts of Nebuchadnezzar's dream are now reality.

Conclusion:

Question from earlier....How do you think it makes God feel when things that are holy and dedicated to him are used for sinful purposes?

God is offended !

You know the real vessels of God are His children (2 Tim 2:21) and when His children defile themselves with sin ...God is offended and if that sin is continued in your number will come up, you will be weighed and divided to destruction.