

Though Thou Knewest All This

Daniel 5 - November 30, 2014 - Dr. Craig P. Scott

Daniel 5:22 - "And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this"

Belshazzar heard stories about the true God, the God of the Jews. He was schooled in Babylonian history. His grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar left his written testimony of his turn to the Most High God. He may have even spoken to Belshazzar about this.

No doubt Belshazzar heard more stories about his grandfather from his mother Nitocris, the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar. Surely he heard the story of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a statue; the three men who were delivered from the fiery furnace by their God; the dream of the tree, and the interpretation and his grandfather's seven years of insanity and more.

In our text, Daniel confirms this fact that Belshazzar knew all this (Daniel 5:22).

How many people in the world have done this same thing? They have heard the testimonies of their parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles and yet have turned away from God.

Betty Ann and I have written our testimonies with the desire to remind our children, our grandchildren and our great grandchildren of our faith in Christ and to encourage them to continue to live for Him.

Besides my immediate family, I know I have shared my personal testimony with my relatives, yet not all have turned to God. At family gatherings, they reluctantly yield to my praying over the food, but many don't get it.

How often has the clear testimony of God's work of grace in the lives of His servants been dismissed by the world? They know what God did in someone else's life, but they fail to humble their own hearts.

In our text we will learn that there is a time coming when God's mercy and His grace will be used up, and there will be no more time. There will be no more chances; and no more appeals. Time will run out and there will be an end to the road.

In fact, in the case of Belshazzar, the end came sooner than expected. For him when the end came there was little warning. God did just as He said He would.

Allow me to back up and describe the events surrounding this passage.

It began on the evening of Tishri 15, the first day of the Jewish feast of Tabernacles. It is most likely that Daniel, along with many of his Jewish countrymen had built booths in their yards or on their roofs. They were remembering their wilderness wanderings. Remembering God's protection and reminding themselves that one day God would supernaturally bring them into the Promised Land where He would rule.

How do I know this? Secular history clearly reports that according to the Nabonidus Chronicles that the Medo-Persian Empire, led by Darius the Median, killed Belshazzar, the king of Babylon and conquered Babylon on Tishri, 16, 539 B.C.

It is no coincidence that this event occurred during the Jewish feast of Tabernacles. God had long ago etched into the fabric of His word hints of his work in history. Take time in your studies to look at the eschatological significance of Daniel.

Some items are obvious such as in Daniel 2, the statue depicting all the major kingdoms of the world until the Messianic Kingdom arrives. The Lion, Bear, Leopard and Beast of Daniel 7. The timeline provided in Daniel 9 predicting the time of the Messiah's sacrificial death as well as the timeline ending with the messianic kingdom. The last is based on the Jewish Sabbatical rests.

Israel's feasts and Sabbaticals are pivotal in God working in this world. Also notice the eschatological significance of the tree of Daniel 4 and Nebuchadnezzar's prideful ways. Compare Nebuchadnezzar's 7 years of insanity with the coming Tribulation Period where prideful nations will be humbled.

In our context, Daniel is well into his 80's. He either retired from political service or retreated to Babylon from his place of ministry in Shushan (Daniel 8:2). In fact twenty-three years has transpired since Nebuchadnezzar died. A new king was leading the nation. In fact, the kingdom experienced a turbulent six-year transition after Nebuchadnezzar died. In that time many things had changed which may account for Belshazzar's lack of knowledge of Daniel.

After Nebuchadnezzar died, his son, Amel-marduk ruled 2 years but was murdered by his own brother-in-law. Nebuchadnezzar's grandson, Nergal-shazzer followed him and ruled for 4 years before he died. Another grandson of Nebuchadnezzar followed Amel-marduk. His name was Labashi-Marduk. He ruled but a few months before he was assassinated.

Then Nabonidus, a loyal politician of Nebuchadnezzar who married Nebuchadnezzar's daughter, Nitocris was named ruler. He ruled for 17 years. But most of those years he lived outside of Babylon and his son Belshazzar remained in city and co-ruled with him.

During those twenty-three years Babylon became more corrupt. It was poorly ruled and severely weakened. As a result, the Persian Empire (modern day Iran) began to press on the northern borders of the country.

King Nabonidus, the coregent of Babylon, came out of his spiritual retirement and led an army against the Persians but was defeated. Resulting in the Persian Army surrounding Babylon. This is the setting for our passage.

Belshazzar knew the tactics of the Persians. He had spent years stocking the city with food. The city was 14 square miles. It is a city larger than Oklahoma City, Colorado Springs or Columbus Ohio. The city was surrounded by two and at places three walls. The outer wall was 25 to 85 feet thick.

Some ancient sources report the outer walls to be 320' high and 65 miles long. Modern day archeologists have confirmed they were at least 45' high and wide enough for 2 and at some places 4 chariots to cross paths. At least 10 miles of the wall has been uncovered.

The outer and inner walls were dotted with 250 towers. The Euphrates River flowed under the walls. Inside the city were parks. Most buildings were 3 to 4 stories high. They had paved streets. The Temple of Bel was 8 stories high. The king lived in a magnificent palace. Bridges spanned the River and canals inside the city. There was even a tunnel dug under the river.

Certainly the king and the people felt safe behind the walls. Babylon was an ancient world technological wonder.

The Persians had already been pushed back once. Because of this, Belshazzar felt confident that they could wait out the Persian King. As we all know, it is very expensive to keep an Army in the field.

So to booster the confidence of the people, the king proclaimed a feast, hence, Daniel 5:1. The purpose of this feast was to encourage the people and to suppress their fears regarding the Persian Army outside their walls.

The text tells us that Daniel did not attend the king's feast, but historians tell us the whole city celebrated along with the king.

Daniel, a Jew, was most likely celebrating something different. He would have been on his roof or backyard sleeping and eating under his booth with other Jewish families celebrating the feast of Tabernacles. His thoughts would be on God's protection of His people during the wilderness wanderings. This feast would also remind him of His Lord who would one day return to destroy all earthly empires. After that, the Lord would rule and restore His people.

As the sunset on the first day of Tabernacles the king of Babylon was getting drunk. Belshazzar commanded the Jewish temple instruments to be brought out and drunk from. He was arrogantly defying God. In pride he drank from the forbidden items, and openly declared his strength over the God of the Jews and promoted his god Bel as supreme. Daniel 5:2-5

Yet, God was also on the move. Outside the gated of Babylon God moved Darius the Median to separate his Persian Army into three groups: one at the head of the River Euphrates entering Babylon; the second company at the place where the Euphrates exited the city; and the third company was stationed miles upstream where the river split (part going into a swamp and a lake and the other part flowing through Babylon).

There, his engineers began digging a channel towards the swamp and the lake. Darius' plan was to temporarily change the course of the river so it would flow into the lake.

As the evening of the 16th moved on, a finger of God appeared over a candlestick and wrote on the plaster wall - Daniel 5:5-6. The main hall was 56' wide and 173' long. Other halls were also used to entertain a celebration. But this was the main hall. In the middle of the 173 foot long wall was a niche where the kings throne sat. Above the throne was a plain white plaster wall. It was probably there the finger wrote.

I can almost see drunken Belshazzar turn white and almost drop to the floor in fear.

Daniel 5:7 - get the wise men.

Even though the writings were in Aramaic forms, none could read or determine an interpretation. Notice that the Scriptures state that the king's continence changed three times - Dan. 5:6, 9 & 10.

The hall must have grown still; everyone must have felt the seriousness of the situation. It is amazing that at the very height of our arrogance, God can reach down and touch one's heart.

Daniel 5:10-12 - the queen was summoned. This is not Belshazzar's wife, but rather his mother, Nebuchadnezzar's daughter.

Daniel 5:13 - Daniel was sent for. Even though it was late in the evening, it was not uncommon for those in the Jewish community to be up during the feast of Tabernacles. Furthermore, the entire city was celebrating. The ancient historian Herodotus writes that the city was filled with drinking and dancing. It must have been a loud commotion and hard for those wanting to sleep.

Daniel 5:14-16 - The king greeted Daniel and told him of the writings on the wall. As Daniel drew near to the king I can imagine what he saw. Surely he looked at the handwriting on the wall and understood what it said. And then he saw the golden cups from the Jewish temple on the king's table.

Daniel 5:16-17 - Daniel rejects the offer of rewards for interpreting the sign. He then reminds Belshazzar of his grandfather's arrogance and 7 years of insanity. He also reminded him of his grandfather's repentance and faith in the Most Holy God - Daniel 5:18-21.

Then in Daniel 5:22-24 he points to Belshazzar's own arrogance. "You, knowing all this, still defied God."

Insight: How often do we see this happen in our day?

THE WRITING ON THE WALL INTERPRETED

1. MENE - God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it - Daniel 5:26

The Euphrates River was diverted. At that moment Darius had commanded his troops to enter the city as soon as the riverbed was passable.

2. TEKEL - Thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting.

There is now no more mercy. No more grace. The time of accounting has come. Belshazzar was found without righteousness and still in his sin.

3. U PERES - The kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.

As Daniel spoke, the Persians were moving into the lower riverbed and under the city walls. Within hours the city fell. The guards on the walls were drunk along with the rest of the city. That night as the city was partying, it fell into the hands of Persia. The king was captured and killed. Most of the city didn't even know what happened.

God's time of mercy had ended, His grace was gone; and time ran out.

Additional insights:

No one knows when the end will draw near. No one knows when God's patience will be over. What a sad day it is when God determines your days are numbered and your life is finished. You have been weighed and found lacking, you have no Savior; there is no forgiveness; you are without righteousness and your door of hope has closed and is sealed. Your opportunity of mercy is forever gone. Your body is soon to be a corpse and your soul cast into hell, separated forever from all that is good and holy. Lost forever. Shut up into a Christ-less eternity.

If you don't have Christ, flee to him today.

The final insight: This took place on the 16th of Tishri. It literally occurred during the feast of Tabernacles. The feast points to the day that all nations will be destroyed and Christ's rule will begin. Is it just a coincidence that Babylon ended during this feast?

Certainly the likeness of Belshazzar's pride and his shameless defiance against God will one day overtake the world. Though the world will know about Christ, it will refuse to humble itself before Him. Just like Belshazzar, judgment will come without warning. All will come crashing down in a moment. Then there will be no more mercy, no more grace and no more time.