

Almighty God Crashes Belshazzar's Drunken Party

Daniel 5:1-9; Ephesians 5:18

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How often do people challenge and even dare Almighty God as if they are mightier than their Creator. They plan evil devices, and (in effect) challenge Him to prevent them if He can. They sin with a high hand and shake their fists in God's face and insult the Almighty. That's what is being done with the perversion of Biblical marriage in the "Respect for Marriage Act" that codifies into national law same sex "marriages" (Destruction of Marriage Act). It seeks to destroy God's institution of marriage and dares Him to do anything about it.

Nebuchadnezzar wickedly challenged the Lord back in Daniel 3:15. God accepted the challenge and humbled the king by appearing with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and protecting them from all harm.

Rabshakeh, the Assyrian general for King Sennacherib, likewise dared the Lord God in Isaiah 36:18-20. God accepted the dare and destroyed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night as they slept.

Even **Israel** foolishly dared God after they were delivered from Egyptian bondage and became hungry as they wandered in the wilderness (Psalm 78:19-22). The Lord fed them and yet He sent fire upon them.

It will never go well for us if we transgress God's commandments and dare Him by our words or deeds to do anything about it. That's the height of foolishness, for the Lord will not remain silent—He may delay so as to show mercy—but He will not be silent forever (Exodus 20:7).

God certainly did not hold King Belshazzar guiltless as we shall see from our text today. The main points from our text are: (1) Belshazzar Dares Almighty God at a Drunken Party (Daniel 5:1-4); (2) Almighty God Crashes Belshazzar's Drunken Party (Daniel 5:5-9).

I. **Belshazzar Dares Almighty God at a Drunken Party (Daniel 5:1-4).**

A. God humbled proud Nebuchadnezzar by taking from him the mind of a man and giving him a mind of a beast for a season at the end of which Nebuchadnezzar publicly proclaimed his folly (Daniel 4:34-37). Rather than learning from this event which occurred about 23 years earlier, Belshazzar embarks upon an even greater folly against the Lord.

B. Belshazzar is called by Daniel "the king" throughout this chapter and elsewhere (Daniel 7:1; Daniel 8:1). He was, however, serving as king of Babylon in the absence of his father, Nabonidus, who spent a lot of time away from Babylon on other adventures (a co-regency). One other objection by skeptics is that Nebuchadnezzar is called Belshazzar's "father" (Daniel 5:2). From a number of historical records Nabonidus was identified as Belshazzar's father. Is there an historical inaccuracy at this point in Daniel? No! The relationship of father and son (in the Aramaic language) could be used in the sense of "a family ancestor" if there was a blood relationship between Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar or in the sense of "a royal predecessor" since Nebuchadnezzar preceded Belshazzar on the throne. "Father" had a rather broad meaning.

C. The occasion and timing of this great feast is puzzling indeed, for the threat of imminent danger was not far outside the great walls of Babylon. For outside Babylon was encamped the mighty Medo-Persian forces of King Cyrus, and what does Belshazzar do? He calls for a great drunken feast to which 1,000 of his lords/princes are invited. Why?

1. Belshazzar trusted in the great walls of Babylon to defend them against Cyrus. The Greek historian, Herodotus (who was born about 50 years after Daniel's death), writes that the walls around

the city were about 15 miles on each side (225 square miles). Those walls were said to be over 300 ft. high, 80 ft. thick. The foundation of the wall was 35 feet deep. The city was protected outside the walls by wide and deep canals and moats filled with water. Babylon also had within its walls sufficient food and water to last years. Like the Titanic, Babylon was unsinkable.

2. Belshazzar trusted in his gods to protect him against Cyrus (to these gods he appeals later in this drunken party).

3. This drunken feast was called by Belshazzar to calm his fears and the fears of his lords/princes that they need not fear Cyrus, for they were safe within the walls of Babylon and were protected by their gods. This was a dare against God's providence. No one could harm them (The Parable of the Foolish Rich man who built bigger barns in Luke 12).

4. This is the false security that the world always seems to place in that which perishes (whether in military power, the economy, or a political party). But all such confidence is built upon sand. God likewise speaks to us not to put our confidence in bank accounts, property, guns, or preparations, but rather in our God who uses such means to provide for us (Psalm 124:8).

5. Let us not underestimate the power of alcohol and drugs to so dull our senses that we dare God and His providence (Ephesians 5:18). To not drive or act safely is to dare God to keep us safe. To rebel against God and His commandments is to dare Him to chasten us.

D. While in this drunken state, Belshazzar commanded that the holy vessels that had been taken by Nebuchadnezzar from the temple in Jerusalem and kept in the temple of Marduk be brought out that the one, true, living God might be profaned (Daniel 5:2-3). This is the next dare brought by Belshazzar against God.

1. This was a further dare to Almighty God in desecrating that which God called "holy". Why is Belshazzar not challenging any other of the gods of the nations (e.g. the gods of the Persians outside the walls)? The polytheism of the heathen nations tolerated the honor of one another's gods, but the God of the Jews tolerated no other god. The one true religion of the Bible is exclusive—not inclusive (Exodus 20:4; Isaiah 43:10; John 14:6). That is what is most hated about Biblical Christianity—its exclusivity, its narrowness. There is a biblical sense in which we are called to be narrow-minded (Matthew 7). We must be as narrow as Jesus, the prophets, and the apostles lest we fall into the open-mindedness of backslidden churches and the culture all around us which leads to destruction. The farther away from the truth the church and the culture become, the greater the attacks will be about us being too narrow—a cult. Why? Simply because we have committed ourselves to follow Jesus.

2. It was not because these vessels were holy in themselves, but rather because they were set apart to a holy use by the infinitely holy God. Thus, the temple was called "holy" as was the priesthood, the sacrifices, the altar, the Sabbath, and the feast days. Likewise, the Scriptures are called "holy" (Romans 1:2)—as are our bodies (Romans 12:1), Christ's Church (1 Corinthians 3:17), our covenant children (1 Corinthians 7:14), Christ's ministers (Ephesians 3:5), brothers/sisters in Christ (Hebrews 3:1), heaven (Hebrews 9:12), and the Christian faith (Jude 1:20). We profane our holy God (and treat Him as common and ordinary) when we treat what He calls holy as no big deal (that is profaning God's name). We follow in the footsteps of Belshazzar when he profaned what is holy rather than using what God calls holy for holy purposes (in our thoughts, words, and deeds).

E. The final dare brought by Belshazzar against God Almighty was more direct. He praised and worshipped the false gods of Babylon made of "gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone" (Daniel 5:4). Do you see how challenges and dares against God progress—daring God by challenging God's providence; then daring God by profaning what He calls "holy"; and finally daring God by worshipping our own gods? Let us not dare and challenge God at any point. Let us not have to learn the hard way (through the rod), but rather the easy way (through the Word).

II. Almighty God Crashes Belshazzar's Drunken Party (Daniel 5:5-9).

A. While Belshazzar and all those invited were profanely mocking Almighty God at this drunken party, God crashes their party.

1. The hand of a man appears and the fingers write on the wall a message for Belshazzar (whether with a tool or just with the finger we are not told). There is no full body seen, but just a hand and its fingers and the message that is written (Daniel 5:5).

2. The king's face goes immediately from being red from wine to being white from terror. He begins violently shaking from his waist to his knees (Daniel 5:6).

3. Belshazzar then calls for the wise men to come and interpret the message that has been left behind, but it was written in a script that was unknown to any of the wise men, so they could not interpret the message (Daniel 5:7-8). Once again the wisdom of the world is shown to be foolishness (Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great image in Daniel 2; Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great tree that is cut down in Daniel 4; 1 Corinthians 3:19). Why would we seek out the wisdom of the worldly in order to know how to deal with our struggles and trials when we have the wisdom of God in Jesus Christ and in His written Word (Colossians 2:3; Proverbs 2:6; Colossians 3:16)?

4. Belshazzar is left in this great upheaval of mind disappointed to say the least and without hope as to the meaning of this message delivered to him in such a terrifying and ominous way (Daniel 5:9). This could not be good news, even though he did not know what the message said; for he was shaking to the core of his being and no one could tell him what it meant.

B. Application

1. God is always present to hear and see (even when He is not invited). He doesn't have to be invited. This truth terrifies the unbeliever, but is a great comfort to the believer. The believer wants to be known and searched out by the God who made us and redeemed us.

2. When God brings providential danger, trials, and hardships upon us, it is not a time to drown our fears, care, and anxiety with booze, drugs, parties, pleasure, or even busyness, but is rather a time to be humbled before God through confession of sin, to fall upon His mercy in prayer (whether privately or with friends), to gain wisdom and encouragement from God's Word, and to fast (Joel 2:12-13).

3. Paul calls Esau a "profane person" (in Hebrews 12:16) because he sold his birthright for an earthly meal to satisfy his present hunger. He did not weigh out the value of that great blessing from God (not just an earthly, but a spiritual blessing). Let us not treat the blessings from God as common/ordinary or as that which we can trade away for some earthly benefit (Christian parents, faithful church officers, holy brethren, the gospel of Jesus Christ, the commandments of the Lord).

4. Our God is to be feared (taken seriously) and treated with the greatest reverence. One of the fruits of true faith in Jesus Christ is the fear of God (taking His warnings seriously and taking His promises seriously). Any other view of God is playing games with Almighty God as did Belshazzar. Even the hand of God writing upon a wall did not bring Belshazzar to repentance. May the Lord humble us and may we flee to the mercy of God in Christ Jesus where there is alone forgiveness, wisdom, righteousness, and hope of eternal life.

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