

## Belshazzar's Booze Banquet

**Text:** Daniel 5:1-4

### Introduction:

1. This event occurred in 539 B.C. approx. 23 or 24 years after the death of Nebuchadnezzar.
2. The authenticity of this account has been severely attacked by critics. This was because for a long time no reference could be found in ancient history to a monarch by the name of Belshazzar. History is also clear that Nabonidus was king of the Babylonian Empire at this time.
3. Question: How do we answer this alleged problem?
4. Answer: The Nabonidus Chronicle for 556-539 BC, which was translated in 1882 by T.G. Pinches, states that Nabonidus and Belshazzar shared co-regency. It says that Nabonidus was in the city of Tema (Teiman) in the Arabian Desert for 10 years, while Belshazzar was with the army in Babylon. "He (Nabonidus) entrusted the army (in Babylon) to his oldest son, his first born, the troops in the country he ordered under his command. He let everything go, entrusted kingship to him, and, himself, he started out for along journey." (*Nabonidus Chronicle*, British Museum, Room 55, Case 15, WA 35382) (David Cloud's Commentary)
5. The account of Belshazzar's feast before us serves as a powerful warning to us of the evils of drink and living for sinful pleasure. This will be the focus of our first message from this chapter. Let's study this sinful feast under 3 divisions.

Look firstly at...

### I. The Information about the Feast (Vs. 1)

#### A. The Immensity of the Feast – "a great feast"

1. Feasts like these were often held by pagan kings to flaunt their wealth and prowess.
2. John Phillips describes the scene:

The dining room was enormous, reportedly 1,650 feet wide (502m) and a mile long (1.6km). Some 4,500 pillars in the form of giant elephants were part of the walls. They were carved out of stone and stood twenty feet high (6m). The tables were fashioned in the form of horseshoes. The lords of Babylon and their wives sat down to eat and drink as trained peacocks, arrayed in gold-and-silver-trimmed harness, drew miniature chariots laden with choice wine and all manner of food to the guests. From the adjoining gardens, an enormous choir and orchestra provided food and entertainment.

#### B. The Invited to the Feast – "a thousand of his lords"

1. This was a large gathering of the political class of Babylon.
2. Note: It is of interest to observe not just who was invited but who wasn't invited! No sign of Daniel at this feast, despite his long

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history of serving the Babylonian court. Whether Daniel was invited or not is unknown but either way, a gathering like this was no place for a man of God. Daniel was likely in his 80s by now but his convictions hadn't changed from when he took a stand as a young man (Daniel 1)

### C. The Intent of the Feast

1. Pride - It was about the prideful exaltation of Nebuchadnezzar.
2. Pleasure - It was about giving oneself over to every impulse of fleshly lust and indulgence. The Babylonians worshipped the goddess Ishtar, the goddess of love. The pleasure-driven culture of Babylon was very similar to the one we find in 21<sup>st</sup> century Australia where people live by the motto, "If it feels good do it!" We live in a pleasure driven, amusement age where people are so high on entertainment it is almost impossible to make them think soberly about eternal realities.
3. Provocation – It was about defying the Medo-Persian army surrounding the city. They were partying in the face of impending judgment!
  - a. They were lulled into a false sense of security on account of their tremendous fortifications and supplies. They felt beyond the reach of judgment or defeat. Their walls were impregnable; huge towers provided strategic vantage points from which to see and attack the enemy. Inside the city there was supplies that would feed the city for many years (some say up to 20!). The river Euphrates ran through the city, providing a permanent source of water and a means to grow crops within the city.
  - b. What a picture of the world that parties and dances as if God's judgment will never come but all the while the sand in the hour glass of God's forbearance and longsuffering is running out.
  - c. "By refusing to think, especially about eternal realities, and by filling our days with entertainment, particularly sin-oriented entertainment, we lose sight of danger and plunge into the abyss." (James Boice)

Look secondly at...

## II. The Intoxication at the Feast (Vs. 2)

### A. The Emphasis upon the Wine (Vs. 2a)

1. The drinking of wine is mentioned 5 times in Vs. 1-4
  - a. "drank wine" (Vs. 1)
  - b. "tasted the wine" (Vs. 2)
  - c. "might drink" (Vs. 2)
  - d. "drank in them" (Vs. 3)

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- e. “they drank wine” (Vs. 4)
2. Intoxicating substances (i.e. wine and spirits) are central to the world’s parties. “Alcohol has been at the heart of man’s sinful activities since the fall.” (Cloud) This should not be amongst God’s blood-washed people! God help us when Christian weddings today have as much wine flowing at them as a heathen one.
3. The Bible makes plain the Divine perspective on alcoholic wine and strong drink by its plain denunciations of it (e.g. Prov. 23) and by example such as these.

### B. The Evil Effects of the Wine (Vs. 2b)

There were two evil effects of the wine we can see in the text:

1. Blasphemy
  - a. The command to bring in the sacred vessels came “whiles he tasted the wine”. Under the influence of the wine, the king gave this wicked command to profane the vessels of the temple of the living God.
  - b. Wine is not just a beverage, it comes with an anti-God, rebellious spirit. Think of the countless curses and blasphemies that are hurled at the Lord of glory while men are under the influence of intoxicating liquor.
  - c. Foolish and wicked decisions are made under the influence of drink. Isaiah, denouncing the sin of his generation said, *“But they also have **erred** through wine, and through strong drink are **out of the way**; the priest and the prophet have **erred** through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are **out of the way** through strong drink; they **err in vision**, they **stumble in judgment**.”* (Isaiah 28:7)
  - d. Strauss on the demon of drink: “The demon of drink has continued to dig at all the foundations of civilization, destroying the moral fiber of nations. People outdo themselves in wickedness when they are overpowered by a pseudo boldness and the absence of restraint produced by the alcohol demon. One of the perils of strong drink is that it too often carries away the drinker to do and say foolish and fatal things, the hidden depths of iniquity being stirred up within him.”
2. Indecency
  - a. The presence of women highlights the immoral activities connected with this feast. In Oriental custom, usually only men were present at such feasts.
  - b. Illustration: King Ahasuerus held a similar feast. Initially the men and women were separate until under the influence of drink, he summoned his wife to be a spectacle for his guests.

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Esther 1:7-12a *“And they gave them drink in vessels of gold, (the vessels being diverse one from another,) and royal wine in abundance, according to the state of the king. And the drinking was according to the law; none did compel: for so the king had appointed to all the officers of his house, that they should **do according to every man's pleasure**. Also Vashti the queen made a feast for the women in the royal house which belonged to king Ahasuerus. On the seventh day, **when the heart of the king was merry with wine**, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, and Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, the seven chamberlains that served in the presence of Ahasuerus the king, To bring Vashti the queen before the king with the crown royal, to shew the people and the princes her beauty: for she was fair to look on. But the queen Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment by his chamberlains.”*

- c. Wine dampens the conscience and releases those who drink it from moral inhibitions. People do things under the influence of drink that they would not normally do!
  - d. Read Prov. 23:29-35. There is a connection between intoxication and indecency and immorality!
    - i. Noah's drunkenness lead to nakedness (Gen. 9:21)
    - ii. Lots' drunkenness lead to incest (Gen. 19:20-38)
3. According to Pastor Denis Lyle alcohol is:
- The main factor in the death of one thousand children each year.
  - The main factor in the death of half of drivers under twenty-five who are killed.
  - Implicated in half of all recorded crimes including half of all murders.
  - Implicated in half of all child abuse cases.
  - Implicated in half of all wife battering.
4. Peter Masters describes alcohol as, “Satan's fermented river of false hopes, false consolation, false happiness, false courage and it is his way of binding millions to the world.”

Look thirdly at...

### III. The Impiety of the Feast (Vs. 3-4)

#### A. The Participants (Vs. 3)

- 1. “the king”
- 2. “his princes”
- 3. “his wives and his concubines”
- 4. They were unified in their evil defiance of the one true God! There are all too many ready to follow an evil leader.

#### B. The Profanity (Vs. 4)

- 1. “they drank wine”
  - a. They used the sacred for the profane.

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- b. Their blasphemous worship of the idols the crowning point of their rebellion but God's displeasure at their sin of drunkenness also clearly revealed.
- c. Clear link again drawn between their drink and their depravity
2. "praise the gods"
  - a. Belshazzar's underlying motivation and purpose for using the temple vessels becomes clear. It was an act of willful rebellion and unbelief against the One True God of Israel.
  - b. The primary desire was not to use these vessels so they could feel they were "drinking in style" from vessels that were precious and valuable. It was to despise and degrade the God of Israel and to elevate and honor the pagan deities. He was trying to demonstrate that his pagan gods were superior to Israel's God.
  - c. Vs. 22 makes it clear that Belshazzar was sinning against light that had been given to him by God in the example of Nebuchadnezzar, his grandfather.
3. Belshazzar crossed the line between God's longsuffering and His judgment. Men often interpret God's patience as weakness but they are gravely mistaken. When God's mercy expires, judgment comes swiftly and severely upon the unrepentant.

### Conclusion:

1. Challenge: As believers, are our events (e.g. meals and parties) distinct from the world? Are our weddings permeated with the spirit of holiness or the spirit of sensuality?
2. Challenge: Do we drink from the devil's cup?
3. Challenge: Do we attend ungodly, compromise functions where alcohol is present?