

Daniel chapter 5: King Belshazzar

Beware Of The Writing On The Wall

I would like to continue our study on the Six Kings who ruled during the lifetime of Daniel.

Thus far we have considered King Darius, the mighty ruler of the Mede and Persian Empire. The folly of King Darius was seen in his own royal decree to be worshiped as a god by all his people.

He was convinced by his local governors to decree that all his subjects worship King Darius as a god for thirty days. Such a proposal was suggested to the king by local governors who hated Daniel and wanted him removed from his position. They cleverly crafted an evil plot to entrap and destroy God's faithful servant.

Their proposal to the king was, "Anyone who refused to bow down and worship King Darius for thirty days would be sentenced to a terrible death. They would be thrown into a den of hungry lions." King Darius was flattered by this proposal and foolishly signed the decree into law.

When news reached Daniel about the royal decree, Daniel continued to pray to the God of Heaven like he always had.

This led King Darius to have no other choice but to sentence Daniel to death by throwing him into the den of lions.

Miraculously, the Lord saved Daniel from certain destruction by sending an angel to the den who then closed the mouths of the lions.

The next king we studied was King Nebuchadnezzar. We noted the two remarkable dreams he had while king.

In the first dream, King Nebuchadnezzar dreamed of a magnificent statue which was built of gold, silver, bronze, and iron. Stumped by the dream, the king called in his astrologers, soothsayers, and magicians for their interpretations. The wise men were stumped as well. Except Daniel.

With the help of God, Daniel interpreted King Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The message of the dream was that God is in control of nations, governments, and great rulers.

Later in his life, King Nebuchadnezzar had another mysterious dream. It was about a great tree that reached high into the sky. It produced fruit and provided shelter for many creatures of the earth.

However, one day this great tree was struck down, and only a stump remained.

Again, the king was stumped by the dream. He called for his wise men but they could not tell him the meaning of the dream.

Last but not least, the king sent for Daniel.

With the help of God, Daniel told the king the meaning of the dream. We learn from the dream that God is in control of individuals. God humbles men and exalts men. God humbled King Nebuchadnezzar and made him an animal. But after seven years God then exalted King Nebuchadnezzar and made him king once again.

Tonight, let us consider another ruler of Daniel's lifetime, King Belshazzar. Who was he?

Belshazzar was a 6th century king of Babylon who reigned on the throne for only two years. He had the ominous distinction of being the last king of the Babylonian Empire.

King Belshazzar was a relative of King Nebuchadnezzar.

In Daniel chapter 5, we read how King Belshazzar mocked God by throwing a party in his palace with articles taken from the Jewish temple.

The story begins that one night Belshazzar was having a great feast for his nobles and family. Over one thousand people attended the royal affair.

It was a strange time to have a party.

King Darius, ruler of the Medes and Persians, had assembled a massive army right outside the walls of Babylon.

King Belshazzar knew this and was not alarmed by it at all. A river ran through the middle of Babylon which provide water for the people, and they had enough food stored to last 20 years.

King Belshazzar felt safe enough to have a party to worship his false gods even while enemy soldiers were planning to attack the city.

The king and his guests had been eating the very best foods and drinking the finest wines for a while when the king decided to do something terrible.

He ordered his servants, “Bring the gold and silver cups Nebuchadnezzar brought from the house of God in Jerusalem so we can drink from them.”

These special cups were holy to the Lord and were supposed to be used to worship the God of heaven, but Belshazzar was going to use them to worship his idols.

The cups were brought and everyone drank from them, praising their idols. They were blaspheming and making sacrilege of the one and true God of Heaven by drinking from the cups set aside to worship Him!

King Belshazzar knew that it was wrong to use these special cups this way. He didn't care that he was sinning against God. Besides, he didn't think he would be punished for his sin. He thought he was invincible.

He didn't care that he was sinning against God. He thought he could do as he pleased and nothing would happen to him.

There would be no consequences of my sin.

Suddenly, as the king and his guests were drinking from the temple cups and praising their false gods, a hand with no arm or body appeared by the wall! Can you imagine the scene!

Then the hand began to move, writing words on the plaster of the wall. King Belshazzar was so scared his face turned pale! The Bible says his knees knocked together and his legs gave out on him! He had never been so scared in his life!

The hand disappeared, but the writing stayed on the wall where everyone could see it.

“Call in my wise men!” ordered the terrified king. “I want my magicians, astrologers, and sorcerers. I must know what this writing means!”

Have you ever heard the expression, “The writing is on the wall?” What does it mean? Where did such an expression come from?

It comes from this portion of the Bible in Daniel chapter 5. It means the end is near.

King Belshazzar did something wrong-on purpose against the Lord. He thought he could get away with it, too, until God gave him a frightening message! The title of my message is, ***Beware Of The Writing On The Wall: Taking Seriously The Things of God.*** We must take seriously the things of God.

When the wise men arrived in the palace, the king offered rewards to anyone who could read the writing and tell its meaning. That person would receive a royal robe to show he had great power. An expensive gold chain would be put around his neck and he would be made third highest ruler in the kingdom.

All of the wise men must have wanted these special rewards, but none of them could read the writing or tell its meaning! This writing was a message from God. These men couldn't know the message or what it meant because they didn't know the one true and living God.

This frightened King Belshazzar even more! His guests were astonished and confused.

Hearing all the noise in the banquet hall, the queen came to see what was happening. "Don't be worried!" she said to the king. "There is a man here in your kingdom who can help you. He has the spirit of the holy gods in him. In the time of your ancestor, King Nebuchadnezzar, he was found to have great wisdom and knowledge. This man, Daniel, can tell the meaning of dreams. Call Daniel in. He will be able to tell you what the words on the wall mean."

So Daniel was brought before the king. Belshazzar said, "Are you Daniel?" I have heard you are very wise and can interpret dreams. No one has been able to tell me what this handwriting on the wall means. If you can read it and explain it to me, I will give you great rewards."

But Daniel wasn't interested in the king's rewards. "O king," Daniel said, "you know about King Nebuchadnezzar. God gave him great power and might so all the other nations were afraid of him. He became so proud that God had to teach him a lesson. He lost his mind and became like an animal. He had to live outdoors with the animals and eat grass in the fields until he finally admitted that the Most High God is the one who is really in control of men."

"You knew all this, Belshazzar," Daniel continued, "but still you set yourself up against the God of Heaven. You drank from His temple cups while praising your idols that couldn't even hear or understand you! Yet you ignored the living God who holds your very life in His hands! That's why God sent the hand to write the message on the wall."

Even though Belshazzar didn't believe in the one true God, he knew of His power. He should have known better than to go against God. Daniel was reminding him of the seriousness of his sin before God.

God is holy and must punish sin. You can be sure God will not let you get away with sin. Don't be fooled into thinking that God won't care if you sin "just a little" or that, since He saved you from your sins you can live any way you want to.

Now Daniel was ready to tell the king what the words on the wall meant.

Daniel told the king, "God has numbered the days of your rule, and now your rule has ended. You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting-you haven't measured up to what God expects you to be. Now your kingdom will be divided and given to your enemies, the Medes and Persians."

Belshazzar was going to lose his kingdom.

Even though it was a terrible message, the king gave Daniel the promised rewards. A purple robe was put on him, a gold chain was placed around his neck and he was made third in charge of the kingdom.

That very night, enemy soldiers got into Babylon, where King Belshazzar thought he was safe.

Historians tell us the enemy soldiers dug another channel for the river to run through so it didn't go into the city. Then they were able to go right under the walls of the city where the river had been. They captured the city and killed King Belshazzar.

Because Belshazzar had purposely sinned against God, he lost his kingdom and his life! A new king took over Babylon, Darius the Mede, one of King Belshazzar's enemies. God was faithful to Daniel though, and he continued to serve under the new king. As Belshazzar found out, it is a serious thing to sin against God, thinking He will ignore it.

In closing, King Belshazzar was the last king of Babylon. He was the "Party King." But his end was ruin and destruction. The writing was on the wall for King Belshazzar and so we must beware as well. Where do you stand with Christ? Are you serious about God? Do you mock God like Belshazzar? May the Lord help us to take seriously the things of God. Let us pray!