

Daniel 5: Handwriting on the Wall

“And this is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.”

Daniel 5:25-28

Introduction:

1. Lessons not learned can bring painful results, for Belshazzar should have learned from Nebuchadnezzar.
2. There is a God in heaven, and He weighs all the actions of men and gives them according to their works.
3. The first four chapters of Daniel involved Nebuchadnezzar, now we meet Belshazzar, his grandson.
4. All of human history, every minute detail of it, is under the wise and just government of our holy God.
5. The affairs of nations are turned upside down in order to chasten, protect, or reward His small church.

I. The FEAST (5:1-4)

- A. Belshazzar was the son of Evil-Merodach, who was the son of Nebuchadnezzar.
 1. Son is used for grandson or male descendant in the Bible (II Sam 9:7; Matt 1:1).
 2. God told clearly that Belshazzar was grandson to Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 27:6-7).
 3. And in between the two we have Evil-Merodach (II Kings 25:27; Jer 52:31).
 4. Babylon had Nabopolassar, Nebuchadnezzar, Evil-Merodach, and Belshazzar.
- B. The oriental kingdoms of Babylon and Persian were known for feasts (Esther 1:1-9).
 1. It is impossible he did not know of the Medes and Persians coming against him, which shows his arrogance and foolishness in holding such a party at this time.
 2. Wicked kings make foolish decisions when drunk (I Kings 16:8-10; 20:16).
 3. He “tasted the wine,” which may indicate more than wise and noble drinking.
 4. If he had obeyed Lemuel’s mother, he might have done differently (Pr 31:4-7).
 5. Let every saint fear and avoid banquetings and excess of wine (I Peter 4:3).
- C. Belshazzar called for the gold and silver vessels from Solomon’s temple to drink from.
 1. Nebuchadnezzar had taken these items in one of his raids against Judah (1:2).
 2. Only God’s sovereign judgment could cause the king to think such a thought, as these events are separated by 60-70 years. Belshazzar did not even know Daniel.
 3. This was the final act of blasphemy of this king and the kingdom of Babylon.
 4. Not only did he drink from them, so did his Babylonian concubines – his harem.
 5. Not only did they drink from the LORD’s vessels, they praised their pagan idols.

II. The HANDWRITING (5:5-9)

- A. While they were having this great, profane celebration, the LORD paid them a visit.
 1. God’s fingers wrote on the plaster wall near the candlestick of this night party.
 2. This was no dream in his bed, Belshazzar saw the fingers before 1000 witnesses.
 3. He was sorely shaken in appearance and manner by this frightening event.
 4. Terror is something the Lord brings against those who reject Him (Job 18:14).
 5. Pharaoh did not just drown in the Red Sea; he thought of it first (Ex 14:24-25).
- B. Pagans don’t learn, so Belshazzar calls for the same losers who failed his father.
 1. Daniel had proven himself many times, but men do not want truth (John 8:45).
 2. The wise men of Babylon were astrologers, the Chaldeans, and soothsayers.
 3. He offered a promotion and public recognition in his desire to understand it.
 4. These “wise men” could not even read the writing, let alone interpret it.
 5. It was likely in Hebrew, which was not exactly a popular language to learn.
 6. Worse than having a hand write strange words on a wall is not knowing them!

III. The CALL FOR DANIEL (5:10-16)

- A. This must be the queen mother – a wife of Evilmerodach or Nebuchadnezzar.
 - 1. Daniel’s history records that Belshazzar’s wives were with him (5:2,3,23).
 - 2. This queen was not in the party, and she knew Daniel very, very well. She knew his ability, history with Nebuchadnezzar, former position, and both his names.
 - 3. Did she upbraid her son or grandson for neglecting Nebuchadnezzar’s history with Daniel, by her repetition of words regarding the king, his father (5:11)?
- B. The king calls for Daniel, verifies his history, and asks him to interpret the writing.

IV. The REBUKE OF THE KING (5:17-24)

- A. Daniel does not care for the reward, as he is not a hired soothsayer or astrologer.
- B. He recounts the events of chapter four, where Nebuchadnezzar was humbled as a beast.
- C. He rebukes the king Belshazzar for knowing of this event but not humbling himself.
- D. He rebukes the king Belshazzar for intentionally singling out the LORD for profanity.
- E. He rebukes the king Belshazzar for not knowing his breath and ways were in His hand.
- F. He rebukes the king Belshazzar by informing him that he had brought it upon himself, for the handwriting on the wall and the significance thereof were in judgment of him.

V. The INTERPRETATION (5:25-29)

- A. They are Chaldean letters in the “original” text of Daniel, but were not so on the wall, for the Chaldeans could not even read the writing, let alone interpret it (5:8).
- B. Simply taken, they are “numbered, weighed, and divided.” But Daniel interpreted.
 - 1. God numbered your kingdom for a time, and it has expired (Jer 25:11-12; 27:7).
 - 2. God has weighed your conduct, and you are found sinful (Job 31:6; Jer 6:30).
 - 3. God has divided your kingdom from you and given it to others (Is 13:17).
- C. Rather than repent and beg Daniel to intercede for him, Belshazzar rewards him.
 - 1. God blinds men for His own glory (Ex 4:21; 14:4,17; Deut 2:30; Joshua 11:20).
 - 2. Pharaoh, after witnessing ten plagues, took his chariot down into the Red Sea!

VI. The FULFILLMENT (5:30-31)

- A. In just a few hours or minutes, Belshazzar was slain by two of his lords in revenge; who according to Xenophon, led the foreign army into the city and personally killed him.
- B. The kingdom passed without a battle to Darius the Mede and Cyrus the Persian.
 - 1. Cyrus’s engineers diverted the Euphrates River to enter under the city wall.
 - 2. The gates at the river, due to the false security and revelry, had been left open.
- C. God had prophesied the names and details of this overthrow (Isaiah 13 and 45).
- D. The time for the recovery of His little flock had come, and the nations were shaken!

Conclusion:

- 1. Let every believer rejoice that history is His Story of manipulating governments for His congregation.
- 2. Let every man beware of banquetings and excessive wine that clouds and destroys judgment (I Pet 4:3).
- 3. Let every man beware the LORD regards His holy things with singular care (I Cor 11:30; Mal 1:14).
- 4. The LORD has written 31,173 verses for us. Do you tremble as Belshazzar did too late (Isaiah 66:2)?
- 5. The LORD is a God of knowledge, and by Him our actions are weighed (I Samuel 2:3; Job 31:6).
- 6. The LORD searches hearts and tries reins to give to men according to their works (Jer 17:10; Rev 2:23).
- 7. Knowing the terror of the Lord, Paul persuaded men to humble themselves and repent (II Cor 5:11).
- 8. There is yet to come a great sentence uttered and its interpretation is simply horrible, Depart from me!