

## 6. From Arrogance to Destruction (1Q 2020—Daniel)

**Biblical Material:** Daniel 5, Rev. 17:4–6, Ps. 96:5, Col. 1:15–17, Rom. 1:16–32, Eccles. 8:11, Rev. 14:8; Dan. 2:21.

### Quotes

- An arrogant person considers himself perfect. This is the chief harm of arrogance. It interferes with a person's main task in life - becoming a better person. *Leo Tolstoy*
- Sometimes it's difficult to accept, to recognize one's own mistakes, but one must do it. I was guilty of overconfidence and arrogance, and I was punished for that. *Mikhail Gorbachev*
- There is a danger that threatens everyone in the church, all of us. The danger of worldliness. It leads us to vanity, arrogance and pride. *Pope Francis*
- You never really learn much from hearing yourself speak. *George Clooney*

### Questions

Was Belshazzar particularly worse than many other ancient kings? What was so wrong in this instance? How does God look in this story? Was he still trying to win the Babylonians or not? Is there a point at which God “gives up”? If so, how would we know? Do you think the Devil could gain some advantage from this incident? What are the real issues?

### Bible summary

Daniel 5 is the story of Belshazzar's arrogant feast and the end of the Babylonian empire. Rev. 17:4–6 is a description of spiritual Babylon. Ps. 96:5 reminds us that the gods of the nations are idols. Col. 1:15–17 speaks of the Son as the Creator. God's hostility to sin is described in Rom. 1:16–32. Eccles. 8:11 tells us that crimes need to be punished quickly. Rev. 14:8 describes the fall of Babylon. God is in charge, even of kings (Dan. 2:21).

### Comment

Once again the historical situation may mean that God is placed in a less-than-ideal position. After all his work with Nebuchadnezzar, here God is dealing with his “son” (actually grandson) Belshazzar. One wonders how much God had already worked with Belshazzar before this event took place. Certainly Belshazzar had the evidence from his grandfather, and yet seemingly did not pay any attention to the true God.

Coming immediately after Nebuchadnezzar's declaration in Daniel 4, the drunken banquet of Daniel 5 is particularly striking. Why was it so necessary for Belshazzar to have the golden goblets from the temple at Jerusalem brought to use at the feast? It would seem hardly necessary except as a intentional act. Belshazzar appears to be deliberately taking a course to demean the true God by using such sacred vessels in a profane way; a provocative act that would be seen as proclaiming the superiority of Babylonian gods. Just like the actions of Nebuchadnezzar with the golden image, Belshazzar is laying down the gauntlet to the true God. In a sense, God has little option but to intervene directly.

The reaction of the king to the writing suggests that he knew very well what he had been doing. This is the response of a guilty man, rather than simple “confusion.” He wants to know not only what the writing says, but what it means—what is the verdict?

The queen's intervention clearly shows that Daniel's past actions are still well remembered, and that his previous prominence is recalled. (It is perhaps surprising, in view of his abilities, Daniel is no longer in a position of influence). As the lesson speculates, perhaps the queen shared Nebuchadnezzar's view of the God of Daniel.

Before Daniel gives the interpretation, he reminds all present that it is God to whom all credit is due. He even recalls the incident, Surely embarrassing to the royal family, of Nebuchadnezzar's madness and its reason/consequences. The immediate cause of the writing on the wall, says Daniel, is that Belshazzar has not humbled himself, "even though you knew all this." That is the telling phrase—a deliberate refusal to recognize God in spite of clear evidence. This shows that Belshazzar had been given plenty of opportunity to act wisely and correctly, and had abused this privilege. "But you have not honored God who holds in his hand your very breath and everything you do." Daniel 5:23 FBV.

Once again Daniel is there at the center of events. He does not seek power and prestige—in fact he tells the king to keep his gifts, but he still is telling the truth and sharing God. The tragedy is that it is too late for Belshazzar. The tragedy is that God wanted to save him too... Often this story is cited as an example of God's punishment? But is that the best interpretation? Is not a better conclusion that God simply "gave up" on Belshazzar, and allowed effects to follow causes. His actions also in deliberately profaning the vessels from the temple in Jerusalem show a crass contempt and a deliberate rejection of divine counsel, and a refusal even to consider divine aid even at such a critical moment. God allows such actions to have their results.

So what of the end-time plagues, poured out without mercy by an angry and unpleasant God on his erring children, knowing that they are unable to repent, that probation is closed? How strange—that God should rain down his wrath on those who cannot change, when forgiveness is denied them. Very, very strange—but who are we to question God, even if it seems so wrong? It's just God's "strange work". That's the way that the End is so often pictured. When the plagues fall, God pours out his unmerciful wrath on the wicked, knowing that this cannot convert them. Is it a question of God's patience running out, to be replaced by his avenging wrath... Is it really true that God's patience that runs out? However, *it's not a perfect God running out of his infinite patience! Rather it's God proving that he has run out of patients.* There simply are no more who will come to him. Even though they are terminally ill, fatally sick, they will not go to the only Healer. They will not become his patients.

God has no more patients. Even God has the awful experience of being powerless to change the choice of his beloved children. That is what the plagues prove. They do not prove God to be an arbitrary being who decides to finish at an arbitrary time. They simply show him in the very best light, revealing how he has worked for all his fallen children, and the ultimate consequences of free choice.

### **Ellen White comments**

In that last night of mad folly, Belshazzar and his lords had filled up the measure of their guilt and the guilt of the Chaldean kingdom. No longer could God's restraining hand ward off the impending evil. {PK 530.3}

Prophecy has traced the rise and progress of the world's great empires—Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. With each of these, as with the nations of less power, history has repeated itself. Each has had its period of test; each has failed, its glory faded, its power departed. {PK 535.1}