

Daniel

From Arrogance to Destruction

Lesson #6 for February 8, 2020

Scriptures: Daniel 5; 2:21; Revelation 14:8; 17:4-6; Psalm 96:5; Colossians 1:15-17; Romans 1:16-32; Ecclesiastes 8:11.

1. For many years, Belshazzar was one of the most compelling arguments used by biblical critics that the book of Daniel could not have been written at the time when it claimed to have been written. They claimed that Belshazzar never existed. None of the lists of kings mentioned him. As far as the king lists are concerned, there is no break between Nabonidus and Cyrus. (Darius the Mede does not appear either.) What evidence can you cite to support the existence of Belshazzar? Why do you think the extra-biblical accounts of the history of the Babylonian kingdom are so different from the biblical ones? Why didn't God or Daniel mention Neriglissar or even Nabonidus who figure so prominently in the Greek and Persian versions of history? If God wants us to base our faith on evidence, why couldn't He have provided more in this area? (Today, there is plenty of evidence for Belshazzar. See extra comments on Daniel 5 in the *SDA Bible Commentary*.)
2. Did anyone who attended Belshazzar's feast learn anything about God? Did anyone's faith actually improve? When God deals with people like Belshazzar, does He ever run out of patience? Notice that a few hours later, many of these people including Belshazzar were dead. Was he too drunk to realize what was going on? Was Belshazzar just saying to God: "Leave me alone; I don't need You"? Does that parallel the events at the end of this world's history?
3. How will God bring the whole world to a point of decision at the same time? Would this be like a doctor putting up a sign on his office door: This office is now permanently closed because no more patients will ever want to see me?
4. What do we learn about God's dealing with sinners from this story? Is this a case of God finally running out of patience and zapping Belshazzar? Who killed Belshazzar? Did God just "give him up"?
5. Didn't Belshazzar know that the Medo-Persian army was surrounding his city? What is implied by his throwing that elaborate feast while his enemies were surrounding him? Why do you think Belshazzar called for the vessels from the temple in Jerusalem to be used just at that time? Was it just a challenge to *Yahweh* or a "spit in the face" of *Yahweh*?
6. How much did Belshazzar know about the history of Nebuchadnezzar's relationship with God?
7. In 539 B.C. on that night of feasting and revelry, God demonstrated that He was in charge of the events on planet earth. As predicted in Daniel 2, world domination passed at that point from Babylon to Medo-Persia—from Nabonidus and Belshazzar to Cyrus and Darius the Mede.
8. Read Daniel 5:1-4. Compare Daniel 1:1-2 and Revelation 17:4-6. It seems clear that Belshazzar was thinking that by elevating his gods over the God of Judah, he was elevating Babylon in the sight of the rest of the world.
9. Notice, especially in Daniel 5:4, that Belshazzar praised the gods of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone. These are exactly the things mentioned in Daniel 2 and in the same order except that *clay* was replaced by *wood*. Do you think that sequence is accidental?

Of course, the stone at the end refers to Daniel 2:44-45 when God Himself will set up a kingdom that will last forever.

10. By comparing Revelation 17:4-6, it is clear that this final night of drunkenness and debauchery under the control of Belshazzar was a parallel with the woman described in Revelation 17:4-6. She is even called *great Babylon*.
11. Are there any ways in which our society and culture today are following the example of Belshazzar and the others in that great feast? How can we be sure that we are not a part of that? The uselessness of the Babylonian gods was being demonstrated!
12. Read Daniel 5:5-8. Compare Psalm 96:5 and Colossians 1:15-17. At a time of great fear and possible national crisis, Belshazzar did what Nebuchadnezzar had done in the past; he called for his fortunetellers, magicians, sorcerers, and wizards. (See Daniel 2:2; 4:7.) Having called a feast to celebrate his “gods” and trying to prove the superiority of those gods over the God of Israel, Belshazzar needed to, of course, call on the wise men of those gods. Did God intentionally confuse those “wise men”?
13. How futile is it to call on the wisdom of this world? Paul addressed that question in 1 Corinthians 1:20-21.

1 Corinthians 1:20-21: ²⁰So then, where does that leave the wise? or the scholars? or the skilful [*sic*] debaters of this world? God has shown that this world’s wisdom is foolishness! [How did people react when Paul first preached?]

²¹ For God in his wisdom made it impossible for people to know him by means of their own wisdom. Instead, by means of the so-called “foolish” message we preach, God decided to save those who believe.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., 1 Corinthians 1:20-21). New York: American Bible Society. †

14. Was God just playing with Belshazzar? Did those wise men of Babylon truly not have any idea what the message on the wall meant? The message was written in Aramaic which was their language. Were they too drunk to understand the meaning? Or, were they afraid to tell the king what they thought?
15. We do not know where the queen mother was at that time. But, apparently she heard the noise and revelry that was taking place and went to see what was happening. See Daniel 5:9-12.
16. No doubt, that banquet hall was filled with revelry and mirth and was quite noisy. How do you think the noise changed when that hand suddenly appeared writing on the wall? What kind of noises followed? Were they speechless? Or, were they screaming?
17. As we know, the queen mother who was a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar reminded Belshazzar of what he should have already known about Daniel. (Daniel 5:11-12)
18. Given the history that he knew of past experiences like this one, why do you think Belshazzar did not go immediately to Daniel?
19. It is almost certain that Daniel was more than 80 years old, perhaps even more than 90 at that time. Maybe Daniel was in semi-retirement even though soon he would serve as part of the new government. Nevertheless, his skills could hardly have been forgotten.
20. Paul talked about what happens to people who ignore God’s plans for their lives and seek to do things the way they choose. Read about the devastating results in Romans 1:16-32.
21. Read **Daniel 5:18-28**. What did Daniel mention as being Belshazzar’s problems?

First, Belshazzar totally has ignored the experience of Nebuchadnezzar. Otherwise, he would have repented and humbled himself like his predecessor.

Second, Belshazzar has used the temple vessels in order to drink wine and to praise his idols. Here Daniel mentions the six kinds of materials used to make idols in almost the same order noted previously.

Third, the king has neglected to glorify God, the One “who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways” (*Dan. 5:23, NKJV*).

Having addressed the failures of the king, Daniel proceeds to the interpretation. Now we learn that the divine graffiti consists of three Aramaic verbs (with the first repeated). Their basic meaning should have been known to the king and his sages—*MENE*: “counted”; *TEKEL*: “weighed”; and *PERES*: “divided.”

With the Medo-Persian army at the gates of Babylon, the king and the sages must have suspected some ominous meaning in that writing, but the sages do not dare to say something unpleasant to the king. Only Daniel proves capable of decoding the actual message into a meaningful statement in order to convey its full meaning to Belshazzar: “*MENE*: God has *numbered* your kingdom, and finished it; *TEKEL*: You have been *weighed* in the balances, and found wanting; *PERES*: Your kingdom has been *divided*, and given to the Medes and Persians” (*Dan. 5:26-28, NKJV; emphasis supplied*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Wednesday, February 5.[§]

22. As Christians, we recognize that all judgment ultimately comes from God. (See Ecclesiasticus 3:17; 8:11; Matthew 12:36; and Romans 14:12.)
23. While Belshazzar and his associates must have known that the armies of Medo-Persia were outside the city, they felt no fear. The walls of Babylon were at least 40 feet high and 25 feet thick with a moat in between the outside wall and the inner wall. No human army in those days could have conquered them. Furthermore, Babylon had an endless water supply and enough food in hand to survive for years. They laughed at their enemies!
24. As we know, the forces of Cyrus had managed to temporarily divert the Euphrates River, thus lowering the level of the water in the river far enough so they could march under the iron gates that hung down into the water which had been assumed to be capable of protecting the city. Thus, the invaders were able to march into the middle of the city and conquer the city without any battle. What might that teach us about future events and the end of the world? (See Daniel 5:29-31; Revelation 14:8; 16:19; 18:2.)

Exactly as announced by the prophet, Babylon falls. And it does so quickly; while the king and his courtiers drink, the city falls without a battle. According to the historian Herodotus, the Persians dug a canal to divert the Euphrates River and marched into the city on the riverbed. That same night Belshazzar is slain. His father, King Nabonidus, has left the city already, surrendering himself later to the new rulers. Thus, the greatest empire humanity has ever known to this point comes to an end. Babylon, the head of gold, is no more.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Thursday, February 6.

Belshazzar had been given many opportunities for knowing and doing the will of God. He had seen his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar banished from the

society of men. He had seen the intellect in which the proud monarch gloried taken away by the One who gave it. He had seen the king driven from his kingdom, and made the companion of the beasts of the field. But Belshazzar's love of amusement and self-glorification effaced the lessons he should never have forgotten; and he committed sins similar to those that brought signal judgments on Nebuchadnezzar. He wasted the opportunities graciously granted him, neglecting to use the opportunities within his reach for becoming acquainted with truth.—Ellen G. White, *Bible Echo*,* April 25, 1898, par. 10; *Youth's Instructor*,* May 19, 1898, par. 8.

25. Does this story tell us anything about the plagues at the end of time? The book of Revelation suggests that the final plagues will come after probation closes. There will be no more opportunity for anyone to repent and come back to God. So, is this a case of God going berserk? Is this an example of what happens when God's mercy runs out? Is this God's "strange work"? (Isaiah 28:21) Or, is it God, the ultimate Physician, making a diagnosis regarding those who refuse His care? (See Hosea 4:17.)
26. Take another look at the details and the circumstances of the end-time plagues. Is there any evidence that any of the wicked will turn back to God? Or, do these plagues just prove that no one on the Devil's side has any intention of coming back to God? Is this just one of several proofs that God offers to demonstrate that His work is finished and there is not anyone else who is willing to listen to Him and be won? Isn't God able to read minds and hearts and know that everyone has fully and completely and finally made up his/her mind? God has run out of "patients" but not "patience"—He has run out of patients willing to listen to Him! The wicked have refused God's final offer of healing.
27. Is it possible that at this point in time God is demonstrating that even He is powerless to do anything more to change His beloved, yet wicked, children? **When there is nothing more that God can do for sinners, is there any reason for Him to wait any longer in coming back for us?** Each one of us will either finally accept God's plan of treatment (salvation) for us or will reject it. But, even if Belshazzar might eventually be saved and even if he learned something from those dreaded events of his last night, it did not prevent the consequences and his experiencing the first death at that time.
28. There are many other examples in Scripture of people whose actions led to serious consequences but who will ultimately be saved. David is a perfect example. After committing that horrible crime with Bathsheba and having Uriah killed, his kingdom almost fell apart. Ultimately, four of his sons died. But, we have every reason to believe that David will be in heaven! Another example is Hezekiah. Apparently, ultimately, he will be saved and was a friend of God. But, his actions in showing the wealth of his country to the Babylonian visitors ultimately led to the Babylonian army returning to take it by force.

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.** Through manifold providences, God had sought to teach them reverence for His law. "We would have healed Babylon," He declared of those whose judgment was now reaching unto heaven, "but she is not healed." Jeremiah 51:9. Because of the strange perversity of the human heart, God had at last found it necessary to pass the irrevocable sentence. Belshazzar was to fall, and his kingdom was to pass into other hands.—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings** 530.3.†

Every nation that has come upon the stage of action has been permitted to occupy its place on the earth, that the fact might be determined whether it would fulfill the purposes of the Watcher and the Holy One. 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.—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings** 535.1.

In the annals of human history, the growth of nations, the rise and fall of empires, appear as if dependent on the will and prowess of man; the shaping of events seems, to a great degree, to be determined by his power, ambition, or caprice. **But in the word of God the curtain is drawn aside, and we behold, above, behind, and through all the play and counterplay of human interest and power and passions, the agencies of the All-merciful One, silently, patiently working out the counsels of His own will.**—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings** 499.4-500.0.†

29. **Is God constrained by certain rules of engagement? Are there certain things that He would like to do that even He cannot do? God operates by love, trust, and fairness.**
30. The Devil does everything possible to get around, to avoid, or to undermine God's rules. But, God always plays fairly by His self-imposed rules.
31. These rules demonstrate the fact that God will for eternity operate an orderly universe in which both love and hate are possible. This is the only way to run God's kind of universe. If God chose to step in and prevent evil consequences from happening as a result of evil behavior, then an orderly universe would no longer exist. How many people today are living their lives, hoping somehow they can do the evil but avoid the consequences? Would God ever choose to violate our freedom and act in a disorderly way in order to save some of us? Could He? Why does He? Or, why doesn't He? The great controversy would continue if He acted that way!
32. God will act on occasions such as this one to get our attention when things have become very serious. This is to give us an opportunity to think again about what the most important issues are. The question here is not power or might; instead, it is about what kind of a universe we live in and **what kind of a God rules over it.**
33. How does the attitude of the Babylonians toward the Medo-Persian army outside their walls compare with our current world's attitudes toward God and the future? How many people are truly concerned about the fact that God might, one day, end human history? They have not even thought about it! Are we listening?

The history of nations speaks to us today. **To every nation and to every individual God has assigned a place in His great plan.** Today men and nations are being tested by the plummet in the hand of Him who makes no mistake. **All are by their own choice deciding their destiny, and God is overruling all for the accomplishment of His purposes.**—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings** 536.2; *FLB** 168.3.†

34. Babylonians had reached the place where they felt that their city was impregnable. They did not see any reason to fear. Back in 2009, the atheists/humanists in London ran a series of ads on the sides of double-decker buses in London. Those ads said: "There's probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life." Does that sound like Babylon?

35. Belshazzar demonstrated his ultimate arrogance and his blasphemous attitude toward the true God. By getting out the vessels that had been taken from the temple in Jerusalem and drinking wine from them, he was showing his ultimate contempt for God Himself, *Yahweh*. Was that Belshazzar's worst and final sin?
36. Up to that point in history, it seemed like Babylon was winning all the battles against Jerusalem. But, suddenly, the tables turned. Prophecies from Isaiah had predicted that Cyrus would, one day, conquer Babylon. (Isaiah 45:13) And at the time of Belshazzar's feast and the invasion of the city by the army through the riverbed, it was happening.
37. Many scholars recognize that the queen mother who came in and recommended consulting Daniel was Nitocris, daughter of Nebuchadnezzar and wife of Nabonidus and mother of Belshazzar. How do you think she felt about her father's eventual conversion? Obviously, she was not in attendance at Belshazzar's feast. Why do you think that was?
38. Whereas Daniel had been very deferential and respectful when speaking to Nebuchadnezzar even at times when he was delivering terrible predictions, in this case the elderly Daniel was not showing much deference for the young Belshazzar.
39. So, what can we learn from this story of Babylon's fall and Belshazzar's foolishness that might be helpful to us? Is it important for us to see what God has done in the past in order to better understand what He might do in the future?

In reviewing our past history, having traveled over every step of advance to our present standing, I can say, Praise God! As I see what God has wrought, I am filled with astonishment and with confidence in Christ as Leader. **We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history.** We are now a strong people, if we will put our trust in the Lord; for we are handling the mighty truths of the word of God. We have everything to be thankful for.—Ellen G. White, *General Conference Bulletin*,* January 29, 1893, par. 5.† (See also *Life Sketches* 196; *Testimonies to Ministers* 31; 3SM 162.3.)

40. Note carefully that we are to be thankful for the way God has led us. That does not mean that we should be thankful for the times we have departed from God's leadings!
41. If you had been one of the high officials in Babylon in those days and had been invited to that feast, what would you have thought about Belshazzar's rule and the events of that night?
42. What do you think caused Belshazzar to call for the items from Solomon's Temple to be used for himself and his people to drink from that night? Was he intentionally trying to "spit in God's face"? Were those vessels the most beautiful ones that had ever been created up to that time? Was Belshazzar specifically trying to show his contempt for Daniel and Daniel's God who had humbled his grandfather multiple times? Belshazzar certainly could remember well the final days of Nebuchadnezzar. Did Nebuchadnezzar live a humble and God-fearing life in those final days? Did that offend Belshazzar?
43. What are the gods that are held up in our day? Is it money? Status? Education? Position? Fame? Career? What are people worshiping in our day? What about our youth today?

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