

v18 “It appears Belshazzar had learned little from history. It pays to learn well the lessons God has written so clearly in His providential dealings with mankind. In this case, God was the sole source of Nebuchadnezzar’s honor and glory” (Feinberg 1981: 68).

v22 “Knowing his family history, Belshazzar should have walked in humility before the Lord. One of the most amazing spectacles in this world is how little men really profit from the judgments of God” (Feinberg 1981: 69).

v25 “As nouns, they are units of money and may be translated: “Mina, mina, shekel, and a half....” Nonetheless, Daniel’s interpretation takes these nouns and interprets them as verbal forms, passive participles to be exact. The three verbal roots in order may be translated “numbered,” “weighed,” and “divided”” (Longman 1999: 141).

v28 “Daniel does not mean that the Babylonian Empire will be shared between the two, but that its power will be broken and it will pass to the Medes and Persians” (Lucas 2002: 134).

v30 “The outer walls were approximately twenty-five feet in width and rose to a height of at least forty feet. These fortifications were too difficult to challenge, and so according to Herodotus and Xenophon, the Medo-Persian army diverted water from the Euphrates River (which ran under the walls of Babylon) into a marsh. With the level of the water lowered, the soldiers were able to wade the river under the walls and enter the city. Xenophon added that the city was invaded while the Babylonians were feasting in a time of drunken revelry” (Miller 1994: 167).

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DANIEL 5: THE FALL OF BABYLON

THE MESSAGE OF DANIEL 5

The Lord humbles an arrogant king who defiles the temple vessels.

OUTLINE OF DANIEL 5

- I. Belshazzar celebrates a banquet and defiles the sacred vessels from the Lord’s temple (5:1-4).
- II. A human hand writes an inscription on the wall during the banquet (5:5-6).
- III. Belshazzar searches for a wise man to interpret (5:7-16).
- IV. Daniel explains God’s sovereignty in the destruction of the Babylonian kingdom (5:17-29).
 - a. Daniel reminds Belshazzar how the Lord humbled the arrogant Nebuchadnezzar until he recognized the sovereignty of God (5:17-21).
 - b. Daniel explains that the inscription was written because Belshazzar has not humbled himself (5:22-24).
 - c. Daniel reveals that the inscription predicts the destruction of the Babylonian kingdom (5:25-29).
- V. Daniel’s prediction is fulfilled that very night (5:30-31).

THE PURPOSE OF DANIEL 5

“The events in chapter 5 illustrate that God is sovereign and moves according to His predetermined plans. Those events also anticipate the final overthrow of all Gentile world powers that rebel against God and are characterized by moral and spiritual corruption. Such a judgment, anticipated in Psalm 2:4-6 and Revelation 19:15-16, will be fulfilled at the Second Advent of Jesus” (Pentecost 1985: 1347).

DIFFICULT ISSUES

“While not all the questions have been answered, we have moved a long way from the days when Belshazzar was considered a figment of a later writer’s imagination. We should remember this when we encounter similar problems, and indeed we will as early as the end of our chapter and the next as we meet a new figure, Darius the Mede” (Longman 1999: 135).

“I have said many times that if you want to look very wise in the world’s eyes and are willing to risk looking foolish years from now, you can make a reputation for yourself by pointing out the “errors” in the Bible. There are always facts we do not know and things we fail to understand, so it will always be possible to point to certain items and say that they are errors. But these things tend to become explained. As time passes and the data from archaeology, historical investigations, numismatics, and other disciplines accumulate, these alleged “errors” tend to explode in the faces of those who propound them, and the position of these who have taken their stand upon the historical accuracy and inerrancy of this book is vindicated. The Bible is seen to be more reliable, not less reliable, as time passes” (Boice 2003: 60).

CONNECTIONS TO SCRIPTURE

The story of this chapter was not written for Belshazzar but for those who would be tempted to imitate his arrogance and blasphemy. The little horn of Daniel 7 follows in this path and is destroyed (7:25-26). King Herod Agrippa did not give glory to God and was struck down (Acts 12:23). All of mankind will one day refuse to repent of “worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk” (Rev 9:20). Daniel 5 is a history lesson for rulers and ruled alike and one day God will say, as he did to Belshazzar, “you have not humbled yourself though you knew all this” (5:22). And Babylon will fall again, one last time, as the ultimate futility of man’s rebellion against God is made manifest to all creation (Rev 17-19).

Fifty years before the writing on the wall, the prophet Jeremiah presented Babylon as one who made the nations drunk before they were destroyed (51:6-9). Belshazzar’s feast foreshadows this great judgment. Daniel was echoing his predecessor who said that “Babylon was a gold cup in the Lord’s hand” (Jer 51:7) when he pointed to Belshazzar and said that “you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life” (Dan 5:23).

NOTES

“As we read Daniel 5, we begin to get a sense of *déjà vu*. Though many of the faces are different, the genre, the plot, the sins, the props, and the themes of this chapter echo from earlier ones” (Longman 1999: 133).

Miller offers three possible reasons to explain why Belshazzar was holding this great feast just after the Babylonian loss to the Persians. (1) To encourage the morale of the people following the defeat. To present a façade of confidence. (2) It was a coronation ceremony for Belshazzar, who was taking the opportunity in light of Nabonidus’ recent flight from the battle. (3) This was a regular festival celebrated at the appointed time.

v2 “We cannot be certain what was going on in Belshazzar’s mind at this time. But surely he did not just run out of his everyday goblets and called for the spares. He surely had a particular propaganda purpose in mind. But what? He may have been making claims to power by comparing himself to his “father” Nebuchadnezzar. He trifles with Nebuchadnezzar’s war booty, a booty that Nebuchadnezzar himself apparently thought too precious actually to use. Perhaps in the midst of the present crisis Belshazzar is claiming more power than Nebuchadnezzar, a boast vain enough in itself” (Longman 1999: 137).

v4 “Have you noticed how in recent years the world has stepped into the ‘sanctuary’ of faith and laid its ruthless hands on some of the things we hold most sacred? Our day has seen this impious sacrilege carried into many other realms, as well. Is God unmindful of this? Will He not visit for such defiance?” (Feinberg 1981: 65-66). Would this include the institution of marriage? Abominations in the church?

v6 “Since the ‘loins’ in the [OT] are sometimes associated with the reproductive organs, but never clearly mean ‘hips’, the meaning here is the loosening of the sphincter muscles of the bladder and anus” (Lucas 2002: 121).