

Babylon's Last Party

Daniel 5.1-12

As we turn from Daniel 4 and the humbling of the proud to Daniel 5 and the judgment on a whole city, we find ourselves in the same place but in a vastly different time and condition.

Nebuchadnezzar has been dead now for over 20 years – having died in 562. He ruled for 24 years, but his successors, not so long.

His son, Evil-Merodach, sat on the throne for about a year before being assassinated by his brother in law, who was succeeded by his son after 4 years, and who, in turn, was murdered within a month.

This last killer was Nabonidus, who began ruling in 555 and was still ruling when Belshazzar threw his famous party in Daniel 5.

Nabonidus was a son of Nebuchadnezzar, and Belshazzar was his son.

This king worshipped other gods than the supreme god, Marduk, which proved to be a very unpopular move; one which led to an easy entrance for the Medo-Persians into Babylon by the chapter's end.

Belshazzar was second in command then, while his father moved many miles away to set up another great city. This explains the offer of being third in command, in verse 16 – a gift which would not prove to be worth too much.

Most importantly, the forces of Nabonidus had been defeated just days before this event in Dan. 5, and his troops were scattered. The Medo-Persians were at the gate, but like those who would rule Babylon later,

the king is not afraid. Some believe that this very party was meant to calm the nerves of the nobles and the city.

Here is a funny sidebar – for some time, mockers of Scripture believed Belshazzar was entirely made up. For whatever reason, the 5th century historian Herodotus, and the 4th century historian, Xenophon, do not mention him. So before the 1860's, when his name was discovered in other secular records, liberal scholars sided with silence instead of believing what the hand of God had written. Another one of many instances in which the higher critics have had their unbelief counted, weighed, and found wanting.

But let us come back this fate-filled room. We know the year – 539. We know month – October in our time. We know the day – the 11th. We know the hour this toast was made – 7:35 – Iraqi standard time! (Only kidding!)

Well, we know it was the evening, for the writing of the words needed the light of the lampstand to read its words.

What is most striking however is the sharp contrast of the last words of chapter 4, and this scene of luxury and idolatry in chapter 5: (read). There are elements here that take us back to chapter one and the capture of the vessels and the food of the kings table mixed with idolatry.

So here is arrogance versus humility on a larger scale. We learn that humility is hard to learn. Here also is great indulgence, luxury, and drunkenness, versus what it should have been – a time for restraint, watchfulness, and sobriety, as the enemy is at the gate. Here is laxness, a time of ease versus a call to arms, to fight and protect.

Here is, most importantly, sacrilege versus piety, respect; idolatry and manipulation of the nobles versus trust in the true God, honoring Him, and doing what is right. At the very time the king should have been crying out to the God of his father, he is not only neglecting him, but provoking him to his very face!

We are going to come to the reaction, the shock and dread of the king's response to the writing by the divine hand. But the believing, tender soul must grow pale and surprised with each revelation found in the first four verses!

Why are they partying on such an occasion? Don't they know an army is at the door? Why are they calling for vessels taken from Jerusalem on this occasion? Are they drunk or something? Why are they drinking from these sacred vessels? Have they lost their minds? What?! These vessels of God are now lifted to praise the gods of men's hands? These are beyond dumb – dumber than idols.

I don't know who is right – whether, as some, that these vessels came out with other sacred artifacts, to show the strength of the king with his new gods over the old gods, and Jehovah was thrown in with the others – which would be bad enough. Or as others who say, that this God was singled out – the One whom Belshazzar knew was different, as the testimony of his grandfather gave in Daniel 4:37. IN either case, Belshazzar was playing games with God, and that very night, that God took his life.

See here how tentative man, sinful man, is – at his best. How foolish and how brash is man! At the same time, how quickly, how easily can

God turn brash fools upside down; to topple them from their thrones; to bring them to their place in an eternal prison.

What a little thing starts it all off – a mysterious, supernatural hand, writing four little words on the dimly lit wall.

What a change now in the face of the one on the throne! See now his cheeks and face – no longer aglow with wine and pride, but now lit with fear, bloodless, with a look full of dread! His body – so sure of itself a moment ago as he raised his cup – now shakes and wobbles, twisting in panic, and ready to twirl like a falling leaf. His limbs grew faint, his hips disjointed at the blood loss, and, as the Old King James Version puts it, “his knees smote one against another,” pounding one another in a war of fear as to who would be left standing.

There is no description of his voice other than that he called aloud for the enchanters; did he choke and gag and sputter at first, as the 1000 nobles had a front row seat for his dismay?

In any event, he sought the means he thought best suited to unravel this small but powerful mystery, frightful in its meaning – whatever that might be. He grasps the highest prize to be awarded the one who could interpret the writing: all the trappings as the third in command.

But these wise men too are confounded – they despair of their task, no matter what prize money is dangled before them. And the king’s assured and ready answer fails him, which, in verse 9, rings a new round of fear and trepidation – he is lifted by a higher wave of cold helplessness, and plunged deeper into his terror of hopelessness.

Rather than calming the watchful nobles, they are drawn in to this dark and perplexing sea.

Well, here we will stop before the falsely soothing voice of the queen mother enters to assure the king and his party. We want to stop here so as to consider the picture painted by the Spirit for us all to see and read.

First, here is a picture of **indulged human nature**, dancing on the edge of judgment, death, and hell.

The OT prophet Isaiah had written over a century before: "*Come, they say, let us get wine, and let us drink heavily of strong drink; And tomorrow will be like today, only more so.*" (Isa 56:12)

How foolish men are to not see the end coming, and the judgement and eternity to follow!

Likewise, the greater than all prophets gave a similar picture: Jesus said:

¹⁹ *And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry."* ²⁰ *But God said to him, "Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?"* ²¹ *"So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."* (Luk 12:19-21)

Here we are – living it up, calling for wine, women, and song – when the sand of time is about to slip out of the bottle. This is why the Bible regularly warns you: "Boast not of tomorrow."

A well-spoken modern author comments:

"Here is an amazing thing: a king partying while disaster looms! It is not hard to see in this a picture of many today. Western nations continue to creak and wobble under the weight of years of indulging ourselves and thumbing our noses at God. Disaster is approaching!

But most part on! Why did the Spirit of God see fit to include in Scripture this account of a pagan king and a drunken orgy? I suggest that it was because there is in Belshazzar a picture of every person who is apart from God. Belshazzar would die before the night was over, but in a very real sense he lives on in each and every person who refuses to submit to God.” (Roger Ellsworth, p. 49)

Here **secondly**, besides the picture of indulged human nature, is that of self-reliant human kingdoms.

These are the leaders of the realm, arrogantly trusting to their defenses, their resources, their wealth, their past victories, and their present sense of all will be well. The same happened to glorious Greece, to mighty Rome, to Spain, and to France and the house of Bourbon, the well-known opulence of Louis 16th and his wife, Marie Antoinette. America, with her high-handed sins, faces a similar fate.

All of these are little precursors, patterns, of the destruction of the city of mankind, the Babylon the Great in the book of Revelation. And God’s hand still writes upon the wall of our lives today:

¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. (Rev 20:11-12)

Where is your trust when enemies abound; when you find some creature comfort and supplies? Do you leave the Lord behind?

This brings us thirdly and lastly to our final picture drawn for us: that of human need, a need that is clearly spiritual, religious, and divine in nature.

Looking to gods of gold, silver, bronze, wood or stone will not do; these will only provoke the true and living God. The gods of men's hands have no working eyes, ears, mouths, hands or feet. They have no heart. Such idolatry, such calling up them, is not as neutral thing. We shouldn't look upon such sinful superstitions as a harmless act of people simply trying to help keep themselves afloat in a storm. They are certainly not half-way houses toward true religion and spirituality, as some in the past have suggested.

They in fact are an affront to the Lord Himself. His eye is angered by them, his ears burn at the glory given to them, his mouth has spoken so clearly against them, his hand is against every man who takes such a lie to his heart, and his feet are swift to crush those who do not glorify him.

Paul the Apostle wrote in no uncertain terms to the Romans:

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹ because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, ²¹ because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Professing to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man-- and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

²⁴ Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

(Rom 1:18-25)

What will protect you from His righteous judgment? Turning to more sin and unbelief is not the answer. These will not and cannot save you.

We need a God with eyes, ears, mouth, hands, feet and heart; who sees us and watches over us **against** our enemies; who hears us when we cry and answers us according to his wisdom and goodness; who speaks with words permanent – not here and there, but forever, an eternal word; whose hands take ours in His; whose feet carry us surely to glory; whose heart will never stop loving us.

And where shall we find such a God for our lives, our homes, our culture, our worship? One who is perfectly fitted and perfectly worthy to be God to us?

Oh, dear ones, let us see a different wall, and a different hand, with different letters written over these of judgment before us! Let us see the letters of gospel salvation and gospel living upon walls, not of stone or marble, but of our hearts of flesh!

1. Write Christ's love the walls of your own soul – let the Word of Christ dwell in your hearts richly!
2. Write Christ's love upon the walls of your family – let your homes be the house of God while you live, and the gate of heaven when you die.
3. Write Christ's love upon the walls of your child's education and training – train them up **IN** the nurture and admonition of the Lord; bind this to them as you go in and go out – Deuteronomy 6.
4. Write Christ's love upon the walls of your witness to others – you are living epistles, written for all to see, testifying to the good news to the lost; you are walking Bibles, read by all.
5. Write Christ's love upon the walls of culture – aim at indelibly writing the ways of the Lord upon all the earth; taking every thought captive to Christ and His Word; being the light and salt of the earth, a blessing to all nations.

Oh, and how is this done? Not by might, nor power, nor man's wisdom, but by My Spirit, says the Lord. Oh, use the means of grace: 1. come hungry for the Word of God; 2. be faithful and outgoing in the fellowship of the church (don't just come to church for what you receive, but for what you bring); and 3. Prayer (remember how Elisha the prophet rebuked the king for only striking the arrows three times, when he should have done so many times so as to beat his enemy? So should we be men and women and boys and girls of constant prayer.)

Prayer: Lord, you are the potter, we are the clay. Put your wonderful sovereign and loving hand to our lives and make us more like Jesus, in every way. Amen.