

Divine Graffiti: The End of an Empire

Scripture: Daniel 5:1–31

Code: 27-13

INTRODUCTION

Daniel 5 details the end of the great Babylonian Empire. By the close of the chapter, we will see the transition in Nebuchadnezzar's image from the head of gold (the Babylonian Empire) to the chest and arms of silver (the Medo-Persian Empire).

Ezekiel 18:20 could well be the theme of Daniel 5: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." Daniel 5 is a vivid commentary on the fact that sin results in death, not only in the life of an individual, but also in the life of a nation or empire. The Babylonian Empire was once the glorious head of gold--the crown of the times of the Gentiles. But it had gradually deteriorated into debauchery until the hour of its eventual doom. The Medo-Persian army then put an end to a great and historic era.

Daniel 5 gives us insight into how a kingdom as wealthy, vast, and powerful as the Babylonian Empire could fall. The first scene we will look at is set during a raucous feast. In the midst of it God pronounced doom on the empire, and after a few hours, that destruction came. I believe all civilizations follow this pattern: they rise to great heights, become filled with pride, are characterized by self-indulgence and materialism, and begin to descend into debauchery until they are destroyed. Psalm 9:17 says, "The wicked shall be turned into sheol, and all the nations that forget God." When a nation forgets God, its doom is certain.

First we will examine the historical account of the fall of the Babylonian Empire and then make some important applications.

LESSON

I. THE ACCOUNT

A. The Scene (vv. 1-4)

1. The background of Belshazzar (v. 1a)

"Belshazzar, the king."

For years critics have said that the book of Daniel was inaccurate because they believed Belshazzar never existed--that there was no historical record of such a man. However when archaeologists discovered what is called "The Nabonidus Cylinder," history acquired its first known record of Belshazzar. Approximately thirty-six years old at the time of Daniel 5, Belshazzar was decadent, dissolute, idolatrous, immoral, impious, and unworthy to rule. Although he was a co-regent with his father, Nabonidus, Belshazzar was sitting in the seat of royalty the night Babylon fell.

a) The chronology of the predecessors(1) Nebuchadnezzar Seventy years had passed since Daniel and his friends were taken captive (Dan. 1). By this time Daniel was in his eighties. About twenty-three years had passed since Nebuchadnezzar's humiliation and recognition of the true God (Dan. 4). After a reign of forty-three years (seven of which he was insane), Nebuchadnezzar died in 562 B.C. Although Daniel doesn't record anything between the reigns of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, extrabiblical history fills in the gap. After Nebuchadnezzar died, the empire began to decline. He was followed by his son.(2) Belshazzar The Bible refers to him as Evil-merodach in 2 Kings 25:27-30 and Jeremiah 52:31-34. He released Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, from prison and put him in a privileged position in the Babylonian court. Belshazzar reigned for only two years before he was assassinated by his brother-in-law.(3) Neriglissar Jeremiah 39:3, 13 refers to this man

as Nergal-sharezer. He was an official under Nebuchadnezzar who apparently was involved in helping release Jeremiah from prison. Neriglissar reigned four years before his death. He was succeeded by his son.(4) Labashi-mardukThis child regent reigned only nine months. He was beaten to death by conspirators, who appointed a successor.(5) NabonidusNabonidus reigned seventeen years until he was defeated by Cyrus, the Medo-Persian emperor. Although Nabonidus was appointed as monarch, he was not related to Nebuchadnezzar so he didn't have a right to the throne. Apparently that fact intimidated him because he sought to secure his claim by marrying into the royal family (either a widow or daughter of Nebuchadnezzar). This woman had a son named Belshazzar.Maintaining a separate residence at Tema in Arabia, Nabonidus didn't set foot in the city of Babylon for fourteen of his seventeen-year reign. To maintain his power in Babylon, he appointed Belshazzar as his co- regent.Nabonidus was probably the most capable ruler to follow Nebuchadnezzar, and he was a very religious man. He excavated former temple sites and reinstituted abandoned religious rites. He came from priestly lineage. And he appears to have been a man of peace and conviction.b) The conquest by the PersiansCyrus, the king of the Medes and Persians, soon attacked the Babylonian Empire. He and his army met Nabonidus and his forces outside the city of Babylon and defeated them. Nabonidus fled to Borsippa, a city near Babylon, where he was eventually taken captive. He was then exiled to Carmania, a province near Persia, where he died. He never saw Babylon again.As Daniel 5 begins, Nabonidus had already been defeated and the Medes and Persians had held the city of Babylon under siege for several months.

2. The banquet of Belshazzar (vv. 1b-4)

a) Implied indifference (vv. 1b-2)"Belshazzar, the king, made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand. Belshazzar, while he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father, Nebuchadnezzar, had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem, that the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, might drink from them."It's hard to understand how Belshazzar could host a party while the city was surrounded by Medo-Persians, but not when you consider how formidable Babylon was. The city was almost fifteen miles square, according to Herodotus, and had walls that were at least eighty feet thick and three hundred fifty feet high with one hundred massive bronze gates in them (The Histories 1:181). The Babylonians also had an abundance of water since the Euphrates River flowed through the middle of the city.Seated on a raised platform, Belshazzar began drinking before the thousand lords that had gathered for the huge feast. That he tasted wine (v. 2) implies he became drunk. He then called for the gold and silver vessels. When Nebuchadnezzar, his relative, first took captives from Jerusalem, he desecrated the Temple and took all the gold and silver vessels used by the priests. He had them stored in his own temple in Babylon to prove that his gods were more powerful than the God of Israel. Apparently those vessels had remained undisturbed until Belshazzar, in the midst of his drunken stupor, determined to mock the God of Israel. So he commanded that all the vessels representative of Him be used to drink from. That was an act of desecration and blasphemy. Belshazzar wasn't totally uninformed about the God of Israel because he knew He had made Nebuchadnezzar a raving maniac for seven years. He knew that God had revealed dreams and visions through Daniel, revealed in his later conversation with Daniel. But in the midst of his folly, he mocked God, aware that such an act was blasphemous. He challenged God--and God accepted the challenge.b) Idolatrous immorality (vv. 3-4)"They brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God, which was at Jerusalem; and the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, drank from them. They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of bronze, of iron, of wood, and of stone."The descending value of precious gold to worthless stone indicates that Belshazzar and his guests praised their deities. They used the utensils set apart for the true God to worship their false gods. It was a wicked scene.

B. The Sign (vv. 5-6)

1. The hand (v. 5)

"In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the lampstand upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote."

In the midst of the revelry, a supernatural hand appeared from God. God's patience had come to an end, just as it had with those on the earth at the time of the Flood, when He said, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man" (Gen. 6:3). When the people at the feast saw the hand, immediately the drinking and singing stopped. Deathly silence and fear fell over them. The fingers of the hand began to write on a wall that was illuminated by a lampstand. Since the brightest lighting was usually placed where the king sat, it is likely that the fingers wrote on the plaster wall directly above his head.

The archaeologist Robert Koldewey, during his excavation of the palace of Babylon from the time of Belshazzar, found a large room, fifty-five feet wide and one hundred sixty-nine feet long with plaster walls--a significant detail that fits with the biblical record. At the end of the room was a niche in the wall where he believed the king sat so he would be elevated before the people (The Excavations at Babylon [London: MacMillan, 1914], pp. 88-89, 103-4).

2. The horror (v. 6)

"Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another."

Suddenly a face probably flushed red by wine turned ashen white. Although Belshazzar didn't appear to be troubled by a natural foe outside his gate, he was greatly troubled by a supernatural foe inside the palace. Sheer terror gripped his heart. The joints of his hips weakened, which means that all his strength left him. He couldn't stand because of his shaking knees (cf. Nah. 2:10). Such fear will again manifest itself in the future.

a) Haggai 2:7--"I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come." God shook one nation near the beginning of the times of the Gentiles, and some day He will shake the rest of the nations. b) Zephaniah 1:15-18--Someday the judgment of God will come upon this world. Zephaniah described it as "a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of waste and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of the trumpet and alarm against the fortified cities, and against the high towers. And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord; and their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like the dung. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord's wrath, but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy; for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all those who dwell in the land." That will occur on the day Christ returns.

C. The Shortcoming (vv. 7-9)

1. The request (v. 7a)

"The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers."

The same kind of advisers were still available to Belshazzar, just as they had been to Nebuchadnezzar. They already had proved to be useless the first two times they were called on (Dan. 2, 4). But Belshazzar was in desperate need of help.

2. The reward (v. 7b)

"The king spoke, and said to the wise men of Babylon, Whosoever shall read this writing, and show me its interpretation, shall be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about his neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom."

Belshazzar offered a reward to whomever could interpret the writing: a promotion to third ruler of Babylon (Nabonidus being the first and Belshazzar the second). Accompanying the promotion would be a purple robe (representing royalty) and a gold chain (representing highest honor).

3. The reading (v. 8)

"Then came in all the king's wise men; but they could not read the writing, nor make known to the king the interpretation of it."

The wise men couldn't read the writing. Some have suggested that God used an unusual shape for

the letters so only Daniel could read them. Others think the traumatic experience had blinded the reasoning power of the wise men. Perhaps they were so drunk they couldn't read them. We can't be certain.

4. The result (v. 9)

"Then was King Belshazzar greatly troubled, and his countenance was changed in him, and his lords were perplexed."

Apparently Belshazzar had gained some relief, assuming that the wise men would solve the mystery. But when they couldn't, he turned ashen white again. The repeated failure of the wise men to find answers in the midst of a crisis again demonstrates the foolishness of the world's wisdom. First Corinthians 2:14 explains why: "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God." God is the Sovereign who rules history. Anyone with a humanistic perspective will never comprehend His plan.

D. The Summons (vv. 10-16)

The dowager queen then entered into the confusion of the moment. Most scholars believe she was the mother of Belshazzar since the text says that his wives were already present at the feast (v. 2). In addition, no wife of a king would dare to have entered and addressed the king with such authority as she did.

1. The queen's recollection (vv. 10-11a)

"Now the queen, by reason of the words of the king and his lords, came into the banquet house; and the queen spoke and said, O king, live forever; let not thy thoughts trouble thee, nor let thy countenance be changed. There is a man in thy kingdom, in whom is the spirit of the holy [God]." Nebuchadnezzar used that last phrase "in whom is the spirit of the holy [God]" thirty years previous (Dan. 4:8-9, 18). As the widow or daughter of Nebuchadnezzar, she probably remembered when he had said that about Daniel.

2. Daniel's reputation (vv. 11b-12)

"In the days of thy father light [enlightenment] and understanding [insight] and wisdom [application of knowledge], like the wisdom of the gods, was found in him, whom the king, Nebuchadnezzar, thy father, the king, I say, thy father, made master of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers, forasmuch as an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, interpreting of dreams, and revealing of hard sentences [riddles], and dissolving of doubts, were found in the same Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar. Now let Daniel be called, and he will show the interpretation."

The queen used every noun and adjective she could think of to tell Belshazzar that Daniel was the most intelligent, gifted, and capable man in the realm. Since Daniel could reveal dreams and riddles, she suggested that he be summoned.

3. Daniel's readiness (vv. 13a)

"Then was Daniel brought in before the king."

Daniel wasn't to be found with the other wise men. He had stood alone when he was a teenager. He stood alone when he was a mature man. Now that he was in his eighties he continued to stand alone, refusing to compromise his convictions.

4. The king's request (vv. 13b-16)

a) A verification of Daniel's identity (vv. 13b-14)"The king spoke and said unto Daniel, Art thou that Daniel, who art of the children of the captivity of Judah, whom the king, my father, brought out of Jewry? I have even heard of thee, that the spirit of [God] is in thee, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in thee."Belshazzar had heard about Daniel. But after Nebuchadnezzar died, Daniel apparently faded into the background since Belshazzar had to verify his identity. Although Daniel had the rank of a prime minister, Belshazzar obviously hadn't paid much attention to him.b) An appeal for Daniel's help (vv. 15-16)"The wise men, the astrologers, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing, and make known unto me the interpretation

of it; but they could not show the interpretation of the thing. And I have heard of thee, that thou canst make interpretations, and dissolve doubts; now, if thou canst read the writing, and make known to me the interpretation of it, thou shalt be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about thy neck, and shalt be the third ruler in the kingdom." Daniel was not impressed by the attention now given him, nor was he interested in being a third ruler in the kingdom. Who would want to be the third ruler in a kingdom that only had a few hours remaining in its history? Daniel wasn't intimidated by monarchs when he was a teenager, and he wasn't about to be intimidated as a man in his eighties.

E. The Sermon (vv. 17-24)

1. The integrity of Daniel (v. 17a)

"Daniel answered and said unto the king, Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another." Daniel didn't want the king's gifts--they meant nothing to him. Daniel had great character and courage. We need more men like him in our day. So many people strive to be rich, powerful, and famous. But Daniel wasn't like that--he was filled with holy zeal and had no interest in gifts or rewards. He couldn't be bought because he had integrity.

2. The illustration of Nebuchadnezzar (vv. 17b-21)

"Yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation. O thou king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar, thy father, a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honor; and for the majesty that he gave him, all people, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down. But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him. And he was driven from the sons of men, and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses; they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till he knew that the Most High God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will."

Nebuchadnezzar needed to learn who was sovereign, so God humbled him. Nebuchadnezzar used his God-given authority to pervert justice. He became proud of his power, so God struck him down. For seven years Nebuchadnezzar imagined he was an animal and consequently acted like one. After that divine punishment, he learned that God rules over the kingdoms of men and gives them to whom He chooses.

3. The indictment against Belshazzar (vv. 22-23)

a) He sinned against knowledge (v. 22)"Thou, his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this." Belshazzar couldn't claim he was an ignorant pagan. Daniel told him, in effect, that he had sinned against light. He knew what had happened to Nebuchadnezzar and that Nebuchadnezzar eventually attributed all that happened to him to God. Belshazzar knew that God was responsible for breaking Nebuchadnezzar's pride. Against that knowledge he sinned and failed to humble his heart. Such a serious sin provokes the same indictment from God. He condemns anyone who understands the gospel of Jesus Christ yet refuses to believe in Him. (1) Hebrews 10:29--"Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant ... an unholy thing." There will be greater punishment for someone who knows the truth yet treats it with indifference. Such a person has sinned against light. (2) Matthew 11:20-24--Christ pronounced horrible judgment on cities in Galilee for their failure to repent in spite of the miraculous works He had done there. He told them their judgment would be worse than Sodom's because they refused to heed the words and works He said and did in their midst. b) He blasphemed God (v. 23a)"But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine from them." Belshazzar not only sinned against light and rejected God, but also committed willful blasphemy by desecrating the holy vessels from the Temple in Jerusalem. c) He committed idolatry (v. 23b)"Thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know; and the God, in whose hand thy

breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified."Belshazzar's sin against knowledge, and sins of blasphemy and idolatry constitute a progression: first he knew the truth and turned from it. Then he blasphemed the true God. Finally he worshiped false gods.

4. The intention of God (v. 24)

"Then was the part of the hand sent from him, and this writing was written."

When God saw Belshazzar's sin against light, blasphemy, and idolatry, He sent the fingers to write on the wall.

F. The Solution (vv. 25-28)

1. Consummation (vv. 25-26)

"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."

"MENE" means "numbered," or in the vernacular, "Your number is up!" Daniel told Belshazzar that God, who numbers all kingdoms, said his was finished. To make sure Belshazzar understood it, He said it twice.

2. Calculation (v. 27)

TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting."

"TEKEL" has a double meaning: "to be weighed" and "to be found too light." In those days, people would weigh things by putting a standard of weight on one side of the scale and the commodity being weighed on the other. In effect Daniel told Belshazzar that he had been weighed by God's standard and came up short. He was too light in his moral value and spiritual virtue.

3. Conquest (v. 28)

"PERES [UPHARSIN], Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians."

By dropping the first letter of "UPHARSIN," which means "and," along with the "in" at the end, which indicates plurality, we are left with the same consonants that Daniel used in verse 28. The root word means "to divide" or "break," indicating that the Babylonian Empire would be broken, or conquered, and taken over by the Medes and Persians.

The literal translation of God's message is: "Numbered, numbered, too light, divided." It was God's prophecy that Belshazzar's kingdom would be destroyed because it was lacking in moral and spiritual value--it did not meet God's standard. The Medes and the Persians would absorb it into their larger dominion. I'm sure that when Daniel concluded his interpretation for Belshazzar that the hall rang with his words.

G. The Sequel (vv. 29-31)

"Then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom. In that night was Belshazzar, the king of the Chaldeans, slain. And Darius, the Mede, took the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old."

The very night of Belshazzar's feast, the Medes and the Persians were just outside the city. It was a night marked for history: the 16th day of Tishri, 539 B.C., corresponding to the 11th or 12th of October. Herodotus tells us that the Medes and the Persians had built a dam on the Euphrates, thereby diverting its flow away from under the wall of the city and into nearby swamp land. When the water level began to fall to knee or waist height, the Medo-Persians marched underneath the wall on the shallow river bed, taking the city by surprise and without a battle (The Histories 1:190-91). The great Babylonian Empire fell, and its end was sudden.

II. THE APPLICATION

Babylon fell in 539 B.C. Some day the Babylon of Revelation 17- 18, the final world system of the Antichrist, will experience a far greater fall than its predecessor. But between the two, nations throughout history fall for the same reasons. What were the devastating sins that caused Babylon to fall? Some of them are paralleled in America today.

A. Drunkenness (vv. 1-4)

The fall of Babylon occurred when its leaders were drunk. Cyrus was able to capture most of the surrounding cities of Babylon, but Babylon itself resisted all attacks--it appeared to be unassailable. Yet in drunken debauchery, the Babylonians thought themselves impregnable. Coincidentally in the same palace two hundred years later, Alexander the Great, though undefeated by all the armies of the world, soon died of a fever after drinking himself into a stupor (Arrian, The Campaigns of Alexander 7:24- 26). He repeated Belshazzar's folly.

Alcohol has destroyed many rulers, and it destroys people throughout America. Statistics indicate that there are millions of alcoholics in this country (for specific statistics see Dr. S.I. McMillen's None of These Diseases [Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell, 1984], pp. 22-28, 150-51).

B. Pleasure Madness (vv. 1-4)

The Babylonians were having a party while the end of their kingdom was only a few hours away. They didn't understand the seriousness of their situation because they were preoccupied with pleasure: entertainment, illicit sex, dancing, drinking, and feasting. America is in a similar condition. Our nation is preoccupied with sports, movies, TV, sex, and eating out, to name a few of our indulgences. We spend billions of dollars to satisfy our fleshly desires. The entire country is drowning in pleasure madness, unwilling to face the reality that we are on the brink of doom.

C. Immorality (vv. 2-3)

The worship of pagan gods often involved sexual perversion. In digs around Babylon, archaeologists have discovered artifacts engraved with pornographic pictures. But I don't know that their pornography could be any worse than what has happened in America. Our nation has abandoned itself to vice and lust. When my daughter Melinda was little, she once asked me why three X's were on the marquis of a theatre. The little X's at the bottom of her letters carried a completely different meaning.

D. Idolatry (vv. 4, 23)

Babylonian society was destroyed, in part, because of its idolatry. They worshiped their man-made gods, having blatantly rejected the true God. Thousands of deities cluttered their culture. Similarly in our country are many false messiahs, religious phonies, cults, and occultic practices. And we worship a multitude of secular gods: sex, money, material goods, pleasure, and education, to name a few. We have crowded God out of our country, except for pockets of those who really know Him.

E. Blasphemy (vv. 2-4, 23)

It wasn't enough for Babylon just to reject God; they blasphemed and mocked Him as well. And in America we produce movies that spoof Jesus Christ and make Him into a clown, superstar, or a sinner. We mock God with our empty prayers before congressional meetings and football games. We mock God with religious charlatans who use His holy name to get rich and fill the needs of their egos.

F. Willful Rejection (vv. 18-22)

No nation I know of in the history of the church has had a greater opportunity to hear the gospel than the United States. Yet the majority isn't interested. In Daniel 5:18-22 Daniel reminded Belshazzar of how God revealed Himself to Nebuchadnezzar, yet Belshazzar willingly sinned against that knowledge. James 4:17 says, "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." Many churches throughout this country are either empty or led by ministers who deny the Word of God. Many turn their backs and willfully reject what they know to be true. Apparently we have learned little from history.

G. Unrelieved Guilt (vv. 6, 9)

Babylonian society was filled with guilt because sin brings guilt. When Belshazzar saw the writing on the wall, his "countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another" (v. 6). Belshazzar's guilt convicted him.

People interpret what happens to them in light of their conscience, and our consciences can make cowards of us all. After Adam and Eve sinned, God called for Adam (Gen. 3:8). Normally Adam

would have responded to God, but instead he hid himself--his conscience convicted him. America is guilt-ridden: never have there been so many psychiatrists, psychologists, and counselors trying help patients deal with problems like mental illness, alcohol, drugs, misery, and sorrow.

H. Greed and Impure Motives (vv. 7, 16-17)

In Daniel 5:7 Belshazzar promised that whomever interpreted the writing would "be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about his neck, and ... be the third ruler in the kingdom." In verses 16-17 he specifically promised that reward to Daniel, although Daniel had no desire for it.

American society, like Babylonian society, is characterized by greed, selfish motives, and a lack of honesty and integrity. People bribe policymakers to get what they want. Most people aren't motivated to speak the truth for its own sake; they expect compensation first.

I. Materialism (vv. 7, 16-17)

In Babylon power and prestige were equated with the quality of one's clothes and the riches he possessed. Yet I don't think there's ever been a country like America that has experienced wealth for such a long period of time. There are richer people in the Arab states, but the masses there don't experience what we do here. By world standards the average American is wealthy and decadent.

J. Overconfidence (vv. 1-4, 30-31)

The Babylonians feasted because they thought their city was impregnable. And many believe America is impregnable. But we won't be conquered as fast from the outside as we will from the inside. One day an enemy will overtake us easily because we will be so corrupt internally that we won't be able to put up a fight. When Babylon fell, it was reported that not even a spear was thrown. Although Belshazzar and a few others were executed, no battle occurred because the invasion happened so fast. The people believed their resources were enough to protect them.

Such blind confidence is a product of humanism. The Babylonians had forgotten that God rules the kingdoms of men. They exalted themselves as opposed to the Lord of heaven. Similarly, we live in a humanistic day. Man claims to be the master of his fate and the captain of his soul, like W.E. Henley did in his poem "Invictus," which means "Unconquered." But it is great foolishness to think we have all the resources in ourselves to meet our needs.

K. Corrupt Leadership (vv. 1-4)

All the princes were as drunk as the king and participated in the same immorality. The soothsayers, Chaldeans, and magicians couldn't offer Belshazzar any answers because they were totally inept. Daniel 5 is a picture of godless leaders filled with guilt, lust, folly, and alcohol. Sad to say, some American leaders are characterized by such vices.

L. The Decline of the Family (vv. 18-22)

It has been observed that Belshazzar wasn't as good as his father, Nabonidus, or his grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar. I think Nebuchadnezzar became a believer, but there was a wide gulf between him and Belshazzar. That to me illustrates the decline of the family, a trend many have observed in America.

M. Pride (v. 22)

Pride was ultimately responsible for Babylon's fall; for Daniel said, "Thou ... O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart."

CONCLUSION

A poem magnificently summarizes Daniel 5 and focuses our attention on the condemnation belonging to all who have not received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior:

At the feast of Belshazzar and a thousand of his lords,
While they drank from golden vessels, as the Book of Truth records,
In the night as they revelled in the royal palace hall,
They were seized with consternation at the hand upon the wall.
See the brave captive Daniel as he stood before the throng,

And rebuked the haughty monarch for his mighty deeds of wrong;
 As he read out the writing, 'Twas the doom of one and all,
 For the kingdom was now finished said the hand upon the wall.
 See the faith, zeal and courage that would dare to do the right,
 Which the spirit gave to Daniel this the secret of his might.
 In his home in Judea, a captive in its hall,
 He still understood the writing of his God upon the wall.
 So our deeds are recorded; there is a hand that's writing now.
 Sinner, give your heart to Jesus, to His royal mandate bow;
 For the day is approaching, it must come to one and all,
 When the sinner's condemnation will be written on the wall. (MOODY)

Sin brings destruction. The world's doom is inevitable as things continue to grow worse. But the Bible promises that those who put their faith in Jesus Christ will escape the wrath to come (1 Thess. 1:10) and be delivered from the hour of tribulation (Rev. 3:10). Search your heart and determine if you truly know Christ. We must first come to Christ and then stand for His truth so that others may come to know Him as well. God is not willing that any should perish (2 Pet. 3:9).

Focusing on the Facts

1. According to Ezekiel 18:20, what is the ultimate result of sin?
2. According to Psalm 9:17, when is the doom of a nation certain?
3. What did critics once believe about Belshazzar? Why?
4. How much of a time gap exists between Daniel 4 and 5?
5. What happened to the Babylonian Empire after Nebuchadnezzar died?
6. Why didn't Nabonidus have a right to the throne? How did he secure his claim?
7. How can Nabonidus be considered the most capable ruler to follow Nebuchadnezzar?
8. Why did Belshazzar host a banquet although he knew that Babylon was surrounded by Cyrus's army?
9. What had Nebuchadnezzar done to show the people that his gods were more powerful than the God of Israel? How did Belshazzar mock God?
10. What did the sudden appearance of the supernatural hand communicate about God's patience?
11. What was Belshazzar's reaction to the hand? When will that same demonstration of fear occur in the future?
12. What is demonstrated by the wise men's failure to interpret the writing on the wall?
13. Why had Daniel been remembered by the queen? What did she emphasize?
14. How did Daniel demonstrate his continuing refusal to compromise his convictions?
15. Why did Belshazzar have to verify Daniel's identity?
16. What was Daniel's response to the promised rewards? Why?
17. What were the three indictments against Belshazzar?
18. Explain how people can sin against knowledge.
19. Explain the interpretation of the writing on the wall.
20. When was the prophecy fulfilled? How?
21. In what condition were Babylon's leaders when the city fell?
22. What distracted the Babylonians from realizing the seriousness of their situation?
23. What nation has probably had the greatest opportunity to hear the gospel? How has it turned its back on the truth?
24. Why were the Babylonians so confident? Why was their confidence misplaced?
25. What was ultimately responsible for the fall of Babylon?
26. Although sin always has consequences, there is hope in Christ. What does the Bible promise for those who put their faith in Jesus Christ?

Pondering the Principles

1. Rather than trusting in the God Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged as supreme, Belshazzar trusted in the walls and moat around Babylon as his protection. What fortresses do you trust in: modern technology, arms-limitation agreements, your salary, friends? Although we need those things, have they, or any others, become a source of confidence that isolates you from trusting God? According to Isaiah 31:1 and 42:17, what had Israel trusted in other than God? If you believe you need to trust God more, read Psalm 46 and James 4:13-16.

2. When people think of you, what quality do you suppose they remember? Is it holiness, as was in the case of Daniel? Is there anything preventing you from having a holy reputation? If so, confess it to the Lord and commit yourself to establishing a reputation that will honor God (1 Tim. 3:1-10).

3. When Belshazzar offered a reward, Daniel made it clear that he wasn't motivated by what he could gain. How would you have responded? What motivated Daniel to serve the king? Read 1 Thessalonians 2:2-14. How did Paul demonstrate that he had not come to the Thessalonians "with a pretext for greed" (v. 5, NASB)? How did the Thessalonians respond to the message he offered? What example do you see there for you?

4. Belshazzar didn't reflect the morals of his father. That can often happen when parents don't instill in their children the same values they hold. Why did God make such an important issue about the Israelites' diligently instructing their children (Deut. 6:6-23)? How effectively did they teach their children (Jud. 2:7-13)? Are you doing everything you can to help insure that your children will not forget the truths you live by? What can you do for and with your children to build their character and their walk with God?

5. Are you seeking to be salt and light (Matt. 5:13-14) in the midst of a dark and decaying world? What are some ways you are preserving the world around you from corruption? In what ways are you the light of truth to your relatives, friends, and neighbors? Think of at least two people you need to share the message of salvation with and begin praying for them. Ask God to "open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light" (Acts 26:18, NASB).

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