

“The Handwriting is on the Wall” Daniel 5:1-31

2.18.24

Last week we talked about the fact that “Pride goes before a fall.” Remember our lady who bragged about being confident she could walk on icy sidewalks...



Down she went. Yes, pride goes before a fall! We saw how the most powerful man on earth was humbled to the point that he was literally eating grass like an animal...



How sad!!! But it broke him and it humbled him. You see, King Nebuchadnezzar had to be broken from the DISEASE OF ME! And so do we. You and I will never know peace and joy without being surrendered to God and that means “Me” dies and you place Jesus on the throne of your life. Have you done that? You can do that today.

Unfortunately, the lesson Nebuchadnezzar learned didn’t pass down to his grandson, who also had contracted the DISEASE OF ME.

Daniel 5:1

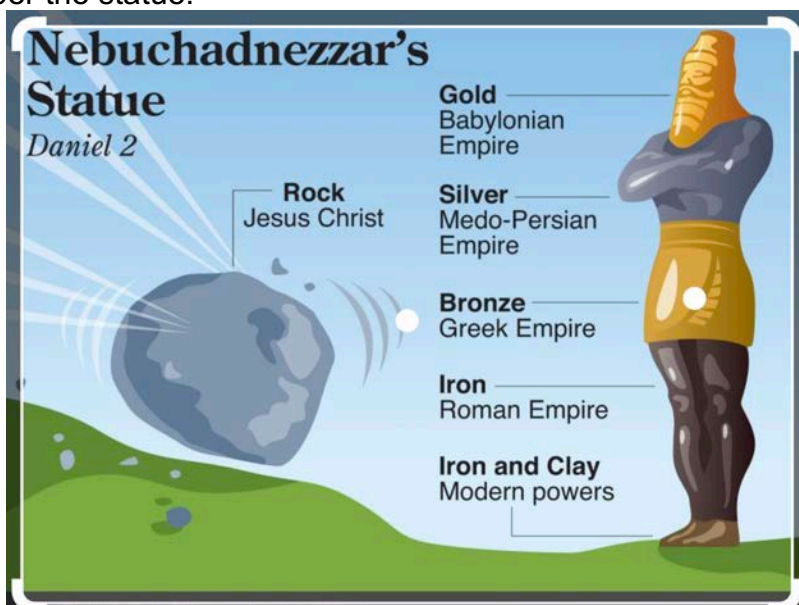
¹ King Belshazzar made a great feast for a thousand of his lords and drank wine in front of the thousand.

Now, here’s some background on King Belshazzar. Approximately seventy 70 years has passed since Daniel chapter 1...since Daniel, a teenager, along with his teenage friends were taken captive by the Babylonians and hauled off from Israel to Babylon. Daniel by now is in his mid-late 80’s and

we're now approx. 20 years since the end of chapter 4 when Nebuchadnezzar was broken and recognized that God is the only true God and God placed him in his position of authority.

So, as we come to chapter 5, it is 562 BC and Nebuchadnezzar has died. He had reigned for 44 years, but Daniel doesn't record anything between the reign of Nebuchadnezzar and this man, Belshazzar and his reign. However, history and archaeology fill in the gaps. What we learn is that Belshazzar was Nebuchadnezzar's grandson through his daughter: Nitocris (Nye-toe-cris). Also, don't let it throw you that Nebuchadnezzar is called Belshazzar's "father" a couple of times in chapter 5 (we'll see this in verse 2 in a moment). That's just a generic use of the word "father," meaning "predecessor or ancestor."

Let me tell you what we're seeing. We're seeing the end of an empire. Babylon is going down. Remember we saw this in chapter 2 by way of the first dream Nebuchadnezzar had that Daniel interpreted. Remember the statue:



The head of gold, representing Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian Empire would be destroyed by the silver arms...that's the Medo-Persian Empire. Like all world powers, they gradually deteriorate...usually imploding from within because of loose living which usually leads to loose fiscal policy, which leads to such a weakening of the nation that it's easily overthrown. That would describe Babylon and I'm afraid America is exhibiting a lot of these same characteristics. Well, the Medo-Persian army, led by Darius the Mede and Cyrus the Persian are on the doorstep of Babylon. They are outside the massive city walls, (which BTW, the Babylonians had a false sense of security...thinking the wall was impregnable), the Medo-Persian army was making preparations to invade the city...but of all things...the King is having a party! A party for all of the Elites...all of the "who's who" of the city were there. This is the height of arrogance and stupidity. It gets worse...bring out the wine...

Daniel 5:2

²Belshazzar, when he tasted the wine, commanded that the vessels of gold and of silver that Nebuchadnezzar his father^[a] had taken out of the temple in Jerusalem be brought, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them.

Now when King Nebuchadnezzar plundered Jerusalem, he desecrated the temple. He took all of the gold and silver vessels that were in the temple, that were used by the priests, and hauled them off to Babylon. He placed these sacred vessels in a special place, in the house of his own deities. This was his way of showing the Babylonians that their gods were stronger than the God of Israel.

Apparently, Belshazzar knew about these vessels and ordered that they be brought to him so they could perform blasphemous acts of desecration in open defiance of the God of Israel by drinking out of them.

Let me say this about alcohol...when it's introduced in a setting like this...there are going to be problems...you understand that. This party is getting ready to get wild. There are women there and I'll leave it at that. And church, alcohol is so dangerous. I don't touch it. Never have and never will. You don't need it. There's nothing alcohol can do for you to make you more holy or more Christlike. I'm not saying you can't drink...because the Bible doesn't say, "Thou shalt not drink." But it gives a better plan...be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 5:15-18

¹⁵ Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,

Well, let the debauchery (sensual indulgence) begin.

Daniel 5:3-5

³ Then they brought in the golden vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. ⁴ They drank wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone. ⁵ Immediately the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, opposite the lampstand. And the king saw the hand as it wrote.

Can you imagine? See this depiction...



In the midst of all of this revelry and debauchery...a human hand appears... You know those folks had to be thinking...man on man, what did they put in this wine...and I would imagine there were some screams as people started noticing the hand...and it's right beside the King. How do we know that? Because that's where the lampstand would be...offering the greatest light for him to see and BE SEEN. All eyes are on the King...

Daniel 5:6

⁶ Then the king's color changed, and his thoughts alarmed him; his limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together.

The King is petrified! He's gone from what is likely near drunken-high...to have his knees knocking together. That's not figurative...that's literally what was happening. He's terrified...a human hand is writing above his head. You say, "**Who's hand was it?**" See the depiction again...



And I want you to look down at verse 24. We'll get to 24 eventually, but I want to show you something now, (where the hand was from).

Daniel 5:23b-24

²³ but the God in whose hand is your breath, and whose are all your ways, you have not honored.²⁴ "Then from his presence the hand was sent, and this writing was inscribed.

I don't want to over-exegete the passage, but I believe the hand was sent from the presence of God. The hand was from heaven...and was likely the hand of Jesus...another preincarnate Christophany of Jesus...in this case...His hand...versus his entire body as the fourth man in the fiery furnace. For me...I have no problem believing it was the same hand who wrote with his finger in the sand as men stood around him holding stones...stones to pummel the woman caught in adultery. Yes, I believe it was the hand of Jesus and I know this is arguable...but, I believe this is righteous indignation coming from the throne of heaven for the blasphemy of drinking out of the Temple vessels...making a mockery of God!

Church, I want to tell you something...you don't mess with God! OMG...so flippant. You don't openly mock Him and get away with it. Eventually, you'll get your due. For Belshazzar, it's going to happen tonight...this is only the beginning!

Daniel 5:7-8

⁷ The king called loudly to bring in the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers. The king declared^[b] to the wise men of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing, and shows me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around his neck and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom."

The King is scared out of his mind and he says... "Whoever can tell me what this means...I'll make you rich and I'll place you as #3 in the kingdom." First of all...here we go again with this motley crew of fakes and shysters...these guys are still hanging around. Likely the grandsons of those enchanters and sorcerers of Nebuchadnezzar's day. This is a waste of time, but here they come.

Daniel 5:8-12

⁸ Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or make known to the king the interpretation. ⁹ Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, and his color changed, and his lords

were perplexed. ¹⁰ The queen,^[c] because of the words of the king and his lords, came into the banqueting hall, and the queen declared, “O king, live forever! Let not your thoughts alarm you or your color change. ¹¹ There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the spirit of the holy gods.^[d] In the days of your father, light and understanding and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods were found in him, and King Nebuchadnezzar, your father—your father the king—made him chief of the magicians, enchanters, Chaldeans, and astrologers, ¹² because an excellent spirit, knowledge, and understanding to interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar. Now let Daniel be called, and he will show the interpretation.”

Now this “queen” was the “Queen mother” of Belshazzar, not his wife...but to use older language, she was the “Lady Dowager,” likely the wife of the late King Nebuchadnezzar...making her the grandmother of Belshazzar. This is how she would have known about Daniel. She had experienced and witnessed Daniel’s abilities. But it seems that Daniel was a forgotten man.

You know that can happen to folks when they get older. Remember, Daniel is in his 80’s. He’s an old man, particularly for that day. And yet, this is a reminder...just because you’re old doesn’t mean that you’re all washed up with nothing to give. You have wisdom, discernment, knowledge from experience...and those things can’t be bought and are priceless. Don’t you dare think because you’re old and your body doesn’t work so well anymore that you don’t have much to offer. You do! God is not finished with you. Keep sharing your wisdom and knowledge with your family...with us...and serve as you can...as you’re able. God will honor it! Here comes Daniel...

Daniel 5:13-17

¹³ Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king answered and said to Daniel, “You are that Daniel, one of the exiles of Judah, whom the king my father brought from Judah. ¹⁴ I have heard of you that the spirit of the gods^[e] is in you, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you. ¹⁵ Now the wise men, the enchanters, have been brought in before me to read this writing and make known to me its interpretation, but they could not show the interpretation of the matter. ¹⁶ But I have heard that you can give interpretations and solve problems. Now if you can read the writing and make known to me its interpretation, you shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around your neck and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.” ¹⁷ Then Daniel answered and said before the king, “Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another. Nevertheless, I will read the writing to the king and make known to him the interpretation.”

Daniel is not intimidated by this scene. He’s been through a lot. He was hauled off as a teenager from his homeland. His name was changed. He was emasculated and made into a Eunuch. He’s already been threatened to be killed. He’s not afraid. He’s calm because He looks to the Lord. Church, may I remind us that the human heart can’t entertain fear and faith at the same time. Daniel chose faith. And so must we! Either we’ll focus on fear or faith. See it:

Fear or Faith

Fear or faith, you pick? Daniel was not afraid...and that’s why he wasn’t enticed by the King’s stuff. He didn’t want a chain of gold or a position of authority. He had already had all of that with his grandfather. When you get older, you’re not really enticed by stuff anymore. You really laugh at it and are amazed how much possessions turned your head when you were younger! I know that to be the case in my own life.

Here’s another point to consider: Daniel couldn’t be bribed. There’s such a tremendous need for honorable men and women in our day. People who can’t be bought. Those who do what’s right, even if it costs them everything. Those are people of integrity. Try to find that in our society today, and

you often have to look long and hard to find men and women of character and integrity. Daniel was that kind of man! “Keep your stuff, King” he said, “I’ll tell you the interpretation.”

Daniel 5:18-22

¹⁸ O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father kingship and greatness and glory and majesty.¹⁹ And because of the greatness that he gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whom he would, he killed, and whom he would, he kept alive; whom he would, he raised up, and whom he would, he humbled.²⁰ But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit was hardened so that he dealt proudly, he was brought down from his kingly throne, and his glory was taken from him.²¹ He was driven from among the children of mankind, and his mind was made like that of a beast, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. He was fed grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, until he knew that the Most High God rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he will.²² And you his son,^[f] Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this.

There are three indictments by Daniel #1: “You knew all this.” You knew. You’re not ignorant. You can’t claim, “I didn’t know...” You knew what happened to Nebuchadnezzar. You knew that he ultimately gave all glory to the God of heaven. You knew God broke him, but you have failed to humble your heart and follow his example. Instead, you have thumbed your nose at God!

Church, there’s a lot of people living like this in our country. They know the Gospel. They know the truths of God’s Word and they flaunt their pagan rebellion before Him. They’re described in Rom. 1:

Romans 1:28-31

²⁸ And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.²⁹ They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips,³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,³¹ foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.³² Though they know God’s righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

Indictment #2: Belshazzar showed willful blasphemy against God:

Daniel 5:23a

²³ but you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven. And the vessels of his house have been brought in before you, and you and your lords, your wives, and your concubines have drunk wine from them.

That’s blasphemy and they knew it. Indictment #3: Overt idol worship...

Daniel 5:23b

And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see or hear or know, but the God in whose hand is your breath, and whose are all your ways, you have not honored.

And now the interpretation...of the handwriting on the wall. Church, the hammer is going to drop!

Daniel 5:24-25

²⁴ “Then from his presence the hand was sent, and this writing was inscribed.²⁵ And this is the writing that was inscribed: Mene, Mene, Tekel, and Parsin.

The words written on the wall were Aramaic. You say, “Well, they spoke Aramaic. Why couldn’t they understand them?” Well, they knew what the words meant, but they couldn’t understand the interpretation, because this is how it looked in English:

Numbered, Numbered, Weighed, Divided

They understand the words...but, not what they meant? Well, here you go:

Daniel 5:26-28

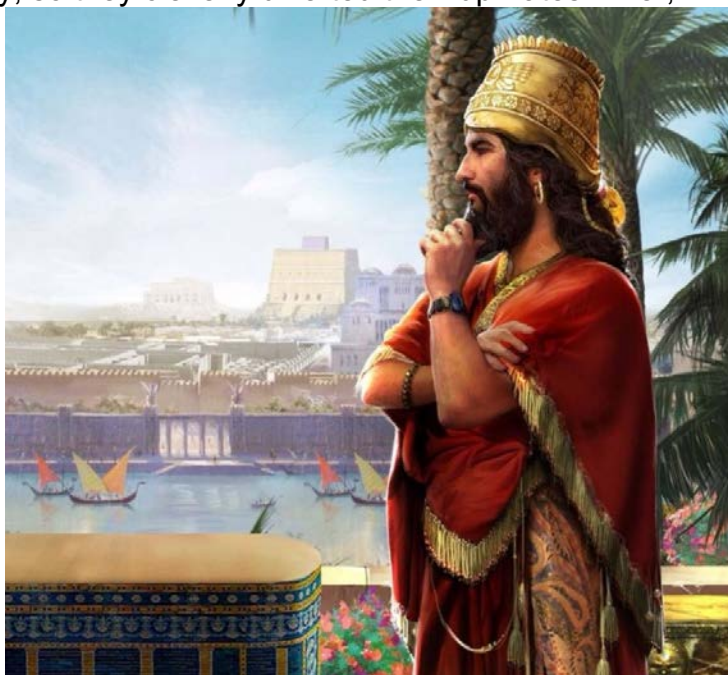
²⁶ This is the interpretation of the matter: Mene, God has numbered^[a] the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; ²⁷ Tekel, you have been weighed^[b] in the balances and found wanting; ²⁸ Peres, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.”^[c]

Here's the bottom line...Daniel said, “You're days are numbered...you have been weighed in the balance of God's justice and you have been found wanting...therefore, you're finished...today is your last day...(like the man who built the bigger barns in Jesus' parable) and your life will be demanded of you today and your kingdom will be divided. Belshazzar finally speaks...

Daniel 5:29-31

²⁹ Then Belshazzar gave the command, and Daniel was clothed with purple, a chain of gold was put around his neck, and a proclamation was made about him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom. ³⁰ That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed. ³¹ ^[d] And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.

You say, “How did they take over?” Well, the Medo-Persian army knew they could never scale the massive walls of the city, so they cleverly diverted the Euphrates River,



which flowed into the city, under the wall, so that the soldiers could enter through the river duct. While Belshazzar and all the Elites feasted, the water became only waist deep because the diversion and nobody noticed, and thus the soldiers entered the city under the wall...(the Euphrates River provided a Trojan Horse, if you will) and in they came...and those soldiers opened the city gates from the inside and the rest of the army flooded in like a tidal wave and killed Belshazzar and routed the city, placing Darius the Mede on the throne that very night. **Listen carefully, it does not pay to ignore the “handwriting on the wall.”** I read this poem and thought it was good. No author is ascribed to it...

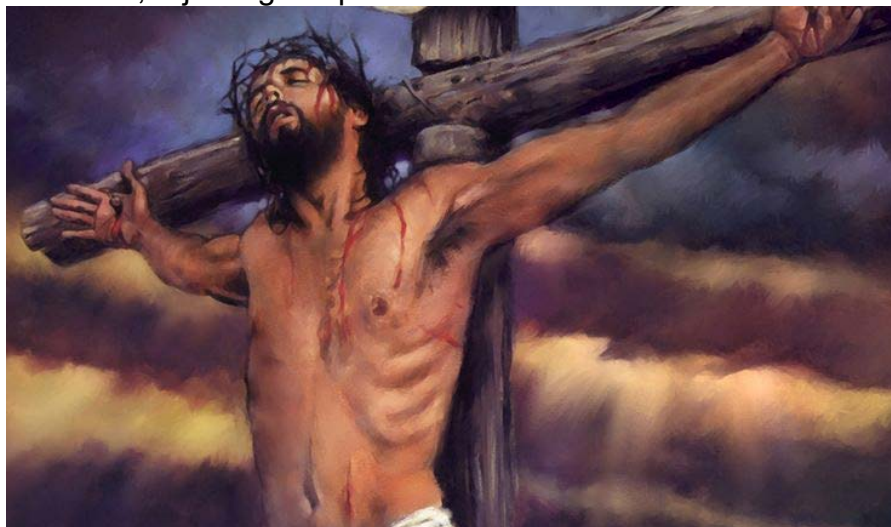
**At the feast of Belshazzar and a thousand of his lords
While they drank from golden vessels, as the book of truth records
In the night, as they reveled, in the royal palace hall
They were seized with consternation at the hand upon the wall.**

**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, and 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 a sinner's condemnation will be written on the wall.**

The handwriting is on the wall and that is true for every person who's ever lived or will live. The handwriting on the wall means you will reap what you sow and that there are consequences for thumbing your nose at God, rejecting the provision of His Son...Jesus... See Him...



the One who died for you on the cross. He died on the cross to pay your sin-debt, but if you reject Him... Judgment is coming! And just as with Belshazzar, Jesus will weigh you in His balance, and you will face His retribution. The prophet Ezekiel said this to the nation of Israel and it is applicable to us...

Ezekiel 18:30-32

³⁰ "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin.^[d] ³¹ Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? ³² For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God; so turn, and live."

Turn and live...that's your opportunity today! Come to Jesus, before it's too late, because the handwriting is on the wall.
