

Four Part Story

1 – Profane Debauchery

Daniel introduces us to the main character of this story in verse one – he calls him “King Belshazzar” –

- There was a time when Bible critics said King Belshazzar was a fictitious character, made up by the writer of Daniel, because there was no secular or extra-biblical record of him.
- Then the Cylinders of Nabonidus (Na-bow-nie-dus) were discovered by archeologists and the existence of Belshazzar was confirmed!

-Here’s how the story goes –

- It has been 70 years since the opening of chapter 1 – Daniel is well into his 80’s.
- Nebuchadnezzar reigned for 43 years and died in 562 BC
 - After his death, the throne was in turmoil for several years as one conspirator after another backstabbed his way to power!
- Eventually Nabonidus ended up on the throne – He married Nebuchadnezzar’s widow or daughter and they had a son, Belshazzar.
 - It could rightly be said his father was Nebuchadnezzar since there is no Hebrew equivalent for “grandfather.”
- Another interesting historical fact that is confirmed in this story is that Nabonidus and his son, Belshazzar, were co-regents (it’s a long story) which is why Belshazzar promises whoever interprets the handwriting on the wall would be “third ruler in the kingdom.”

Belshazzar was not a good person –

- He was a worthless and careless leader –
 - The Persians had already laid siege to the city. Any decent leader would be thinking of how he would protect his people – not throw a massive party!
- He was profane and immoral –
 - What Daniel discreetly describes here is a drunken orgy.
- He is a blasphemer –
 - Back in chapter 1 of Daniel – in the first few words – we read that when Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem he took “some of the vessels of the house of God” back to Babylon.
 - Now they become part of the story...
 - He took those vessels in part to show his dominance over the God of Israel –
 - What did he learn? The God of Israel knows how to humble those who walk in pride!
 - This is a deliberate, profane act of blasphemy.

The reader of this story right now feels the way you do when you watch the news or listen to the Briefing and hear example after example of pure debauchery being celebrated in our culture.

- The powerful being profane, belligerent and blasphemous.

But God....!

2 – Divine Graffiti

v. 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.”

- An archeologist named “Koldewey” in 1899 discovered what is believed to be this very banquet room.
 - Enough was still left so that they could see the size (55’x162’) and that there was a niche where the king sat.

- The walls were coated with white gypsum or plaster!
- The King saw it alright – This massive and mysterious hand writing directly above his head!

By the way, did you know the Lord knows how to humble those who walk in pride?

-v. 6 – “Then the king’s color changed, and his thoughts alarmed him; his limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together.”

-The writer takes us from righteous anger to righteous ridicule...!

An old and worthless playbook –

-He calls for the wise men of Babylon to come and read the handwriting (we’ve seen this movie before!) yet gets the same results – they have no clue.

-v. 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.”

-Then the queen steps in and recommends Daniel –

-Remember the queen, Beltshazzar’s mother, is the widow or daughter of Nebuchadnezzar.

3 – Inspired Interpretation

Before he reads the handwriting on the wall, Daniel wants to make sure the king knows –

-He doesn’t want his gifts –

-Here’s a man that can’t be bought...

-He reminds him of Nebuchadnezzar’s testimony –

-That God raised up Nebuchadnezzar and gave him his kingdom but instead of recognizing the gracious nature of God, he was lifted up in pride.

-And he learned the hard way that God is sovereign by becoming an animal until he acknowledged the grace and power of God!

-Then he wants him to know that what will happen is the direct result of his blasphemy against the LORD.

-v. 23 – “...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.”

Three words written on the wall –

-Mene = God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end

-Tekel = You have been weighed in the balances and found wanting

-Peres = Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians

Once again in Daniel we have the contrast between the false and worthless idols of the Babylonians verses the real and true God of Israel –

4 – Reward and Punishment

Daniel is given the reward of purple garment, the gold chain and 3rd in command –

-Mainly, this is in keeping with the Daniel – end of chapter, promoted; end of chapter 2, promoted; end of chapter 3, promoted; end of chapter 5, promoted

-God’s man continues to be elevated all the while the Babylonian empire is on the way out!

Belshazzar gets what he has coming –

Application

1 – God knows how to humble the proud

2 – God will humble the proud