

September 5, 2021

“Weighed In The Balances”

Belshazzar was the last king to reign over the vast and powerful, but short lived, Babylonian Empire. Historically, from recovered Babylonian inscriptions, it seems that he was co-regent with Nabonidus, who may have been away from Babylon or in a state of retirement at the time when Belshazzar “saw the handwriting on the wall.”

We are introduced to Behshazzar in the fifth chapter of Daniel. When we first read about Belshazzar he was fully involved in gaiety, revelry, and idolatry. The text says he “*made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, And drank wine in the presence of the thousand*” (Dan. 5:1). Wine-bibbing and sober judgment do not go hand in hand. One would think that the King’s Court, or the chambers of government would be off-limits for booze-consuming parties of revelry and licentiousness. However, you can be certain that Belshazzar was not the last government official to be bloated with booze and pride, or to act the part of a fool.

Once the brain becomes inflamed with wine, a person tends to lose his inhibitions, and he is more likely to manifest irreverence toward God. Such was the case with Belshazzar. Hence, in the midst of his merry-making, he “*gave the command to bring the gold and silver vessels..which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple which had been in Jerusalem, that the King and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them*” (Dan. 5:3). These “vessels” were a part of the “*articles of the house of God*” which Nebuchadnezzar, when he besieged Jerusalem, brought from Jerusalem and placed in “*the treasure house of his god*” (Dan. 1:1,2). Now, some 70 years later, Belshazzar takes the vessels which originally belonged to the house of God, drinks wine from them, and praises “*the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone*” (Dan 5:4). It would be difficult to conceive of a greater display of irreverence, or a more vivid example of people worshipping and serving “*the creature rather than the Creator*” (Rom. 1:25).

But God has many ways of getting a person’s attention! In the case of Belshazzar, in “*the same hour*” in which they drank wine from the temple vessels while praising “*gods*” which only exist in people’s imagination, “*the fingers of a man’s hand appeared and wrote upon the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king’s palace, and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote*” (Dan. 5:5). Yes, Belshazzar saw “the handwriting on the wall,” and he saw the “*fingers*” which wrote, but he evidently did not see either the “*hand*” or the “*man*” to whom the “**fingers**” belonged. Perhaps he had a guilt-ridden conscience. At any rate, though he did not know what the message contained, he obviously believed it contained bad news. As might be expected, Belshazzar’s “*countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened, and his knees knocked against each other*” (Dan. 5:6).

Alarmed by what he had seen, Belshazzar nevertheless just **had** to know the interpretation. He summoned “*the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers*” and promised them saying, “*whoever reads this writing, and tells me the interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around his neck, and he shall be the third ruler in the kingdom*” (Dan. 5:7). Of course, that was a fruitless promise, for these men were as ill-equipped as any modern soothsayer to decipher a **real** message from God. However, the queen, remembering Daniel’s previous interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (Dan. 2), said “*let Daniel be called, and he will give the interpretation*” (Dan. 5:12). So Daniel was brought before

the king.

But Daniel, as a prophet of God, was not a people pleaser. He reminded Belshazzar of the fact that “*the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar...a kingdom and majesty, glory, and honor,*” but that “*his heart was lifted up,*” his glory “*was taken from him,*” that he “*was driven from the sons of men,*” his “*dwelling was with the wild donkeys,*” and he was “*fed with grass like oxen*” (Dan. 5:18-21). Then he addressed Belshazzar, saying, you “*have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this,*” and he reproved him for drinking from the temple vessels, while praising “*gods...which do not see or hear or know,*” while refusing to glorify “*the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways*” (Dan. 5:22-23). All this was bad news, but the worst was yet to come, for Daniel then gave:

The Interpretation of The Writing on the Wall!

He said “*this is the interpretation that was written, MENE, MENE. TEKEL, UPHARSIN*” (Dan. 5:25). “*MENE*” literally means “to number.” “*TEKEL*” means “to weigh.” “*UPHARSIN*” means “torn” or “divided.” Hence, Daniel said “*God has **numbered** your kingdom, and finished it.*” “*You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting.*” “*Your kingdom has been **divided**, and given to the Medes and Persians*” (Dan. 5:28). And “*that very night Belshazzar was slain,*” thereby bringing the collapse of the Babylonians Empire, and the Medo-Persian Empire coming into power. Yes, Belshazzar was “*weighed in the balances*” of divine judgment, and he was found wanting.”

Practical Applications:

We live in what is called “the Gospel Dispensation,” and must submit to “*the law of Christ*” (Gal. 6:2), which superseded the fulfilled, blotted out and nailed-to-the-cross Law of Moses (Col. 2:14-17; Heb. 9:15-17). However, even though we live under a different dispensation, people today are not really different from those who lived in the past. We have the same desires, are tempted in the same ways, and react in similar fashion to events and circumstances which differ in point of **time**, but not in **principle**. The fact is this: there are a number of parallels that may be drawn between then and now, some of which are as follows:

1. Position and Power were abused. Belshazzar was “*the king*” and thus had an opportunity to be a role model for his subjects. But he boozed it up, engaged in revelry, and practiced idolatry. And he, along with his subjects, suffered the consequences. Legion are the examples that could be cited of those who abused their “position” in the civil, domestic social, economic, and religious realms!

2. Belshazzar was a wine-bibber, and wine in the stomach messes up the brain. Thus it was but a simple cause and effect process from which Belshazzar went from drinking wine to misusing sacred temple vessels, and praising “gods” of human invention. Yes, “*Wine is a mocker, Strong drink is a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise*” (Prov. 20:1). And the same may be said of illegal drugs which destroy the bodies and minds of millions in our modern world!

3. Belshazzar refused to learn from the mistakes of others. He “*knew*” what happened to Nebuchadnezzar when “*his spirit*” was hardened in pride, and thus lifted himself “*up against the Lord of heaven*” (Dan. 5:20-23). He “*knew*” better than to act the way he acted. He was without excuse! But how many of us in times of grievous sin in our own lives, could truthfully say “I didn’t know any better than to do what I did”

4. Great gifts can be worthless! True to his promise, Belshazzar made the proclamation that Daniel “*should be the third ruler in the kingdom*” (Dan. 5:29), but that very night the

kingdom fell! Thus, what Daniel really received amounted to one third of nothing! But how many today, for worldly gain, have sold out to the devil without giving a second's thought to this question, "*what profit is it to a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul*" (Matt. 16:26)?

5. Belshazzar's days were "numbered;" his life came to an abrupt end that night — much sooner than he had envisioned. But, friend, **your** days are also "*numbered!*" "*Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble...*" (Job 14:1). "*It is appointed for man to die once*" (Heb. 9:27). Each one of us will die, but not one of us knows when! Hence, in the words of

Amos to Israel, we urge you to "*Prepare to meet your God...*" (Amos 4:12)!

6. Belshazzar was "weighed in the balances and found wanting" (Dan. 5:27). He was a man of position and privilege. He reigned during the time of Daniel the prophet. He "*knew*" what God had done to Nebuchadnezzar. His life, his example, his earthly and eternal fate could have been so different. But Belshazzar didn't begin to have all the privileges **we** have! Over us, Christ has "*all authority*" (Matt. 28:18), and He is the "*Mediator of a better covenant which was established on better promises*" (Heb. 8:6). We are citizens in a free society, where Bibles are plentiful, and everyone has the opportunity to know the will of God. Yet so many resist every loving attempt of concerned saints who urge them to obey the very gospel by which their own immortal souls can be saved!

7. Belshazzar waited until it was too late. On his last day on earth he boozed it up, engaged in revelry, and praised the creature rather than the Creator. He no doubt had different plans for the future, but he ran out of time! Tragically, he has many modern counterparts!

Conclusion: The story about Belshazzar was not written for **his** profit. He was dead when this record was penned. This story was written "*for our learning*" (Rom. 15:4). Friend, don't be a modern Belshazzar! One Belshazzar was more than enough! —by Bobby Witherington
