

Daniel 5

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[0 : 0 0] Daniel chapter 5. King Baal Shatzar made a great feast for a thousand of his lords and drank wine in front of the thousand.

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

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.

They drank wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone. Immediately the finger 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. Then the king's color changed and his thoughts alarmed him. His limbs gave way and his knees knocked together. The king called loudly to bring the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers.

[1 : 0 2] The king declared 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.

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 king Balashatzar was greatly alarmed and his color changed and his lords were perplexed.

The queen, 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.

There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the spirit of the holy gods. In the days of your father, light and understanding and wisdom like the wisdom 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. 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.

[2 : 0 6] Now let Daniel be called, and he will show the interpretation. Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king answered and said to Daniel, You are that Daniel, one of the exiles from Judah, whom the king, my father, brought from Judah.

I have heard of you, that the spirit of the gods is in you, and the light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you. 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. 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 third ruler in the kingdom.

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.

O king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar, your father, kingship and greatness and glory and majesty. And because of the greatness that he gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him.

[3 : 20] Whom he would, he killed, and whom he would, he kept alive. Whom he would, he raised up, and whom he would, he humbled. But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened so that he dealt proudly, he was brought down from the kingly throne, and his glory was taken from him.

He was driven from among the children of mankind, and his mind was made like that of beasts, 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, and mankind sets over, kingdom of mankind, and sets over it whom he will.

And you, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all these things. 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, and your wives, and your concubines, have drunk wine from them.

And you have praised the gods of silver, and gold, and bronze, iron, and 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.

Then from his presence the hand was sent, and this writing was inscribed. And this is the writing that was inscribed, Mene, Mene, Tekel, and Parson. This is the interpretation of the matter.

[4 : 45] Mene, God has numbered the days of your kingdom, and brought it to an end. Tekel, you have been weighed in the balance, and found wanting. Paris, your kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.

Then Belshazzar gave the command, and Daniel was clothed with purple, and a chain of gold was put around his neck, and proclamation was made about him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom. That very night, Belshazzar, the Chaldean king, was killed.

And Darius, the Mede, revived the kingdom, being about 62 years old. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Well, before I get underway, I just want to lend my own word of thanksgiving to God for the birth of another child in our congregation this week.

And I think I'm getting ready to call. I think we should have a name change. Rather than Holy Trinity Hyde Park, maybe we start going by Church of the Sacred Stroller. Because I think that's about 20 or 21 kids born this year.

And I'm going to want to get a picture of about 40 strollers up and down the hallways. I absolutely love it. Also want to let you know that we're going to have lunch today after the service, right down the hallway, past all the strollers, and in the cafeteria.

[6 : 13] So stick around. The whole congregation is going to eat together. In 1853 and 54, John George Taylor, archaeologist, and at that time an emissary of the British Museum, found himself near Babylon in the land of Ur, excavating a ziggurat built in honor of the moon god.

The regular pyramid-like structure rose from the plain on building blocks of sun-baked bricks. You've probably seen pictures of this kind of structure in the Egyptian world.

The step-by-step receding strength onto a flat top upon which was probably a temple dedicated to the gods.

Without knowing it, Taylor was about to solve a long-standing puzzle in Daniel's historical record. For on the very top stage and in each of the four corners, four identical, small, barrel-shaped clay cylinders, short even of six inches, were there and waiting to be found.

Objects, presumably, which hadn't moved, let alone been read or deciphered since they were put there nearly 2,300 years before.

[7 : 59] from what we now know by deciphering them, Nabonidus, king of Babylon from 556 to 539, embedded them there after making repairs on the site.

From the historical record outside the Bible, Nabonidus was fourth in line after Nebuchadnezzar. He followed Amel Marduk, Nergal Sha-Utsur, and Labashi Marduk.

So when our text speaks of Baal Shatzar, he is the son of Nebuchadnezzar the way you are the son of your father and grandfather and great-grandfather.

In fact, we would have no problem understanding this on the south side, would we? Within the pastoral community, I've met many of my African-American brothers who tell me who their sons are.

They are those who follow in their train. The cylinders that Taylor discovered in his 19th century excavation add to and attest to one in Babylon named Baal Shatzar, right there, verse 1 of our text.

[9 : 17] Son of Nabonidus. They speak of Baal Shatzar, this one, being given charge over Babylon when his father made a trip to a distant place.

Previously, Baal Shatzar only existed in the writings of Daniel and led many to believe that he was a figment of a biblical imagination.

No one could account for his existence, let alone understand how anyone other than Nabonidus could have been viewed as the ruler of Babylon at the time of the fall to the Persians. In light of that, take note.

A lot of time has passed between the closing verse of verse 4 where we were last week and the opening verse of chapter 5. Nebuchadnezzar, who we've been walking with all fall, has now been in the grave for some 23 years.

And nearly 70 years has passed since Daniel was taken from Jerusalem, a captive of war, and deported to Babylon.

[10 : 31] So Daniel is now, in our text, an octogenarian, older even than Pastor Jay. I've been waiting for that all week.

Babylon itself is just a few short hours away from Persian invasion and its collapse from the world scene.

and in our chapter, the hand of God and the heart of man. One to four, what I would call wine in gold.

This is what was going on during the final hours of the kingdom. It's detailed for you there and it's been read already. Although the Persian army had been assaulting the city for some time and we know that, it appears that Baal Shatzar decided to hold a great feast probably in accordance with the normal calendar in the honor of one of his gods.

And what a party that was. And an extended list of attendees. The best of the Babylonian wines was set out and presumably to the delight of the lords, the prettiest women, were not only present but they were there in abundance.

[12 : 08] This was a party of seductive proportion. And as things go, things got sacrilegious.

The wine began to work on Baal Shatzar and he called for Israel's gold-drinking vessels to be brought in and in mockery he meant to mix his libation with the cup of the divine and in doing so pour out his power over the impotence of kingdoms long ago put down.

You can envision them. A toast to our gods. our ways for none can stand before us.

And with that, Baal Shatzar throws back his head in delightful defiance. You've seen it at parties, haven't you?

Neck stiff to the skies. hand with a firm grip on God. He owns Yahweh.

[13 : 28] And to prove it, he pounds it down on the table, wipes his mouth dry, and says pour me another wine in gold.

Verses five to nine, blood runs cold. The one who had held God in his hand, clenched him around his fingers, now sees one, the fingers of which answer his toast with text.

The writing on the wall. Rembrandt painted the scene. It's in the National Gallery in London. his ability to fix the eyes of Baal Shatzar and those around him with haunting fear, their faces literally drained of color.

Lord Byron put the vision to words. The monarch saw and shook and bade no more rejoice. All bloodless waxed his look and tremulous his voice.

Let the men of lore appear, the wisest of the earth, and expound the words of fear which mar our royal mirth.

[15 : 04] men of love but as the text will tell us, none could. Although the queen mother remembered one who would.

Envisioning the scene of 10 to 16 is not hard and I find it more than a little humorous. It brings aged Daniel into the banquet hall.

Face now creased but gait still strong, calm, the only one clear headed.

He looks at the king, a man considerably younger than himself, whose face has fallen, whose feet are unsure, whose body is convulsing, whose legs according to the text are literally knocking and uncontrollable shaking.

One could liken it to a mature elderly man standing before a foolish and intoxicated figure on the sidewalk. The contrast of the two is so complete that the words of Bel Shatzar only make me laugh.

[16 : 30] Here is the impotent one attempting to gain control of his tongue in a way that would suggest continuing claim to power.

The king as a street drunk in Halloween dress no less, a pretender to power in a stupor stuttering promises to Daniel of bling and a shawl and best yet a share of what he possesses.

I think the original readers would have smiled. Perhaps there is some wisdom here for you.

Early on in the series I mentioned that Daniel's first readers were probably the displaced small congregations of Jewish religious adherents who were learning to live under the geopolitical forces that now bent all of their traditions to its own will.

But there is another view in the academy that needs a voice concerning the original hearers. It really comes from the voice of wisdom literature that perhaps the early readers of this book in this place were the youth who were intended to rise to a place of responsibility within the affairs of man.

[18 : 19] Written for the learned. Those in school. Those with productive work to do. If correct, then everyone wanting to be useful in life take note.

here is a contrast between those who lack self-control and those who are in control of themselves.

I can't remember who it was who lamented in some sense the fact that they didn't receive a world class education but when they looked at how it was normally spent by those who did was quite glad seeing the frivolous way the emerging world downplayed their moment of opportunity.

may it may it not be so for you. The text gives way to the remarks of Daniel before the king.

He embodies the preacher bold. 17 to 23 let me just paraphrase it. this is what he said after Baal Shatzar laid out all those things for him.

[19 : 59] He said hey you can keep your clothes and your costume jewelry. Give it to one of the many number of jesters who are surrounding you in your court.

I've got no use for those things. In fact I cleared out my dress up drawer long ago. And then he goes on like only an old man can.

Let me tell you something about your father he says. And he recounts the ancient stories of Nebuchadnezzar of long ago.

Almost makes me wonder if one of Daniel's roles when Baal Shatzar was young was to enter his room at night and tell him stories of the kingdom.

Daniel snuck in one on Nebuchadnezzar and his boastful heart the days God laid him low. After laying out the father it's almost like hey verses 17 to 21 like father verses 22 and 23 like son.

[21 : 20] his rhetoric actually ratchets up. Take a look at verse 22. points his finger almost in the face of this young wobbly ruler and he says and you his son Baal Shatzar have not humbled your heart though you knew all this!

but you lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven and the vessels of his house you have brought in before you and you have drunk wine from them and you have praised the gods of silver and gold and bronze and iron and 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 think of it when we raise our Friday Saturday night glass to our gods and live in accordance with our pleasures and demonstrate that in our youth we have him in our hand

Romans 1 speaks of the impiety of the human heart who does not worship the God of the heavens but exchanges him for delights that are lesser than him and indeed all of us all of us drink from its cup I mean what what a display of this as only an old man can do of speaking truth to power Daniel fearless forceful full of faith bending the mind and heart of the one to whom he speaks it kind of makes me wonder

I don't know if you're a literature buff what in the world Robert Frost was smoking when he penned his own rendition of the event of this chapter in his celebrated poem the bearer of evil tidings this is the kind of guy that gets the message to go before the king in his poem you ready the bearer of evil tidings when he was halfway there remembered that evil tidings were a dangerous thing to bear so when he came to the parting where one road led to the throne and one went off to the mountains and into the wild unknown he took the one to the mountains he ran through the veil of Kashmir he ran through the rhododendrons till he came to the land of Pamir and there in the precipice valley a girl of his age he met took him home to her lover or he might be running yet and then the last phrase as for his evil tidings

Belshazzar's overthrow why hurry to tell Belshazzar what soon enough he would know Robert Frost what text are you reading Daniel fearless forceful faithful calling a spade a spade well there might be encouragement here for you too especially those advancing in years Daniel evidently lived in readiness well into old age some of his best days came after he hit 80 my dad just got on a plane he's 80 to go to

[25 : 56] Poland he's all fired up about Poland and Brussels and wherever anyone in the world would give him an invitation to use what were 20 years of NBA basketball experience to stand in front of people and have that as a platform where he can share the gospel you can replace a knee you can give him a hip it doesn't matter he'll find he'll find his way through the electric or the detectors in the airports he'll go anywhere into old age every Friday morning in his 80s leading a Bible study with about 90 men this is just a basketball coach he's no pastor this is a man who told me Dave I'm praying that I'll be more productive for Christ in my 80s than the combination of the first 79 years the text moves effortlessly from wine and gold to blood run cold to preacher bold and then it lands on the verdict told you know it was

Johnny Cash just because I feel you might need a little space here Johnny Cash was 1954 55 walks into Sun Records nobody knows him yet he goes I got a song and so Sam Phillips says well give us a song he goes well I just got one it's kind of a religious song and he sings him his song Belshazzar as only Johnny Cash can do Phillips looks at him and says you know that's a gospel song we can't sell gospel songs they're not working so he sent them away a couple weeks later Cash comes back he goes you know I got a couple other songs and he sang them and well the rest is history outside of Johnny Cash and Bob Dillon you don't need much else or at least I don't it's ironic it's ironic to me that Cash's last album more powerful than most is in the train of gospel like work well the song that

Cash sings has this refrain of what it is to be weighed on the scales and being found wanted and with that maybe you're ready to get back in 24 to 8 weighed and found wanting weights and measures have been used nearly from the beginning of time to speak of justice and righteousness in fact if you're in the law school here you're quite familiar with lady justice perhaps a reference back to themis the Greek mythological goddess carrying the scales of justice in one hand and a sword in the other and her eyes blindfolded can you see her according to the records themis became an oracle in delphi dressed in flowing robes she symbolizes fairness equal administration under the law the interpretation of the handwriting of the wall is embedded in the same idea it's as if a legal judgment has been rendered the we're not we're not reading the brief we're no longer taking depositions it is the verdict told weighed counted!

counted! Like I looked at it twice! Wanting! Divided!

done! And the young man who had God in his hand falls under the hand of God for lifting up his heart rather than humbling himself.

[30 : 37] that very night according to the text 30 and 31 Babylon fell.

And you can look outside the scriptures to Herodotus ancient Greek historian of the 5th century BC confirms for you how the battle was won. Herodotus writes whether someone advised him in his difficulty or whether he perceived for himself what to do I do not know but he did the following that is leader of Persia he posted his army at the place where the river goes into the city see in Babylon it was impenetrable the wall but they brought the water in through an aqueduct underneath the wall and iron gates down before it so that nobody could penetrate where the river comes out of the city he told his men to enter the city by the channel of the Euphrates when they saw it to be fordable having disposed his troops and given this command he himself marched away with those of his army who could not fight and when he came to the lake that is where he dammed it up Cyrus dealt with it and with the river just as he had the Babylonian queen drawing off the river by a canal into the lake which was a marsh he made the stream sink until its former channel could be forded when this happened the Persians who were posted with this objective made their way into Babylon by the channel of the Euphrates which had now sunk to a depth of about the middle of a man's thigh the Persians took them unawares and because of the great size of the city those who dwell there say those in the outer parts of it were overcome but the inhabitants of the middle part knew nothing of it here's the language of Herodotus all this time they were dancing and celebrating a holiday which happened to fall then until they learned the truth only too well game over writing on the wall curtain falls and a lesson for all the hubris of the human heart to lift itself up against God to live in a way where we do not honor God or give thanks to God but to live as Belshazzar lived to toast yourself and your own gods to throw back your head in delightful defiance neck stiff to the sky to have a firm grip on God to own Him and to prove it to pour Him out again the text says the most high

God rules mankind and sets over whom He will I'm going to tell you now who we set up for while we do our thing Psalm 2 says the God who dwells in the heavens laughs and He sets up His own King on Mount Zion which I proclaim to you today to be Jesus of Nazareth the itinerant Galilean preacher the Son of God who on the cross shed His blood that your rebellion and mine might find payment for on the scales of justice the God who lives in the heavens will be both just and the justifier and all the wrath of a depleted kingdom is poured out on His own Son that those who will grab hold of Him by faith shall know God the task for you for me today is simple and it's clear if you do not submit your life to Jesus Christ you will on a final day be pulled down it will occur to all of us enthrone Him while He may be found repent and believe the gospel live for someone put away the libations of the heart and a way of life that can only be met by a humbling of the heart this is God in your hand a participation in His death for your life not a stiff necked rising but a humble heart receiving

I mean to save you today and for those who know Him may we walk in His way our Heavenly Father we come now to the table celebration of the death of your Son that we might have life nourish strengthen confirm your church through this meal in Christ's name

Amen God