

Daniel 5:17-31 – The Handwriting on the Wall

Belshazzar belittled the one true God by taking the vessels of the Jerusalem temple and using them to drink wine at his party. If that was not bad enough, instead of praising the one true God, he worshiped the gods of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone. It is the kind of thing that Paul spoke of in Romans 1:21-23. God's judgment was swift. A hand appeared and wrote a message on the wall. None of the "wise" men of Babylon could read the writing on the wall, let alone interpret it. After belittling the God of Israel, he had to rely on a Jew to read and interpret the message from God. As we might expect, it was not good news for Belshazzar.

Read Daniel 5:17-23.

What did Daniel think about the reward that Belshazzar offered to him if he read and interpreted the message? Daniel didn't read and interpret the message for the reward. Why do you think he did read and interpret the message? (5:17)

Before Daniel gave the reading and interpretation of the message, he had another message that he gave to Belshazzar first. In verses 18-19, what did Daniel say about Nebuchadnezzar? I get the impression that Daniel was saying, "I knew Nebuchadnezzar, and you, Belshazzar, are no Nebuchadnezzar." (5:18-19)

Daniel gave a recap of the heart of chapter 4. In verses 20-21, what lesson did Nebuchadnezzar learn? (5:20-21)

From verses 22-23, what was Belshazzar's sin? Did he understand the consequence of his sin? Dale Ralph Davis makes a good point that if we know what is right, it doesn't mean that we will do what is right. What are some examples of people who assume that educating people about a problem will fix the problem? Based on verse 23, what did Belshazzar not understand about God? (5:22-23)

Read Daniel 5:24-31.

In case there was any doubt, where did the hand come from which wrote on the wall and delivered the message to Belshazzar? (5:24)

In verse 25, we are finally told what the message said. What do these words mean apart from Daniel's interpretation? Mene (mina; Brown, Driver and Briggs) was a unit of weight and currency. Tekel was a unit of measure, a shekel. Parsin (peres), another unit of weight and measure, was a half-mina according to BDB. Some translations have the last word as "UPHARSIN". Most modern translations translate "U" as "and". (5:25)

In verses 26-28, Daniel gave the interpretation. What was the interpretation of MENE, MENE? (5:26)

What was the interpretation of TEKEL? (5:27)

What was the interpretation of PERES (the singular of PARSIN)? (5:28)

We are not told how Belshazzar reacted to the interpretation. Do you think he believed Daniel's interpretation? What did Belshazzar do in verse 29? (5:29)

How was God's message to Belshazzar fulfilled? When was it fulfilled? (5:30)

We are told that Darius, the Mede, received the kingdom. Who was Darius? Cyrus, the Persian is generally attributed with conquering Babylon and assuming control of it. Some think that Darius and Cyrus were one and the same person. Some say that Daniel 6:28 should be understood as "during the reign of Darius, even / that is, the reign of Cyrus the Persian." In 5:31, Darius was called "the Mede". Why would he also be called "the Persian"? He could be someone who, right now, is only known from the Book of Daniel. Maybe archaeologists will later discover artifacts which will contain information about Darius. (5:31)

How do you think the Jewish exiles reacted to the news that the Babylonian king was dead and that the empire was conquered? When there is a regime change, the big question is whether the new regime will be better or worse.