

Hurst Green

17th Jun 2018

Daniel 5

Belshazzar and the writing on the wall

Last week we left Nebuchadnezzar finally worshipping the almighty God and wanting all his people to know and so he has sent out an open letter to all of the known world which we have as Daniel Chapter 4.

Now we show that Daniel is not a history book as we suddenly leap a great many years and several kings. You can look up the detail but we are some thirty years later and four kings and actually Belshazzar was the son of the current King who was away trying to secure the borders of the Kingdom.

Think back to Chapter 2 and the image. The kingdoms are in decline and we are about to move from Gold down to silver but that is the end of this chapter.

Belshazzar is the King of Babylon, a huge city with stores to last the whole city several years and walls even the most brave army would view as impregnable.

Now as we start this chapter the Medes are outside the walls of Babylon and have been there for two years laying siege to the town. The only clue to this in our reading is the last two verses

Daniel 5:30-31 (ANIV)

³⁰ That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, ³¹ and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, at the age of sixty-two.

Now unknown to Belshazzar Darius had spent his time working on how to get into Babylon. The Euphrates flowed through the city and ensured the water supply but Darius had been building a canal to divert the waters.

This night all was ready and the sluice gates opened, the water level of the Euphrates dropped and the Medes entered the city.

So what is Belshazzar up to?

In the besieged city he is busy showing his officials that he has no worries and what better way than throwing a party and so he throws a great banquet.

Then he has this great idea of showing how powerful he is by using the implements that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem.

So far these items had been in the treasury of their God which acknowledges they are something special and Belshazzar decides to use them for the ordinary – just part of his party.

And so they do so and begin to praise other Gods – Big mistake.

So we get to this chapter which many refer to in everyday language even though they probably do not know it.

The whole passage gives us the phrase – the writing is on the wall.

Usually meaning the end is nigh and there is nothing you can do about it!

And there is nothing Belshazzar can do about the coming punishment for his arrogance for he has forgotten the main theme of Daniel.

God is in charge.

Nebuchadnezzar's experiences were well known – his open letter would have been in the archive. It all would have been talked about.

In Daniel 2 it says

Daniel 2:20-21 (ANIV)

²⁰ ~~and said:~~ "Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his. ²¹ He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them. ~~He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning.~~

And in Psalm 33 we are told

Psalm 33:10-12 (ANIV)

¹⁰ The LORD foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples. ¹¹ But the plans of the LORD stand firm for ever, the purposes of his heart through all generations. ¹² Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people he chose for his inheritance.

Nebuchadnezzar had learned this lesson the hard way and all his learnings were forgotten in about 20 years.

Now the Holy things have been taken and used for a profane purpose.

Now in there is the first lesson for you today.

Holy things are for holy purposes – and only for holy purposes.

And you are a Holy thing.

It is written in Leviticus and repeated in several other places

Leviticus 11:45 (ANIV)

⁴⁵ ~~I am the LORD who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy.~~

We are God's saints – he has made us righteous and so we are Holy Things and that brings a challenge to us in the light of this lesson from two and a half thousand years ago.

Do we live our lives as Holy things or do we take our bodies and live profane lives only dipping into the Holy once or twice a week?

We have been sealed by God – we have his Holy Spirit on us that we might know, and that all might know, we belong to God.

Does our daily life reflect that.

Are we using our life for Holy things so that all may know our God and his ways by what they see in our lives here?

Our enemy, Satan, has one aim – to desecrate what God has consecrated.

In our reading today he has got Belshazzar to do exactly that.

Have we let Satan into any part of our lives to desecrate us and pull us from the Holy thing God intends us to be?

And so this hand appears and the finger writes on the wall.

This was an awesome demonstration of the power of God and rather stripped the party of any pleasure. It had some effect on Belshazzar

Daniel 5:5-6 (ANIV)

⁵ Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote. ⁶ His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way.

The finger of God is a thing of mighty power and crops up at key times in the bible

When God was using Moses to set up the Exodus in Exodus 8 the Pharaohs magicians tell the Pharaoh that all this is by the finger of God. Once again we have the unbelievers recognising the power of our God more readily than the believers.

The finger of God also wrote the 10 commandments

Exodus 31:18 (ANIV)

¹⁸ When the LORD finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the Testimony, the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God.

And Jesus worked by the power of the finger of God

Luke 11:20 (ANIV)

²⁰ But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you.

And the finger of God came to the palace in Babylon that night and wrote upon the wall.

Once again all the wise men, magicians and enchanters were called in and offered great wealth and positions of power if they could tell the King what all this meant.

Daniel 5:9 (ANIV)

⁹ So King Belshazzar became even more terrified and his face grew more pale. His nobles were baffled.

But the queen remembered Daniel and he was summoned

Daniel 5:13-16 (ANIV)

¹³ So Daniel was brought before the king, and the king said to him, "Are you Daniel, one of the exiles my father the king brought from Judah?" ¹⁴ I have heard that the spirit of the gods is in you and that you have insight, intelligence and outstanding wisdom. ¹⁵ The wise men and enchanters were brought before me to read this writing and tell me what it means, but they could not explain it. ¹⁶ Now I have heard that you are able to give interpretations and to solve difficult problems. If you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around your neck, and you will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom."

Daniel instantly recognises the sin that has gone on and tells the King that he does not want the gifts offered but he will tell him what the writings mean. He spends verses 18 to 21 reminding the King of Nebuchadnezzar and how he learnt to fear and obey the most high God.

He then gets down to the core of the problem in verse 22

Daniel 5:22 (ANIV)

²² "But you his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this.

The key words – you knew.

Those are words that condemn many even today – you knew.

How many know God and yet choose not to follow him – like Belshazzar they set themselves up against God for you are either for God or you are against him – there is no middle road.

Belshazzar knew of the dreams and interpretation, he knew of the furnace, he knew of Nebuchadnezzar's experiences and testimony, he knew of the most high God and he chose to walk a different path.

Just like so many today!!

But for Belshazzar it was all about to come crashing down – Daniel read the words and gave the meaning:

Daniel 5:26-28 (ANIV)

²⁶ *"This is what these words mean: Mene : God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end.*

²⁷ *Tekel : You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting.*

²⁸ *Peres : Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians."*

Belshazzar gave Daniel the gifts he had promised and made him the third highest ruler in the Kingdom

It was rather short lived

Daniel 5:30-31 (ANIV)

³⁰ *That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, ³¹ and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, at the age of sixty-two.*

Babylon fell to the Medes.

And for all those who walk a different path today one day it will all come crashing down – their life will end and they may not get a final chance to turn their life around.

And never forget that we have all been weighed in the scales and found wanting.

We have been given the route out of repenting of our sins and turning again to our faithful God.

But we need to remember that last bit – we need to turn from our sinful ways and make these Holy bodies stay Holy for we are Holy because our God is Holy.