

Message #7
Daniel

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CHOOSING A SECURITY SYSTEM DANIEL 5

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

William Henley (PROJECTOR ON--- WILLIAM HENLEY) was a British poet and writer who lived in the latter part of the 1800s. He struggled with health problems for most of his life. He got tuberculosis at an early age which got into his bones and resulted in the amputation of his left leg below the knee when he was eighteen. His most famous poem is "Invictus," which goes like this:.
INVICTUS POEM--- STANZA 1)

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul. (STANZA 2)

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed. (STANZA 3)

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds and shall find me unafraid. (STANZA 4)

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishment the scroll,
I am the master of my fate;
I am the captain of my soul.

Such pride is the guiding principle of many in our world today. It is evident in media heroes like Rambo and the characters that John Wayne plays. We find it in some world leaders, which we noted in the message last Sunday. We see it also in some sports celebrities.

Before what was dubbed as The Fight of the Century in 1971 Muhammed Ali (MUHAMMED ALI) proclaimed, **"There seems to be some confusion. We're gonna clear this confusion up on March 8. We're gonna decide once and for all who is king! There's not a man alive who can whup me. I'm too smart. I'm too pretty. I am the greatest. I am the king!"**

There is a danger that accompanies such pride and arrogance. The author of Proverbs in the Old Testament (PROVERBS 16:18) warned, **“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”** On March 8 the undefeated champion was defeated by Joe Frazier.

Last Sunday we saw this principle at work as we studied the Lord’s humiliation of King Nebuchadnezzar in #4, as he credited himself for the accomplishments of his government. We are going to see the results of that pride again today in the life of a later Babylonian king by the name of Belshazzar. We are also going to focus on what produces such an attitude and how we can avoid it.

The events of #5 occur in the year 539 BC, over 20 years after the great Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, died (562 BC). (BABYLONIAN KINGS) In the intervening years there were a number of rulers of the Babylonian Empire. Nebuchadnezzar’s son, Evil-merodach, also known as Amel-Marduk, whom I suggested was tutored by Abed-nego, ruled for two years after his father died. Evil-merodach was assassinated by his brother-in-law, who took over the throne. Four years later he died. His son took over but was killed after only two months in office.

This time the one who became king was not a descendant of the royal family of Nebuchadnezzar. His name was Nabonidus. He came to the throne in 556 and ruled until the fall of Babylon in 539 BC. According to ancient Greek historians he was the last king of the Babylonian Empire.

The problem that we initially encounter in #5 is that the text says that Belshazzar is on the throne when the Babylonian Empire is defeated. For years liberal critics pointed to this as an error in the Bible. Secular history was clear that Nabonidus, not Belshazzar, was the last king of Babylon. (PROJECTOR OFF) There was not even any mention of Belshazzar in the early historical records.

But then his name began to turn up in archaeological finds. Still he was called only “crown prince,” or “son of the king,” or “governor” of the province of Babylon. He was not called “king,” as he is in the Aramaic text of Daniel.

Then in 1979 a statue was discovered dating to the sixth century BC. It contained the same inscription in the Assyrian language and in Aramaic. In Assyrian, Belshazzar was called “governor of the province of Babylon.” In Aramaic he was called “king of the province of Babylon.” So it became clear that the title “king” in Aramaic was a legitimate term for the position that Belshazzar held.

Rather than being a problem for conservatives this is now a problem for the critics. The liberal contention is that Daniel was written in the second century BC 400 years after the events that it supposedly describes. The problem is that the ancient Greek histories that were available to a second century author make no mention of any Belshazzar. The more recent archaeological finds demonstrate that Daniel tells an authentic story, using information that was not available to later writers.

(PROJECTOR ON--- BABYLONIAN EMPIRE 4) The picture that we have then is that King Nabonidus was away from the city of Babylon for much of his reign. He was leading his army in various battles and directing the building of temples to the Babylonian gods in other cities. During the last part of his rule he lived in northern Arabia in Tema, perhaps because of health reasons. Also Tema was a very important trade center. So Nabonidus left his oldest son Belshazzar in charge in the province of Babylon, where he thus served as co-regent with his father.

I.

In vv. 1-4 we see THE CAUSE OF BELSHAZZAR'S DEFIANCE. (I. THE CAUSE OF BELSHAZZAR'S DEFIANCE) In v. 1 we are told that Belshazzar held a great feast for a thousand of his nobles. From the writings of two ancient Greek historians (Herodotus and Xenophon) and from the writings of King Nabonidus and Persian King Cyrus we know the specific circumstances behind this feast. The Greek writers don't speak of Belshazzar. The more recently discovered writings from Nabonidus and Cyrus do speak of him.

A few years earlier (PERSIAN EMPIRE) Cyrus, king of Persia, made an alliance with the Medes. Together they began conquering the lesser powers around Babylon. Eventually they approached the province of Babylon itself. The Babylonian army came out to meet them, but was badly defeated. The Babylonians retreated back into the city of Babylon. (BABYLON AND MOAT) The Greek historian Herodotus writes, "**Here they shut themselves up and made light of his (Cyrus's) siege, having laid in a store of provisions for many years in preparation for this attack.**"

The Babylonians may have been discouraged by their defeat at the hands of the Persians. But once they were safe behind the wall of the city, Belshazzar apparently began to provide this kind of spin on the situation: "You know, things aren't really so bad. We are safe in here. Nobody is going to get over, through, or around our walls and our moat. (BABYLON MAP) We've got food in here to last for years. The Euphrates runs right through the city. So we have no problem with water. Those poor suckers outside are going to freeze in the cold and suffocate in the heat. Let's have a party."

So they had a party. Xenophon and Herodotus claim that there was an annual festival at this time of year to honor the Babylonian moon god. The feast typically lasted all night. Perhaps they used that occasion to have an even bigger celebration than usual. (BELSHAZZAR'S PALACE) Daniel says that a thousand nobles were present. Archaeologists have even discovered the ruins of the hall where they would have partied. It was a building 55 feet wide and 165 feet long, part of a palace complex that was about 1000 feet long by 600 feet wide.

After the king had a little too much to drink, he got the bright idea to have somebody bring in the vessels that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem many years earlier. (PROJECTOR OFF) Normally Middle Eastern rulers were too superstitious to risk offending any other gods. Belshazzar apparently had something

against the God of Israel and the Jews. Perhaps he was reacting to the loyalty that his predecessor Nebuchadnezzar had shown to this Jewish god and his rejection of the Babylonian gods. It is also possible that Belshazzar had vessels from the temples of other gods that the Babylonians had conquered brought in.

So the king's assistants brought in these holy vessels and drank from them. In the drunken orgy that took place the partiers praised the Babylonian gods, whom Daniel calls gods of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone. The true God took offense.

Belshazzar was defiant because he felt secure. His confidence rested upon a great security system. He had, after all, the strongest military defense system of any place in the world. He was confident that his fortress could withstand any challenge. Belshazzar was defiant because he felt secure.

II.

In vv. 5-9 we discover GOD'S PRONOUNCEMENT (PROJECTOR ON--- GOD'S PRONOUNCEMENT) about this situation. The God of Israel was not overly impressed with those defensive fortifications. He was definitely unhappy about the sacrilegious treatment of the objects from the temple in Jerusalem. Those vessels were holy, set apart for a special worship of Himself. God had given the Israelites detailed instructions about how those vessels were to be made and used. They were to be treated with respect, because they were set apart for His worship.

Nebuchadnezzar had been humbled because he was proud. But he had maintained a certain respect for the God of Israel. Belshazzar went a step beyond pride to open defiance. He challenged and defied the God of Israel by drinking from the cups from His temple.

God's pronouncement was quick in coming. Suddenly the fingers of a man's hand appeared and began writing on the plaster of the wall. I imagine that the noisy orgy quieted down in a hurry. The pride, defiance, and self-confidence went out of the king quickly. Verse 6 says, **"Then the king's color changed, and his thoughts alarmed him; his limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together."**

The literal reading of **"his limbs gave way"** is actually **"the knots of his loins went loose."** What that implies is that the king wet and/or dirtied his pants. This proud, defiant ruler was instantly humbled.

Belshazzar immediately sent for his advisors and promised the one who could interpret the writing on the wall a position as third ruler in the country. Nabonidus, his father, was acknowledged as number one, and Belshazzar was number two. The one who can interpret this writing is offered a position as the third most powerful official in the government.

The wise men came in, but they could not understand it. Aramaic writing, like Hebrew, did not have written vowels. Perhaps they couldn't figure out the right vowels so that it

made sense. Jewish rabbis later said that the letters were written vertically, and the advisors tried in vain to read them horizontally. We don't know for sure what the problem was.

III.

In any case when circumstances get desperate, people often turn to a man of God. Thus in vv. 10-29 we are provided with DANIEL'S INTERPRETATION of the dream. (III DANIEL'S INTERPRETATION) In v. 10 the queen comes in and begins to tell Belshazzar about Daniel.

The queen may be Belshazzar's mother and the wife of Nabonidus, or she could be Nebuchadnezzar's wife named Nitocris. According to v. 2 the wives of Belshazzar were already present at the feast. The queen also seems to be old enough to have first hand familiarity with Nebuchadnezzar's reign.

In v. 11 the queen refers to Nebuchadnezzar as Belshazzar's father. Nabonidus was actually Belshazzar's father. But in Aramaic, as in Hebrew, the word for "father" was used also for grandfather and great-grandfather and sometimes for anyone who had preceded a ruler in office. In fact one scholar identifies seven different usages of the Aramaic word for "father" in this time period. It is doubtful that Nebuchadnezzar was a blood relation to Belshazzar. So it is likely that the term here is used in the sense of "predecessor."

In v. 12 the queen goes on to describe Daniel as one who is good at, among other things, the "**solving of problems.**" Literally she says that he is good at "**untying knots.**" Back in v. 6 Daniel said that the king had a problem with the knots of his loins. Now Daniel is called in as the knot solver. So there is a pun at work here. The Aramaic speaking Jewish readers of this story would have been laughing at the humor of the narrator in describing the proud pagan king who is brought into a position of dependence upon the Jewish hero Daniel, who is the knot solver.

After hearing about Daniel, the king sends for the servant of the God whom he has just been defying. Daniel is around 80 years old now. He apparently is no longer in active government service. It has been 23 years since the death of Nebuchadnezzar. But the king repeats the offer of rewards and power if Daniel can interpret the writing on the wall.

In v. 17 Daniel begins to speak. He prefaces his remarks by saying that he could care less about the rewards that are offered. Then he plunges into a history lesson. He talks about the events in Daniel #4 that we considered last time. He reminds Belshazzar about what happened to his predecessor Nebuchadnezzar when he became proud and arrogant. In vv. 22 & 23 Daniel applies the history lesson to Belshazzar. Before the watching crowd he charges the king with three basic sins:

First, he says, “...(you) have not humbled your heart.” Belshazzar was accountable and responsible because he knew about the past dealings of the God of Israel with his predecessor Nebuchadnezzar. But the king did absolutely nothing with this information.

Second, according to v. 23 Daniel says: You not only failed to humble yourself, you actually exalted yourself and defied the true God of the universe. You committed the worst imaginable blasphemy.

Third, Daniel tells the king, “...the God in whose hand is your breath, and whose are all your ways, you have not honored.” It is bad to defy God. It is bad to fail to humble oneself before the God who is there. It is bad to fail to glorify the God who is really there. God is upset by that.

Daniel says to Belshazzar: The God who holds you in the palm of His hand and could snuff out your life at a moment’s notice, you have not acknowledged, recognized, or glorified. This figurative hand that holds you, Belshazzar, has become a literal hand that has written out your sentence (HEBREW INSCRIPTION):

Hebrew and Aramaic are read from right to left. MENE, MENE, TEKEL, and PARSIN, or UPHARSIN. This early form of Aramaic did not have vowel markings. Applying vowels in one possible way the wise men could have translated the saying in this way: “Mena, mena, shekel, half-shekel.” Each of those words referred to different coins of decreasing value. But that statement didn’t make much sense.

Daniel applied vowels in a different way. In this different way the first word could mean either “to number” or “to set the limit of.” This word appears twice in the writing on the wall, and Daniel says that God has in mind both meanings: “**God has numbered your kingdom, or the days of your kingdom, and set a limit to it, or put an end to them.**”

Daniel relates the third word in the inscription to a verb which means “to weigh.” In the Ancient Near East something was weighed when it was put on a balance scale. The thing to be weighed was put on one side, and the standard of measurement was put on the other side. Belshazzar was put on the scale, but he did not measure up to God’s standard. He was too light. Therefore he was rejected.

The “U” in the last word means “and.” The root word itself can mean either “to divide,” or “Persia.” Because the word is in the plural form, Daniel says that it has both meanings. It means therefore that Belshazzar’s kingdom has been divided from him and that it has been given to Persia, which has allied itself with the Medes. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Verse 29 does not tell us what Belshazzar’s emotional state was after this. Apparently he believed the interpretation, because he followed through immediately with his promise of reward. Perhaps he hoped to avert God’s judgment by rewarding God’s man. Probably he was terribly shaken. In any case, as the last official act of the Babylonian Empire the king honored one of its Jewish captives, a foreigner who,

because of his nationality, could never have dreamed of holding the top position of leadership in Babylon, but who by divine revelation predicted not only the downfall of Babylon but also the future course of Gentile history until Christ should come from heaven to rule on earth. Man may have the first word, but God always, always has the last word.

IV.

In v. 30 we come to THE RESULT OF BELSHAZZAR'S DEFIANCE. (PROJECTOR ON--- IV. THE RESULT OF BELSHAZZAR'S DEFIANCE) This verse provides only the barest outline of the judgment that was wrought upon Belshazzar that night. But from the ancient historians we can fill in the details, and they are fascinating.

As the army of Cyrus the Persian looked at the city of Babylon (BABYLON FORTRESS), the officers realized--- as Belshazzar did--- that it was impossible to go over those walls or to go through them or to go around them. But as they surveyed the city day after day, somebody got the bright idea: "Hey, maybe we could go under the walls. Maybe we could go up or down the riverbed where the Euphrates River enters and exits the city."

So they began to dig a canal upstream from Babylon to divert the Euphrates River. (NABONIDUS CHRONICLE) The Nabonidus Chronicle written by Babylonian priests at the direction of the Persians describes what happened. On the night of October 12, 539 BC, the armies of King Cyrus, led by General Darius, placed half of the army near the place where the river entered the city and half of the army where it exited the city. (PROJECTOR OFF) The water of the Euphrates was diverted into the new canal, and the water level of the river at Babylon dropped significantly. It dropped enough that the Persian troops were able to wade through the Euphrates into the city where the Euphrates entered and exited. Belshazzar had so much confidence, such a tremendous sense of security in his fortifications, that those two points were not even guarded that night. So the divided Persian army divided the city that night by going into Babylon on the Euphrates riverbed.

The Greek historian Herodotus writes, **"It is related by the people who inhabited this city, that, by reason of its great extent, when they who were at the extremities were taken, those of the Babylonians who inhabited the center know nothing of their capture (for it happened to be a festival), but they were dancing at the time, and enjoying themselves, till they received certain information of the truth."** The general in charge led soldiers to the palace. Belshazzar and company were quickly overpowered, and the king was executed that night. General Darius the Mede was put in charge in the city.

A false sense of security produced a defiant spirit which resulted in God's judgment. Belshazzar made the fatal mistake of choosing the wrong security system. He should have put his trust in the God who is really there.

V.

(PROJECTOR ON--- V. THE APPLICATIONS) Consider then the APPLICATIONS that we can take from this story. There are at least two of them that we can find here.

A.

The first basic question that the Book of Daniel answers for us is this: IS GOD WORTHY OF OUR TRUST? (V. THE APPLICATIONS A. IS GOD WORTHY OF OUR TRUST?) Chapter 5 shows us that He is, because the events that took place here fulfilled numerous Old Testament prophecies. In this chapter God said through his writing on the wall that Babylon was finished and that Belshazzar was about to be killed. It happened. Fifty years earlier in Daniel #2 God revealed to Nebuchadnezzar in a dream that Babylon would be replaced by a kingdom that was inferior to it. It happened. Persia was that kingdom.

Also fifty years earlier Jeremiah was prophesying to the remnant of Jews who were left in Judah. In #51 he refers to the harm that Babylon has brought to Judah (PROJECTOR ON--- JEREMIAH 51:36):

Therefore thus says the Lord:

**“Behold, I will plead your cause
and take vengeance for you.**

I will dry up her sea

and make her fountain dry, (JEREMIAH 51:37-38)

and Babylon shall become a heap of ruins,

the haunt of jackals,

a horror and a hissing,

without inhabitant.

38 “They shall roar together like lions;

they shall growl like lions' cubs. (JEREMIAH 51:39-40)

39 While they are inflamed I will prepare them a feast

and make them drunk, that they may become merry,

then sleep a perpetual sleep

and not wake, declares the Lord.

40 I will bring them down like lambs to the slaughter,

like rams and male goats.”

The events of Daniel #5 sound suspiciously like the fulfillment of the words of this prophecy.

At least 150 years before the events in our story the prophet Isaiah predicted in the 44th and 45th chapters of his book the specific ruler who would return the Jews to Jerusalem. (ISAIAH 44:28) His name, Isaiah said, would be Cyrus. We know from secular historians that Cyrus was the one who led the attack on Babylon. Although Darius became governor of the province of Babylon, Cyrus became ruler of the entire

Medo-Persian Empire. This man would be the king who would allow the Jews to return to their homeland. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Is God worthy of our trust? He is. For he controls the course of human history. He is not some giant watchmaker who wound up the universe and let it go. Rather He is a personal God who is intimately involved in all of the details in the development of human history. We ought to trust this God because He is sovereign over us, and ultimately we are answerable to Him. That was the lesson that Belshazzar learned too late. May the same thing not happen to us.

B.

The second question that the Book of Daniel answers for us is: HOW SHOULD WE LIVE IN AN OFTEN GODLESS SOCIETY? (V. A. B. HOW SHOULD WE LIVE IN...) The answer from #5 is that we should invest in the proper security system. Belshazzar devoted much of his energies to strengthening the walls and the moat of his city and to stocking it with food supplies. He was confident that these efforts would give him true security. He could have hope for the future because of them. He could even defy the God of Israel.

Belshazzar should have learned from Nebuchadnezzar's experience, but he did not. Instead he trusted in his own security system, and this produced pride and defiance of the true God. God in turn responded in judgment.

What is the source of our security in life? Is it a job, or a career, or a house? Is it a retirement plan? Many stock portfolios have lost much of their value in the last year. Those who put their trust in Sam Bankman-Fried, the cryptocurrency guy, lost it all. Is it other people? Other people can let us down. Is it physical fitness--- exercising and eating right? At the most those disciplines may add a few years of life. A

job, a retirement plan, a good house, friends, a disciplined lifestyle are all good things to have. The Bible has positive things to say about wise planning. But if these things are the source of our ultimate security in life, we are in trouble.

The most important question is: What kind of security system have we chosen for our eternal future? Are we depending upon good works, church membership, generous contributions, a good reputation, or our own moral behavior for eternal life? These may all be good things, but if we are depending upon them for eternal life, we are going to have a false sense of security. We are going to develop pride, like Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar did, about what we have accomplished and achieved.

The Bible says that our days have also been numbered, and a limit has been set to them. We, too, have been weighed in the balances and found wanting, because the standard of measure is perfection. The Bible declares, "**All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**" (Romans 3:23)

The only system that will provide us with eternal security is more expensive than any of us can afford. That's the bad news. The good news is that someone else has paid the price for us--- the Lord Jesus Christ. By dying on the cross He paid the price for our eternal security. We have but one responsibility--- to accept it, to receive it. If we will put our trust in what Jesus Christ has done for us and in Jesus Christ Himself, we will have eternal life.

What about us who are already Christians? We have eternal security. We have eternal life. For us presumptuous pride and a defiant spirit will become problems only if we forget the nature of our security system. Our eternal life is a gift from God. We have not done one single thing to earn it. But when we begin to think that somehow we can become more acceptable to God by doing good works, pride will enter in.

Christian works that have eternal value are only done through Christ's working in us. There is no room for pride in the Christian life, or for an inner attitude that finds security in what we have accomplished. In an often ungodly society we believers need to live by a conviction that we serve a God who has already blessed us and made us secure by virtue of our faith in Christ.

One of the significant things which has affected all of us in the last few years is the whole pandemic thing. We were all pressured for a time to stay home. So we learned how to do streaming and parking lot services. Home became a kind of security for us, a way to avoid catching Covid. Many of us started working from home.

The difficulty and the challenge for the Christian world is that a lot of Christians have continued to stay home. Home has become an unhealthy security when we could go out and meet together with other Christians for worship and Bible study. I read the results of a survey this week from an outfit called the Survey Center on American Life which concluded, "**Apparently, large numbers of people who once identified as Christians have decided they no longer need to attend church.**" (Breakpoint, 2/17/2023)

There are some among us who have physical limitations and extra health vulnerabilities. But the author of the New Testament Book of Hebrews urged Christians not to forsake the gathering of themselves together (Hebrews 10:25). What streaming service cannot provide is the personal interaction which is so important to true Christian fellowship. So we appreciate all of you who are here, and we encourage those of you who are watching by streaming today to make it a point to show up in person, whether here or in another Bible teaching church.

What is going to be the source of our real security in life? A bank account, a career, physical health, personal accomplishments? Or will it be the God who controls the course of human history?