

Arrogance to Fearfulness

In Daniel 5, the Word of God gives us a powerful example of human hubris that ends in a stunning and dramatic way. Though one could say that it takes Nebuchadnezzar a long time to learn his lesson, at least he learned it. His grandson, Belshazzar, does not. In using the temple vessels in a palace orgy, Belshazzar desecrates them. Such an act of desecration is tantamount not only to a challenge of God but an attack on God Himself. Thus, Belshazzar fills up the cup of his iniquities, acting in ways similar to the little horn (see Daniel 8), which attacked the foundations of God's sanctuary. By removing dominion from Belshazzar, God prefigures what He will accomplish against the enemies of His people in the very last days. The events narrated in Daniel 5 took place in 539 B.C., on the night Babylon fell before the Medo-Persian army. Here occurs the transition from gold to silver, predicted in Daniel 2. Once more it becomes evident that God rules in the affairs of the world.

The pride of Assyria and its fall are to serve as an object lesson to the end of time. Of the nations of earth today who in arrogance and pride array themselves against Him, God inquires, "To whom art thou thus like in glory and in greatness among the trees of Eden? Yet shalt thou be brought down with the trees of Eden unto the nether parts of the earth." [Ezekiel 31:18].

"The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that trust in Him. But with an overrunning flood He will make an utter end" of all who endeavour to exalt themselves above the Most High. Nahum 1:7, 8.

"The pride of Assyria shall be brought down, and the sceptre of Egypt shall depart away." Zechariah 10:11. This is true not only of the nations that arrayed themselves against God in ancient times, but also of nations today who fail of fulfilling the divine purpose. In the day of final awards, when the righteous Judge of all the earth shall "sift the nations" (Isaiah 30:28), and those that have kept the truth shall be permitted to enter the City of God, heaven's arches will ring with the triumphant songs of the redeemed.... And the Lord shall cause His glorious voice to be heard.... Through the voice of the Lord shall the Assyrian be beaten down, which smote with a rod." Verses 29-32.—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 366.

The world is teeming with errors and fables. Novelties in the form of sensational dramas are continually arising to engross the mind, and absurd theories abound which are destructive to moral and spiritual advancement. The cause of God needs men of intellect, men of thought, men well versed in the Scriptures, to meet the inflowing tide of opposition. We should give no sanction to arrogance, narrow-mindedness, and inconsistencies, although the garment of professed piety may be thrown over them. Those who have the sanctifying power of the truth upon their hearts will exert a persuasive influence.—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 415.

I ask you who ... love the gathering for indulgence in wit and merriment and feasting, do you take Jesus with you? Are you seeking to save the souls of your companions? Is that the object of your association with them? Do they see and feel that there is in you a living embodiment of the Spirit of Christ? Is it manifest that you are a witness for Christ that you belong to a peculiar people, zealous of good works? Is it manifest that your life is governed by the divine precepts, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Matthew 22:37), and, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as

thysel" (Matthew 19:19)? To speak to the hearts and consciences of those that are ready to perish, is beyond the power of one who does not himself surrender all for Christ. But where do your fluency and warmth of speech show that your interest is centered?—*Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 125.

Belshazzar's Feast

The king commands that the sacred utensils of the Jerusalem temple be used as drinking vessels. Nebuchadnezzar seizes the vessels from the Jerusalem temple, but he places them in the house of his god, which shows that at least he respects their sacred status. But Belshazzar turns the sacred vessels into drinking utensils in a most profane way.

While drinking from the sacred vessels, Belshazzar's lords "praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone" (Dan. 5:4). It is worth noticing that six materials are mentioned. The Babylonians used the sexagesimal system (a system based on the number 60) in contrast to the decimal system used today (based on the number 10). Thus, the six categories of gods represent the totality of the Babylonian deities and, therefore, the fullness of the Babylonian religious system. Interestingly enough, the order of the materials follows the order of the components of the dream statue of Nebuchadnezzar, except that wood replaces the clay. As in the dream, stone appears last; although here it designates the material composition of idols, stone also evokes God's judgment upon worldly empires (see Dan. 2:44, 45), which Babylon symbolizes.

This feast serves as an apt representation of end-time Babylon as seen in the book of Revelation. Like Belshazzar, the woman in end-time Babylon holds a golden cup and offers polluted drink to the nations. In other words, by means of false doctrines and a distorted worship system, modern Babylon lures the world into evil (Rev. 17:4-6), oblivious to the judgment that will soon fall upon her. One day judgment will come.

To us the warning is given, "All these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." ... As soon as the wicked one had the people under his control, there were exhibitions of a satanic character. The people ate and drank without a thought of God and His mercy, without a thought of the necessity of resisting the devil, who was leading them on to the most shameful deeds. The same spirit was manifested as at the sacrilegious feast of Belshazzar. There was glee and dancing, hilarity and singing, carried to an infatuation that beguiled the senses; then the indulgence in inordinate, lustful affections—all this mingled in that disgraceful scene. God had been dishonoured; His people had become a shame in the sight of the heathen. Judgments were about to fall on that infatuated, besotted multitude.—*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 101.

[Christ] would lay before us the danger of making eating and drinking paramount. He reveals the result of giving up to indulgence of appetite. The moral powers are enfeebled so that sin does not appear sinful. Crimes are winked at, and base passions control the mind until general corruption roots out good principles and impulses, and God is blasphemed. All this is the result of eating and drinking to excess. This is the very condition of things which He declares will exist at His second coming.

Will men and women be warned? Will they cherish the light, or will they become slaves to appetite and base passions? Christ presents to us something higher to toil for than merely what we shall eat, and what we shall drink, and wherewithal we shall be clothed. Eating, drinking, and dressing are carried to such excess that they become crimes, and are among the marked sins of the last days, and constitute a sign of Christ's soon coming... . It is impossible to present our bodies a living sacrifice to God when they are filled with corruption and disease by our own sinful indulgence.—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 3, p. 164.

Satan uses men and women as agents to solicit to sin and make it attractive. These agents he faithfully educates to so disguise sin that he can more successfully destroy souls and rob Christ of His glory. Satan is the great enemy of God and man. He transforms himself through his agents into angels of light. In the Scriptures he is called a destroyer, an accuser of the brethren, a deceiver, a liar, a tormentor, and a murderer. Satan has many in his employ, but is most successful when he can use professed Christians for his satanic work. And the greater their influence, the more elevated their position, the more knowledge they profess of God and His service, the more successfully can he use them. Whoever entices to sin is his agent.—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 137.

An Uninvited Guest

As Nebuchadnezzar does in previous crises (Dan. 2:2, Dan. 4:7), Belshazzar calls the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers to clarify the mysterious writing. And to make sure that they give their best, the king promises them extravagant honours: (1) purple clothing, a colour worn by royalty in ancient times (Esther 8:15); (2) a chain of gold, which was a sign of high social status (Gen. 41:42); and (3) the position of third ruler in the kingdom. This last reward reflects accurately the historical circumstances of Babylon at that time. Because Belshazzar was second ruler as co-regent with his father, Nabonidus, he offers the position of third ruler. But despite the tempting rewards, the sages once again fail to provide an explanation.

On top of all his sins, then, the king attempts to find wisdom in the wrong place. The Babylonian experts cannot uncover the meaning of the message. It is written in their own language, Aramaic, as we shall see tomorrow, but they cannot make sense of the words. This might remind us of what the Lord speaks through Isaiah: "For the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hidden" (Isa. 29:14). After quoting this verse the apostle Paul states: "Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe" (1 Cor. 1:20, 21).

Some truths are too important to be left for humans to try to figure out for themselves. That's why God, instead, reveals these truths to us.

A Watcher, who was unrecognized, but whose presence was a power of condemnation, looked on this scene of profanation. Soon the unseen and uninvited Guest made His presence felt. At the moment when the sacrilegious revelry was at its height, a bloodless

hand came forth, and wrote words of doom on the wall of the banqueting hall. Burning words followed the movements of the hand. "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin," was written in letters of flame. Few were the characters traced by that hand on the wall facing the king, but they showed that the power of God was there.

Belshazzar was afraid. His conscience was awakened. The fear and suspicion that always follow the course of the guilty seized him. When God makes men fear, they cannot hide the intensity of their terror. Alarm seized the great men of the kingdom. Their blasphemous disrespect of sacred things was changed in a moment. A frantic terror overcame all self-control.

In vain the king tried to read the burning letters. He had found a power too strong for him. He could not read the writing.—Ellen G. White Comments, in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, pp. 1170, 1171.

If every church member shall give entrance to the word of God, it will give light and understanding to the simple... . "Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord" (Isaiah 29:18-21).

Never was there a time when the Lord would manifest His great grace unto His chosen ones more fully than in these last days when His law is made void.—*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, pp. 95, 96.

It is the duty of every child of God to store his mind with divine truth; and the more he does this, the more strength and clearness of mind he will have to fathom the deep things of God. And he will be more and more earnest and vigorous, as the principles of truth are carried out in his daily life.

That which will bless humanity is spiritual life. He who is in harmony with God, will constantly depend upon Him for strength. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." It should be our life work to be constantly reaching forward to the perfection of Christian character, ever striving for conformity to the will of God. The efforts begun here will continue through eternity. The advancement made here will be ours when we enter upon the future life.

Those who are partakers of Christ's meekness, purity, and love, will be joyful in God, and will shed light and gladness upon all around them.—*Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 327.

Enter the Queen

As the banquet hall is thrown into confusion because of the mysterious message on the wall, the queen comes and provides direction to the befuddled king. She reminds the king about Daniel, whose ability to interpret dreams and solve mysteries has been demonstrated during the time of Nebuchadnezzar. If Belshazzar were as smart as his predecessor, he would have known where to turn to find the meaning of this mysterious

writing. The intervention of the queen proves necessary for the king, who at this point seems utterly at a loss as to what to do next. Her words sound like a rebuke to Belshazzar for having overlooked the only person in the kingdom who can interpret the mysterious writing. And she also gives the king an oral resume of Daniel: The prophet has the Spirit of the Holy God, light and understanding and divine wisdom, excellent spirit, knowledge; he is capable of understanding, interpreting dreams, solving riddles, and explaining enigmas; he was chief of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers in Nebuchadnezzar's time (Dan. 5:11, 12).

At this point, we again wonder why Belshazzar had ignored Daniel. The text does not offer a direct answer to this question, but we presume that at this time Daniel, after serving the king at least until the third year of his reign (Dan. 8:1, 27), is no longer in active service. One factor could be Daniel's age. He is probably around 80 years old, and the king may have wanted to replace the old leadership with a younger generation. The king may have also decided to ignore Daniel because he did not want to commit himself to Daniel's God. But whatever the reason or combination of reasons, it remains striking that someone with such a portfolio as Daniel's could be forgotten so soon.

The queen mother remembered Daniel, who, over half a century before, had made known to King Nebuchadnezzar the dream of the great image and its interpretation. "O king, live forever," she said. "Let not thy thoughts trouble thee, nor let thy countenance be changed: there is a man in thy kingdom, in whom is the spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of thy father light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, was found in him; whom the king Nebuchadnezzar ... made master of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers; forasmuch as an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, interpreting of dreams, and showing of hard sentences, and dissolving of doubts, were found in the same Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar: now let Daniel be called, and he will show the interpretation... .

Before that terror-stricken throng, Daniel, unmoved by the promises of the king, stood in the quiet dignity of a servant of the Most High, not to speak words of flattery, but to interpret a message of doom. "Let thy gifts be to thyself," he said, "and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation."—Prophets and Kings, pp. 527–529.

From the beginning it has been Satan's studied plan to cause men to forget God that he might secure them to himself. Hence he has sought to misrepresent the character of God, to lead men to cherish a false conception of Him. The Creator has been presented to their minds as clothed with the attributes of the prince of evil himself,—as arbitrary, severe, and unforgiving,—that He might be feared, shunned, and even hated by men. Satan hoped to so confuse the minds of those whom he had deceived that they would put God out of their knowledge. Then he would obliterate the divine image in man and impress his own likeness upon the soul; he would imbue men with his own spirit and make them captives according to his will.

Christ came to reveal God to the world as a God of love, full of mercy, tenderness, and compassion. The thick darkness with which Satan had endeavored to enshroud the throne

of Deity was swept away by the world's Redeemer, and the Father was again manifest to men as the light of life.—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 738.

God's dealings with rebellion will result in fully unmasking the work that has so long been carried on under cover. The results of Satan's rule, the fruits of setting aside the divine statutes, will be laid open to the view of all created intelligences. The law of God will stand fully vindicated. It will be seen that all the dealings of God have been conducted with reference to the eternal good of His people, and the good of all the worlds that He has created. Satan himself, in the presence of the witnessing universe, will confess the justice of God's government and the righteousness of His law.—Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 338.