

Weighed, Wanting & Destroyed

Forced by the circumstances, the king resorts to consulting Daniel, but he seems to do so with reluctance. This may tell more about the attitude of the king toward the God of Daniel than toward Daniel himself.

In turn, Daniel's response to the king's offer of reward says a lot about Daniel's priorities and character. It is also likely that Daniel, knowing the meaning of the mysterious words, realizes just how worthless the reward really is.

Daniel then indicts the king on three counts.

First, Belshazzar totally has ignored the experience of Nebuchadnezzar. Otherwise he would have repented and humiliated himself like his predecessor.

Second, Belshazzar has used the temple vessels in order to drink wine and to praise his idols. Here Daniel mentions the six kinds of materials used to make idols in the same order noted previously.

Third, the king has neglected to glorify God, the One "who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways" (Dan. 5:23).

Having addressed the failures of the king, Daniel proceeds to the interpretation. Now we learn that the divine graffiti consists of three Aramaic verbs (with the first repeated). Their basic meaning should have been known to the king and his sages: MENE: "counted"; TEKEL: "weighed", and PERES: "divided".

With the Medo-Persian army at the gates of Babylon, the king and the sages must have suspected some ominous meaning in that writing, but the sages do not dare to say something unpleasant to the king. Only Daniel proves capable of decoding the actual message into a meaningful statement in order to convey its full meaning to Belshazzar: "MENE: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it; TEKEL: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; PERES: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians" (Dan. 5:26-28).

Not exactly words of comfort and cheer.

In vain the king tried to read the burning letters. But here was a secret he could not fathom, a power he could neither understand nor gainsay. In despair he turned to the wise men of his realm for help. His wild cry rang out in the assembly, calling upon the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers to read the writing... . But of no avail was his appeal to his trusted advisers, with offers of rich awards. Heavenly wisdom cannot be bought or sold. "All the king's wise men ... could not read the writing, nor make known to the king the interpretation thereof." They were no more able to read the mysterious characters than had been the wise men of a former generation to interpret the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar.—Prophets and Kings, p. 527.

The carnal mind is enmity against God, and it rebels against His will. Let it once throw off the yoke of obedience and it slips unconsciously into the lawlessness of crime. Iniquity

abounds among those who talk grandly of pure and perfect religious liberty. Their conduct is abhorrent to the Lord, and they are co-workers with the adversary of souls. The light of revealed truth is turned from their sight, and the beauties of holiness are but as shadows to them... .

I have been shown what man is without a knowledge of the will of God. Crimes and iniquity fill up the measure of his life. But when the Spirit of God reveals to him the full meaning of the law, what a change takes place in his heart! Like Belshazzar, he reads intelligently the handwriting of the Almighty, and conviction takes possession of his soul. The thunders of God's word startle him from his lethargy, and he calls for mercy in the name of Jesus. And to that humble plea God always listens with a willing ear. He never turns the penitent away comfortless.—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, pp. 13, 14.

The great day of the Lord is near at hand. When Christ appears in the clouds of heaven, those who have not sought Him with all the heart, those who have allowed themselves to be deceived, will surely perish. Our only safety is to be found through repentance and conversion, and the blotting out of sins. Those who will now seek the Lord earnestly, humbling their hearts before Him, and forsaking their sins, will, through the sanctification of the truth, be fitted to unite with the members of the royal family, and will see the King in His beauty... .

We are called to be the Lord's special people in a much higher sense than many have realized. The world lies in wickedness, and God's people are to come out of the world, and be separate. They are to be free from worldly customs and worldly habits. They are not to accord with worldly sentiments, but are to stand out distinct, as the Lord's peculiar people, earnest in all their service. They are to have no fellowship with the works of darkness.—*This Day With God*, p. 248.

The Fall of Babylon

Whatever his faults, Belshazzar is a man of his word. So, despite the bad news, he is satisfied with the interpretation given by Daniel, which is why he bestows upon the prophet the promised gifts. It appears that by admitting the truth of Daniel's message, the king implicitly recognizes the reality of Daniel's God. Interestingly, Daniel now accepts the gifts he has refused before, probably because such gifts can no longer influence his interpretation. Besides, at that point such gifts are meaningless since the empire is about to fall. Thus, probably as a matter of courtesy, the prophet accepts the rewards, knowing all the while that he will be the third ruler of the kingdom for only a few hours.

Exactly as announced by the prophet, Babylon falls. And it does so quickly; while the king and his courtiers drink, the city falls without a battle. According to the historian Herodotus, the Persians dug a canal to divert the Euphrates River and marched into the city on the riverbed. That same night Belshazzar is slain. His father, King Nabonidus, has left the city already, surrendering himself later to the new rulers. Thus, the greatest empire humanity has ever known to this point comes to an end. Babylon, the head of gold, is no more.

"Belshazzar had been given many opportunities for knowing and doing the will of God. He had seen his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar banished from the society of men. He had seen

the intellect in which the proud monarch gloried taken away by the One who gave it. He had seen the king driven from his kingdom, and made the companion of the beasts of the field. But Belshazzar's love of amusement and self-glorification effaced the lessons he should never have forgotten; and he committed sins similar to those that brought signal judgments on Nebuchadnezzar. He wasted the opportunities graciously granted him, neglecting to use the opportunities within his reach for becoming acquainted with truth". — Ellen G. White, Bible Echo, April 25, 1898.

"So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." The picture is true for all time. You may plan for merely selfish good, you may gather together treasure, you may build mansions great and high, as did the builders of ancient Babylon; but you cannot build wall so high or gate so strong as to shut out the messengers of doom. Belshazzar the king "feasted in his palace," and "praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone." But the hand of One invisible wrote upon his walls the words of doom, and the tread of hostile armies was heard at his palace gates. "In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain," and an alien monarch sat upon the throne. (Daniel 5:30).

To live for self is to perish. Covetousness, the desire of benefit for self's sake, cuts the soul off from life. It is the spirit of Satan to get, to draw to self. It is the spirit of Christ to give, to sacrifice self for the good of others. "And this is the record that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." 1 John 5:11, 12.—Christ's Object Lessons, pp. 258, 259.

He who is imbued with the spirit which actuated Daniel will not be narrow or conceited, but he will be firm and decided in standing for the right. In all his associations, whether with his brethren or with others, he will not swerve from principle, while at the same time he will not fail to manifest a noble, Christlike patience.—A Call to Medical Evangelism and Health Education, p. 37.

The Christian is first a babe in Christ. Then he becomes a child. Constantly he is to make advancement proportionate to the opportunities and privileges granted him. Ever he is to remember that he is not his own, that he has been bought with a price, and that he must make the best possible use of the talents entrusted to him. Even in the infancy of his spiritual understanding, the Christian is to do his best, making steady advancement toward the higher, holier life. He is to realize that he is a labourer together with God.

He is never to become self-sufficient, but is to count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord. He is to walk and work in the Saviour's companionship. As he does this, his faith will increase. Constantly beholding Christ, he will be changed into the same image from character to character.—In Heavenly Places, p. 183.

Further Thought

Large feasts were common in the courts of the ancient world. Kings loved to throw parties with extravagance and luxury to show their greatness and confidence. Although we do not know all of the details of this particular feast, we know that it took place when the Medo-

Persian army was poised to attack Babylon. But humanly speaking, there was no reason for concern. Babylon had fortified walls, a food supply for many years, and plenty of water, because the Euphrates River flowed through the heart of the city. So King Belshazzar sees no problem in having a party while the enemy surrounds the city. And he orders a momentous celebration, which soon degenerates into an orgy. What a powerful testimony to the hubris of humanity, especially in contrast to the power of the Lord. Through Daniel, God tells the king that despite the opportunities he has had to learn truth, “the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified” (Dan. 5:23).

“Cyrus and his army marched up the bed of the river Euphrates; for trenches had been dug, and the river turned from its course, so that there was no obstruction to their entering the city, provided the gates were opened. The guardsmen were indulging in merriment and revelry, and the city was left without defense. Before the officers were aware, the enemy had entered the city, and escape was impossible. Those in one part of the city were slain or captured before those in another part knew that the city was invaded. No alarm was sounded, no cry could be raised to warn the people that the forces of Cyrus were upon them.” Signs of the Times, December 29, 1890

“In the unexpected entry of the army of the Persian conqueror into the heart of the Babylonian capital by way of the channel of the river whose waters had been turned aside, and through the inner gates that in careless security had been left open and unprotected, the Jews had abundant evidence of the literal fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy concerning the sudden overthrow of their oppressors.” Prophets and Kings, p. 552

“Babylon was besieged by Cyrus, nephew of Darius the Mede and commanding general of the combined armies of the Medes and Persians. But within the seemingly impregnable fortress, with its massive walls and its gates of brass, protected by the river Euphrates, and stocked with provision in abundance, the voluptuous monarch felt safe and passed his time in mirth and revelry.” Prophets and Kings, p. 523

Cyrus was acclaimed as a deliverer even by the populace of Babylon. Ellen White describes how Daniel shared the prophecies of Isaiah with Cyrus which eventually led him to give a decree for God's people to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple:

“As the king saw the words foretelling, more than a hundred years before his birth, the manner in which Babylon should be taken; as he read the message addressed to him by the Ruler of the universe, [Isaiah 45:5, 6, 4, 13 quoted] his heart was profoundly moved, and he determined to fulfill his divinely appointed mission.” Prophets and Kings, p. 557

“The history of nations speaks to us today. To every nation and to every individual God has assigned a place in His great plan. Today men and nations are being tested by the plummet in the hand of Him who makes no mistake. All are by their own choice deciding their destiny, and God is overruling all for the accomplishment of His purposes”. — Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings, p. 536.

Conclusions and Lessons

God's people were to heed God's call and flee from Babylon to Jerusalem before Babylon was destroyed (Jeremiah 51:6, 17-20, 45; 50:4, 5, 8, 19, 20 and 28). God's people would return to Jerusalem singing the song of the redeemed (Jeremiah 51:48). Babylon received as she gave (Jeremiah 50:29).

"Perilous is the condition of those who, growing weary of their watch, turn to the attractions of the world. While the man of business is absorbed in the pursuit of gain, while the pleasure lover is seeking indulgence, while the daughter of fashion is arranging her adornments--it may be in that hour the Judge of all the earth will pronounce the sentence: "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting." Daniel 5:27." The Great Controversy, p. 491

"Babylon is a symbol of the world at large. When its doom was made certain, its kings and officers seemed to be as men insane, and their own course hastened its destiny. When the doom of a nation is fixed, it seems that all the energy, wisdom, and discretion of its former time of prosperity, deserts its men of position, and they hasten the evil they would avert. Outside enemies are not the greatest peril to an individual or a nation. The overthrow of a nation results, under the providence of God, from some unwise or evil course of its own." Signs of the Times, December 29, 1890

"The condemnation that will fall upon the nations of the earth in this day will be because of their rejection of light, and will be similar to that which fell upon the kings of Babylon; it will be because they have failed to make the most of present light, present opportunities for knowing what is truth and righteousness. Our condemnation in the judgment will not result from the fact that we have lived in error, but from the fact that we have neglected heaven-sent opportunities for discovering truth. The means of becoming conversant with the truth are within the reach of all; but, like the indulgent, selfish king, we give more attention to the things that charm the ear, and please the eye, and gratify the palate, than to the things that enrich the mind, the divine treasures of truth. It is through the truth that we may answer the great question, "What must I do to be saved?" Signs of the Times, July 27, 1891

"In the balances of the sanctuary the Seventh-day Adventist church is to be weighed. She will be judged by the privileges and advantages that she has had. If her spiritual experience does not correspond to the advantages that Christ, at infinite cost, has bestowed on her, if the blessings conferred have not qualified her to do the work entrusted to her, on her will be pronounced the sentence: "Found wanting." By the light bestowed, the opportunities given, will she be judged." Testimonies for the Church, Volume 8 p. 247