

What Would The Moving Finger Write About You?

Daniel 5: Selected

5th in the Series on Daniel

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We are returning to our study of the Book of Daniel this morning to a time about 35 years later than where we left Daniel in Chapter 4. There, in 604 BC Daniel had interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a mighty tree, cut down, but with its stump left, a stump that came back to life after several years, and became a tree that flourished again. I have seen trees cut down to make fence posts that have come back to life as trees when put in the ground. But the one in Daniel 4 had a dream to go with it, and as the story went, only Daniel could tell what the dream was and what it meant. Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that he was to suffer a mental breakdown and go mad, His kingdom of Babylon would be ruled by children and regents, And, as his dream was interpreted, he could be restored to good mental health

if he ever came back to his senses,
if he finally realized that God was in charge of the world,
if he understood that God has brought his mental collapse on to try to get him to repent,
if he repented and acknowledged God as supreme, maker of all, ruler of all.

Finally, that happened, but it took seven to eight years.

Finally, Nebuchadnezzar came to his senses, acknowledged God as ruler over all, accepted God as God, and was restored.

Now, 35 years later in 539 BC, Nebuchadnezzar's son, maybe grandson, was in charge, and his empire, the Babylonian Empire, was under attack by the Medes and the Persians. Cyrus and his armies had just beaten Babylon at the Battle of Sippar in October 539 and the Babylonians had retreated into the fortress of the Capitol, the city Babylon itself, thought to be impregnable. The King decided to have a feast and consider his next steps. The text is long and curious, but it tells the story of what happened so well. Let's listen as God speaks to us through Daniel 5

Daniel 5

- 1 King Belshazzar (meaning may Baal protect the King) gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them.
- 2 While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets, that Nebuchadnezzar, his father, had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem, so that the king, and his nobles, and his wives and his concubines might drink from them.
- 3 So they brought in the gold goblets that had been taken from the Temple of God in Jerusalem andall drank from them.
- 4 As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.
- 5 Suddenly, the fingers of a human hand 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 legs became weak and his knees were knocking.
- 7 The king summoned the enchanters, astrologers and diviners. Then he said, "Whoever reads this writing and tells me what it means, will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around his neck, and he will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom,
- 8 Then all the king's men came in, but they could not read the writing or tell the king what it meant.
- 9 So, King Belshazzar became even more terrified and his face grew more pale. His nobles were baffled.
- 10 The queen, hearing the voices of the king and his nobles, came into the banquet hall and said, "Don't be alarmed! Don't look so pale!
- 11 There is a man in your kingdom who has the spirit of the holy gods in him. In the time of your father he was found to have insight and intelligence and wisdom like that of the gods. Your father, King Nebuchadnezzar, appointed him chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and divines.
- 12 He did this because Daniel was found to have a keen mind and knowledge and understanding, and also the ability to interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel and he will tell you what the writing means."
- 13 So, Daniel was brought before the King....
- 16 and the king said, "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."
- 17 (Daniel told the king he would interpret the writing but he did not want the gifts from the king.)
- 18 Daniel said, "Your majesty, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendor.
- 19 Because of the high position God gave your father, all the nations and peoples of every language dreaded and feared him.....
- 20 But when his heart (the king's) became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory.
- 21 He was driven away from people and given the mind of an animal; he lived with the wild donkeys and ate grass like the ox... until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and sets over them anyone he wishes."
- 22 But you, Belshazzar his son, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this.
- 23 Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. You had the goblets from his temple brought to you and you and your nobles and wives drank wine from them. You praised the gods of silver and gold, ... which you cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways.
- 24 Therefore he sent the hand that wrote the inscription:
- 25 "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin"
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- 26 Here is what those words mean:
Mene: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end.
Tekel: You have been weighed on the scale and found wanting,
Parsin: Your kingdom will be divided and given to the Medes and Persians.
- 30 That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians was slain and Darius the Mede took over his kingdom at the age of 62.

The Word Of The Lord!

We've just heard one of the great stories of the Bible. In it, God speaks to a king through a hand writing on a plaster wall writing just 4 words. It was a coded message from God to the king! The writing and the words were Aramaic, the language spoken in Babylon. So it wasn't something they couldn't read or know what the words were. But, what these 4 words meant for this king ---well, that was a different story. The message as Daniel read it was very clear, but Daniel was reluctant to tell the King what it meant. When the King insisted, Daniel told him: what God was saying:

Belshazzar --your time is up, your kingdom and your life will end today. God has weighed your life and your response to what you knew about the Most High God, and your life has come up short---wanting, as they say it, so get ready, because you are going to lose all that matters to you, and it will be divided among and given to others.

This is not just a story of changing world powers, one leaving the stage of history (Babylon)and another (Persia) ascending; it is a story that still applies to each of us in this world, and those of 100 years ago and those of 200 years from now.

The message that is timeless says for each of us there will come a day when God calls and our lives will come to an end. It may be at the end of a long and fulfilled life; it may be early, long before it should be, or it may be like in Daniel 5, in the course of human events that will affect the world order. Babylon was at war and had been for a while --one super power versus another. This battle of Sippar had been the culminating event in the long war to block the rising power of the Medes and Persians. Only Egypt remained as a check on the world wide ambitions of Cyrus and later Darius.

Babylon had been to the edge of this deep hole of world calamity once before, but escaped from doom when Nebuchadnezzar came to his senses from his mental disease and acknowledged the sovereignty of God and repented. Belshazzar had seen this, he was there when his father lost the throne for blaspheming and denying God. He knew his father's madness first hand and he knew what his father did with God to be restored.

He had been there.

He had seen it.

He had heard his father give allegiance to God,

but Belshazzar had not followed in his father's ways. He had turned away from God, and turned his back on God; he had walked another way, not God's way, and on the night of his army's greatest defeat at Sippar, he mocked the God who helped his father, believing the great walls around Babylon would defeat Darius. He laughed at the God who had helped his father, and worshipped the gods of gold

and silver, and wood and stone, as he drank from the vessels of the Temple of the Lord God Most High. God saw it and didn't like it.

And soon a disconnected hand was writing messages for the King.

Belshazzar had walked away from God, had created a life that didn't need God in it. He was full of himself. He was relying on his own prowess and wisdom, and his time was up.

So Daniel told him what the hand and fingers were writing:

Mene, Mene –your time has come, you had your chance, you cannot turn your back on God forever and expect that God won't hold you to account.

Tekel –your life and your commitment to God has been weighed on the scales of God's judgment and your end has crashed to the floor, because of your arrogance and your rejection of God.

Parsin—all that you hold dear, especially this Kingdome, will be taken from you and divided among others.

Friends, the story of Belshazzar isn't just ancient history; it's now, and it occurs over and over again, and it tells us exactly how God is going to look at each one of us. Wasn't it ironic that here on Mother's day, we heard another mother, the king's mother, reminding the King of God's interaction with his Father, reminding him that he was there and seen God act, that he knew what God could and would do. Belshazzar knew of God and knew about God, but he had turned away – he was disobedient and arrogant, and it was costly. The sin of pride, of believing himself equal or superior to God, and not needing God was showing. He was rejecting God at his country's direst time, even after he had been shown as a young prince, exactly how God works. And his time had come. Judgment day had arrived.

God gave us this story from Daniel that there might never be any doubt: God still works this way.

In each of our lives there will come a day when God will write on the wall with a moving hand the words of our judgment. The writing will be just like what we have read:

A few words, saying It is now your time.

God is now calling you home.

There will be no more chances, no last minute choices, no more promises to walk a new ways. The hand will write for us: Now is the time.

And we will be weighed, put on the scales of loving Christ and accepting God on the one side and our pride and arrogance toward God and our rejections of God on the other, and our life will be weighed.

It will be time; there will be no more going back. Belshazzar will be waiting if we have not repented in time.

But if we have acted soon enough and wisely enough, there will be Daniel, waiting for us, saying well done.

This story from ancient history shows that God is in charge of everything, even the comings and goings of Kings and empires. This story is to help us understand what God has done and is doing.

Hitler was wrong and God used so many to remove Hitler.

The Holocaust was wrong and Israel now has a country.

Religious intolerance was wrong, and God sent an America to show the world acceptance is better.

And, Putin is wrong, and God will send those to remove him.

The list is long of what God has done and is doing. But know this: God is in charge, God rules over all. God brings the new and removes the old. Doubt it? Read Belshazzar's story again.

So, if the moving finger was to write about you today, what would it say? The clock is ticking. Don't let it get to be too late. Belshazzar did.