

Belshazzar's Feast and the Fall of Babylon

by Arno Clemens Gaebelein

The sermon explores the fall of Babylon and its lessons for the church, highlighting the importance of separation from evil and the need to honor Christ in our hearts and lives.

Scripture: Genesis 19:4, Daniel 5:23, Daniel 5:25, Revelation 3:17, Revelation 17:16

Topics: "Divine Judgment", "Apostasy Warning"

Description

Arno Clemens Gaebelein delves into the historical account of Belshazzar's feast and the divine judgment that followed, showcasing the defiance and blasphemy against God that led to the fall of Babylon. Drawing parallels to the present day, he warns of the impending judgment on apostate Christendom, highlighting the moral and doctrinal declension, the rejection of Christ, and the rise of a great ecclesiastical system symbolized by Babylon. Gaebelein emphasizes the importance of heeding God's call to separation from evil and honoring Christ in our hearts and lives amidst increasing corruption and apostasy.

Transcript

The history of this chapter is so well known that we need not to relate it in full. It was in the year 538 B. C. that this happened. The end of the Babylonian captivity was almost reached and Belshazzar was reigning over the empire. He was the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar and vice-regent of the empire; his father's name was Nabonaid.

Critics have stated that Nebuchadnezzar could not be the grandfather of Belshazzar for Nabonaid, Belshazzar's father, was not a son of Nebuchadnezzar. This objection is seemingly strengthened by the fact that no ancient historian gives the name of Belshazzar, from which the critics concluded that he must be a myth. Berosus, who lived about 250 years after the Persian invasion, gives the following list of Babylonian monarchs :

Nabuchodonosar (Nebuchadnezzar) .

Evil Marudak, who is the Evil Merodach of the Bible.

Neriglissor.

Laborosoarchod.

Nabonaid.

Cyrus, the Persian conqueror.

Different attempts were made to clear up this difficulty, but they failed. Now if Daniel wrote his book he must be correct. But the critics are ever ready to put the doubt not on the side of history, but on the side of the Bible. So they said Berosus was not mistaken and that if Daniel really had written the book, which bears his name, he would have been historically correct. This is how matters stood up to 1854. In that year Sir Rawlinson translated a number of tablets brought to light by the spade from the ruins of the Babylonian civilization. These contained the memorials of Nabonaid and in these the name of Belsharuzzar appeared frequently and is mentioned as the son of Nabonaid and sharing the government with him. The existence of Belshazzar and the accuracy of Daniel were at once established beyond the shadow of a doubt.

Daniel was promised by Belshazzar to become the third ruler in the kingdom (Dan. v, 16).

Why the third and not the second? Because Nabonaid was the first, Belshazzar his son was the second and vice-regent. Nabonaid had a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar for wife and therefore Belshazzar from his mother's side was the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar.

But have the critics learned by this complete defeat? Have they profited by this experience and will they leave the Bible alone? Not by any means. They continue to look for flaws in the infallible Book. Some day they will discover the seriousness of their work.

Daniel writes of Belshazzar as the " son " of Nebuchadnezzar. This is no discrepancy at all for the Semitic languages have no word for " grandfather " or " grandson."

Matters have gone from bad to worse in the empire. A great feast is held, which was perhaps an annual affair. What splendor was exhibited! A thousand lords and princes with their wives and concubines ! Luxuries and licentiousness were seen at that feast. When it was at its height an awful blasphemy was committed by Belshazzar. He commanded that the precious vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem be brought that they might all drink out of them. Then they blasphemed God and praised their idols. It was an open blasphemy and defiance of God. Over against the candlestick on the plaster of the wall, all at once a man's hand appeared and the King beheld the hand that wrote. The whole feast came at once to an end. The joy gave way to fear. The King became pale and his knees shook ; the laughter gradually died out as one after another beheld the mysterious words which had been written on the wall. Once more the Chaldeans and astrologers are called and once more they are unable to read the writing and give the interpretation. Then the wife of Nebuchadnezzar, the aged queen, appears upon the scene. She evidently had no sympathy with the feast. She calls attention to the forgotten Daniel.

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, thy father, the King, I say, thy father, 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 (verses 11-12).

Then Daniel is introduced. He was, as previously stated, an old man. Years and years had passed since he had interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream and sat in the gate of the King, but Belshazzar had no

knowledge of him. Patiently he must have waited in seclusion for other service His God might give him. The fact that Daniel was no longer remembered and neglected is a witness of the degeneracy of Babylon.

Daniel refused the honors of the King, he has to offer. He knew that ere long, but a few hours more, and the blaspheming King would be no more. And Daniel is more than an interpreter of the handwriting on the wall. He is God's Prophet and messenger. Listen to his sublime words:

Then Daniel answered and said before the King, Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the King, and make known to him the interpretation. O thou King, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honor. And for the majesty that he gave him, all people, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him: whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down. But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him: And he was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses; they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will. And thou his son, O, Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this; But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified (verses 17-23).

Then followed the reading of the letters on the wall. Mene, Mene, "Numbered Numbered"; Tekel--"Weighed"; Upharsin "and divided."¹ It was the solemn announcement of the impending judgment. In that night was Belshazzar the King of the Chaldeans slain. How the Persians took the city by diverting the river Euphrates, which ran through the city is well known from history.

But what are the lessons here? The last days of Belshazzar were days of the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes. Impiety reached its climax in open defiance and opposition to the God of Israel. Babylon was glorying and boasting in her own gods and achievements. What does Babylon represent? In its final form it is the great religious world system which flourishes immediately after the church has been called away. This final Babylon is a great ecclesiastical system, the center of which is Rome. Such a system, a universal church full of corruption, will be in existence during the time of the end, but it will not last to the end. According to Revelation that final Babylon will be overthrown by the ten horns before the seven years are accomplished, with which the Gentile age closes.

And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. For God hath put in their hearts to fulfill his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled. And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth. (Rev. xvii. 16-17).

A political power overthrew the literal Babylon and a political power will overthrow the ecclesiastical Babylon.

But though we do not yet see this final, great ecclesiastical system, because the hour for it has not yet come, the material for it is present. We are living in the days of Laodicea, the days of boasting and

vainglory. The days in which we hear on all sides, " I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing." What we hear mostly today is of the great strides we are making, the glorious times we are living in and the still better times which are coming. But what is underneath it all? An impiety and blasphemy even greater than the impiety and blasphemy in the banqueting hall of Belshazzar. Hear some of the blasphemies of present day Christendom: The Bible is not the Word of God, God's holy Word is but a book like other books containing numerous errors, myths, and legend. Is not this a great blasphemy making God a liar? And worse than that, that worthy Name, the Name which is above every other name, is blasphemed. He is rejected as God's holy Son; His virgin birth is sneered at; the blessed death on the cross and its meaning for a lost world is set aside ; every article of the faith is denied. Are these not greater blasphemies than taking golden vessels which were dedicated to Jehovah and make them profane in a banqueting hall? Yea, the best which God could give, the finest gold. His own blessed Son, has been and is blasphemed. God will not stand this boasting, self-glorying, Christ-blaspheming and Christ-rejecting age forever. And the moral declension is as prominent as the doctrinal departure. Luxuries and lusts hold sway on every hand. The days of Lot, filled with licentiousness, are becoming more evident. The material for the final Babylon, the great apostasy is present with us in our day. The well deserved judgment to fall upon Christendom will surely come and not linger.

And the handwriting on the wall? The same hand which wrote on the plaster, over against the candlestick in Belshazzar's hall, has written the judgment and the doom of apostate Christendom on the pages of the Bible. There is a " Mene, Mene Tekel " for the present day conditions of Christendom. Mene, Mene, " numbered." The days are numbered. They cannot extend beyond the time appointed by the God of heaven. We do not know when they will expire. God knows that and all attempts to find out the year or the times will meet with failure and bring dishonor upon God's Word. The time is near, that is what many of God's people feel in their hearts.

Daniel having been forgotten with his God-given interpretations has also its lesson. So have the words of God, the revelations in the Prophetic Word been forgotten. Some day they will be brought back, but then it will be too late for repentance, as it was too late for Belshazzar. This moral condition of the first empire, Babylon, immediately before the judgment came upon it, at the close of the 70-year captivity of the Jews, is thus described in this chapter. It foreshadows the moral conditions of the time of the end, when Israel's long dispersion is almost ended and when God will cut out the ingrafted branches, the Gentiles, and put back Israel upon their own olive tree. May we hear God's call to separation from that which is evil. Babylon -- confusion is all about us and God wants His people to be separated from that which hates and despises His truth. In the midst of increasing corruption and apostasy we must ever honor Christ more in our hearts and lives, be occupied with His Word and do His will, so that we are not partakers of her sins.

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