

When God Crashes the Party

by Denis Lyle

Denis Lyle's sermon explores the fall of Belshazzar and the sovereignty of God as revealed through Daniel's prophetic message.

Scripture: Exodus 8:19, Exodus 31:18, Leviticus 10:8, Deuteronomy 29:6, Psalm 23:1, Psalm 90:12, Isaiah 41:25, Isaiah 44:28 - 45:1, Jeremiah 17:3, Daniel 5:1, Luke 11:20, John 8:1, John 17:4, Romans 14:9, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, Galatians 5:21, Ephesians 5:18, 2 Timothy 4:7

Topics: "God's Sovereignty", "Idolatry Condemned"

Description

Denis Lyle preaches on the story of Belshazzar in Daniel 5, highlighting the tragic dissipation and revelry at the royal feast, where intemperance, impropriety, impiety, and idolatry were prevalent. Belshazzar's defiance of God led to a supernatural message written on the wall, causing fear and a search for interpretation. Daniel, a consecrated, separated, and liberated man, was called to explain the mystery, revealing a prophecy of the kingdom's impending fall. The historic consummation shows the sovereignty of God's ways and the authenticity of His word in fulfilling His purposes.

Transcript

Reading: Daniel 5: 1-31 WHEN GOD CRASHES THE PARTY In this chapter we have the initial fulfillment of the prophecy given to Nebuchadnezzar. The head of gold is replaced by silver in the image. The Babylonian empire is now swept away by the Medo-Persia empire. Now its good for us to be aware that for many years this chapter has come under the critic's hammer. The mention of Belshazzar was once used by liberals to deny the accuracy of the Bible. For the ancient historians cited Nabonidus as the last King of Babylon.

The liberal critics pounced on the Bible and claimed they had found an error. "The Bible", they said "is not historically credible". However, during the 1920's the deciphering of more recently discovered Babylonian documents solved the mystery. These documents indicated that Belshazzar was the son of King Nabonidus. But the second problem is this: if Nabonidus was king during the events of Daniel (Ch 5) then why does (5:1) call Belshazzar "king" Some Babylonian documents solved this problem as well.

They indicated the following: in 555 BC Nabonidus marched an army westward to conquer rebels who had revolted against Babylonian rule since the death of Nebuchadnezzar. But before he left Babylon on this expedition, Nabonidus entrusted "kingship", to his oldest son Belshazzar. Through time Nabonidus built a royal palace in the distant town of Tema, in the heart of the Arabian peninsula, and he settled there. Now

while Nabonidus maintained the title of king in Arabia, Belshazzar exercised kingship in Babylon.

So Daniel was accurate in calling Belshazzar "king", for he was co-regent with his father Nabonidus. Do you see now that this why Belshazzar said "whoever shall read this writing... shall be the third ruler in the kingdom". (5:7) My, whenever you find something in the Bible that you do not understand, or something not substantiated by secular history just be patient. God will always vindicate His Word. The Bible says, "let God be true and every man a liar." Now between (Ch's 4 & 5) there's a period of twenty odd years.

For the first four chapters of the book of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar has been the central figure. He has been the centre of attention as king of the Babylonian Empire. But now in (Ch 5) a new king is introduced, his name is Belshazzar. By this time, Daniel was an old man. He was taken to Babylon in his teens, he has faithfully served in the kingdom for seventy years. He was probably in his mid eighties. Belshazzar was ruling over the city of Babylon. His father, Nabonidus had already been captured by the Medes and the Persians and most of Babylonia, had fallen.

All that remained to be conquered was the city of Babylon itself. Now Belshazzar was convinced that this city was impregnable. It was designed to withstand any kind of assault. It was surrounded by a system of double walls, comparable to a six lane motorway, these walls were 85 feet high, comparable to an eight story building. Over a hundred towers had been strategically placed around the wall to provide surveillance and cross-fire. Under the wall and running diagonally through the city was the Euphrates River, so there would be no water shortage.

Enough food had been stockpiled to last twenty years, and the citizens could grow more food inside the wall. My, Belshazzar believed he was absolutely secure, yet "in that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain". (5:30) Now I have divided this chapter into 3 simple parts: (1) THE TRAGIC DISSIPATION It was a night of royal revelry. Is it not sad to witness the unbridled living of the House of Windsor To see marriages destroyed, homes wrecked and lives ruined in our own royal family.

My, can you see this night of royal revelry The date was October 16th 539 BC Some feel this feast was given to boost morale, the enemy was at the gates, others tell us it was to honour one of the Babylonian gods. Whatever we can well picture it. With rings on their fingers and bracelets on their arms, dressed in the finest clothing with opulent jewels. The atmosphere filled with fragrance of perfume. Music, dancing, drinking it all sounds so up to date. This was: (a) THE FEAST BELSHAZZAR GAVE: You see, Babylonian culture lacked restraint.

They overindulged in food. They overindulged in drink. They overindulged in sex. So the scene before us is not a very pleasant one. Its the ultimate party... food, drink, and sex. Indeed this feast was marked by: 1. INTEMPERANCE: In (5:1) the king drank, in (5:4) he encouraged others to drink. Moffatt puts it like this, "they were carried away by the wine". Thats the danger of strong drink. Not only has it a woeful effect on your body and mind but the great evil of intemperance lies in its influence, you do things that you would never do when you are sober.

Now almost everywhere we turn today alcohol is prevalent. We cannot read the newspaper, watch T.V. walk on our streets without sensing the power of the enemy in this respect. (Lev 10:8 Deut 29:6 Rom 14:9 Gal 5:21) Wine in Scripture is referred to as " a mocker", "a trouble-maker", and as "a serpent who bites at the last". (Prov 20:1 23:20 23:32) In this contest therefore its the symbol of stimulation and irresponsible living. No wonder Paul says, "be not drunk with wine..." (Eph 5:18) 1. 2.

IMPROPRIETY: Women in the east were always in strict seclusion but not here. The concubines were the inferior class of women from the royal harem. They probably were present for the purpose of a sexual orgy. It was wine, women and song as morality was sacrificed at the foul shrine of pleasure. 1. 2. 3. IMPIETY: For look at (5:2) These sacred vessels were originally made by Solomon (1 Kings 7:48) shown by Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:13) and taken by Nebuchadnezzar. (2 Chron 36:10) You see, this king was not content to drink wine to his gods, he wanted to blaspheme the God of the Jews as well.

That which had been set apart for the service of God had been used in the service of sin. (Num 3:31) They were making light of holy things! Can you imagine someone coming in on Sunday morning while we "are breaking bread". A drunk man swerves up the aisle, grabs a cup from the tray, throws the wine on the floor, and fills it up with a shot of whiskey. He then turns around and shouts to the congregation, "here's a toast to the devil". My, this is what happened that fateful night in Babylon.

You see, Belshazzar probably knew about Jehovah's prophecy concerning Medo-Persia's conquest of Babylon. By desecrating the "holy vessels", he was showing his utter contempt for the God of Israel and His prophecy concerning the fall of Babylon. This king was so confident of Babylon's defences that he decided to challenge the God of Israel! Incidentally, in the NT Paul reminds us "what know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you (1 Cor 6:19) My body is the temple of God, my body is the dwelling place of God, it is important that I treat it accordingly! 1. 2. 3. 4.

IDOLATRY: For look at (5:4) Apparently what happened was that Belshazzar would stand and say, "I propose we sing to the god of gold". So they poured wine into the sacred vessels, and drank to the god of gold. Then to the god of silver and so on and so on! They are having fun, they are worshipping the pagan deities. Of course anything that I love, serve, worship more God is a god. It can be sport or a sports car. It can be a job or a house. It can be a hobby. Anything that comes between me and God is a god.

Do you know what serving other gods does It brings the judgement of the true and living God! For notice: (b) THE FINGERS BELSHAZZAR SAW: Look at (5:5) "In the same hour". It means suddenly. Right there in the midst of their revelry something happened. The music stops! The singing ends! The dance floor is silent! The party grinds to a halt! Every eye is riveted on the mysterious fingers writing on the wall. Had God's finger ever written before Yes! Do you recall the days of the Exodus when the plagues came.

Those fingers had spelled out the doom of another mighty leader who had dared to defy the living God. The magicians of Egypt said, "this is the finger of God". (Exod 8:19) Not long afterward God gave to Moses at Sinai, the two tables of testimony, His own holy law, "written with the finger of God". (Exod 31:18) My, it was that same finger that cast out demons (Lk 11:20) that wrote on the ground to expose the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees. (Jn 8:1-9 Jer 17:3) Those fingers are the fingers of God which gave God's revelation to man. (Matt 12:28) Now God might have chosen something else to show His displeasure... an earthquake: fire: a voice of thunder might have announced Jehovah's anger, but instead God uses writing Why Well, the kings of Babylon were famous for writing solemn decrees, so now God shows them that a greater King than them is on the Throne, and He too can issue solemn decrees.

What was the effect of it all Well, look at: (c) THE FEAR BELSHAZZAR KNEW: The word "countenance", means "his brightness changed". In other words he turned from a drunken pale to a frightened white. He was in such mental anguish that he began to cry aloud. It means that he shrieked! Now why was the king so afraid Why did he interpret the writing as a supernatural message Why did he not interpret the writing positively to mean "this is a sign that we are going to win against the Medes and Persians who surround

us".

Well, we always interpret things according to our conscience's don't we Look at Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. When they sinned the Bible says they clothed themselves with fig leaves. Then they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day and they ran and hid. Why were they afraid They interpreted the visit of God according to their consciences! When Herod who had killed John the Baptist heard of the mighty ministry of Christ he said, "this is John the Baptist come back from the dead".

He interpreted the unknown according to his conscience. A telephone call will scare some people to death. A knock at the door will frighten some people because they interpret everything unknown according to their consciences. It has been said, "conscience makes cowards of us all". So the king did next what the lost always do. He sent for the wise men and asked them to explain the meaning of the writing. But all the "brain trust", of Babylon could not read it. For only the man of God can interpret the Word of God. (1 Cor 2:14) My, this world does not have the answer to human problems.

Some time ago TIME magazine did an article on the problem of alcohol, and there was not a single solution. No remedy at all! For the only answer to the sin problem is the Lord Jesus. Now look in (5:1-9) (1) (2) THE PROPHETIC REVELATION It was a night of Dissipation. It was a night of Revelation. Leave to it a woman to come up with a bright idea. Now the Queen referred to in this passage may have been the widow of Nebuchadnezzar whom Nabonidus married when he became king. In ancient times it was an Oriental custom for a new king to marry widows of former kings in order to make his claim to the throne more legitimate.

Such a woman would have been known as Queen Mother and would have been highly respected. Having heard about the confusion in the banquet hall, the Queen Mother entered and told the king about Daniel! Now it would appear that Daniel had been out of royal service for several years, due to several changes of administration since the death of Nebuchadnezzar. But in light of his past record in interpreting dreams and solving problems, the Queen Mother urges that he Daniel be summoned.

Now this section provides us with a profile of Daniel's life. Notice from the context that Daniel was: (a) A CONSECRATED MAN: Did you notice the phrase in (5:11) that the Queen Mother uses, that Nebuchadnezzar her husband also used when speaking of Daniel. (4:8,9, 18) "in whom is the spirit of the holy gods". Now that was just a pagan way of saying that God was evident in Daniel's life. God had been with Daniel all through the years of the captivity. As a young man Daniel had made up his mind to be true to God and the Lord honoured that commitment.

Now he was an old man, but all through the years of his life Daniel had been faithful to God. He was probably now in retirement, known only by reputation, but this Queen recalled the tremendous impact that Daniel had made on her deceased husband, Nebuchadnezzar. My, wouldn't it be wonderful if it could be said of us that God was evident in our lives That the Spirit of God was in us Wouldn't it be great if folks could see so much of Christ in our lives that we would be known as people in whom God lived and through whom God worked! (a) (b) SEPARATED MAN: Look at (5:13) What must Daniel have thought of it Remember he's an old man now, well into his eighties.

He would be a venerable figure. Think of it... hundreds of drunken revellers, and besotted women and into their midst comes a man of God. Oh, he was not there when the pagan counsellors were called to give their interpretation. He was not there when the partying, the blaspheming, the defying, was going on. He

probably received an invitation, because his name may still have been on the list of Babylonian notables, but Daniel declined it. From day one in Babylon he dared to be different and separated unto God.

Can you imagine what they said to him on this occasion * Daniel, how do you ever expect to win the devils crowd if you don't mix with them. * You don't have to drink any alcohol, a soft drink will do. * Daniel, can you not give a little. My, Daniel believed that God meant what He said, " come out from among them and be ye separate saith the Lord". (2 Cor 6:17) Is there not supposed to be a difference between the Lords people and devils crowd Have we allowed the standards to drop so low that no longer there's a line of demarcation between us My, when confronted with something that is questionable ask yourself the question: who am I willing to offend the Lord or the world Daniel was also: (c) A LIBERATED MAN: Do you see what he was free from He was free from: * Material Gain: look at (5:17) I mean this was a tremendous offer.

"The third ruler in the kingdom... " (5:16) "Daniel, here's enough money to get you through your retirement years". Did you catch his answer (5:17) "give your presents and play things to someone else I am not for sale". Many an honest and sincere man has been led to do wrong through the gift approach, but like Moses (Num 16:15) Samuel (1 Sam 12:3) Paul (Acts 20:33) Daniel was not motivated by a mercenary spirit. He was free from Material Gain: He was also free from Royal Glory: I mean he did not allow the glory of the royals to intimidate him.

He refused the kings bride, but he did read the writing. My, those halls had never heard a message like Daniel preached that night! Can you imagine an old time preacher being invited to one of those White House dinners, or one of those Buckingham Palace gala's and giving them an old time sermon on sin: on hell: on eternity: on heaven: on Christ! Do you not admire a man who is willing to preach fearlessly who is not intimidated by his audience Thats the kind of man Daniel was! (a) (b) (c) Also he was: (d) AN ILLUMINATED MAN: For (5:11) says "light and understanding and wisdom... was found in him".

Now what does Daniel do here He does two things. Notice that: 1. Daniel EXPOUNDS HISTORY: He begins with a history lesson, and as he recounts the history of the kings he lays some charges before Belshazzar. You see, Belshazzar: * DESPISED THE LIGHT: For in spite of the fact that Belshazzar knew about the humiliation of Nebuchadnezzar, his grandfather, he had not learned humility from it. What an example Nebuchadnezzar had set before his young grandson, when he turned to the Lord after a period of insanity, but Belshazzar did not learn from it.

Look at (5:22) * DESECRATED THE VESSELS: My, do we not need to be careful lest we desecrate the vessels of the Lord What are these vessels The members of our bodies! (1 Cor 6:19-20) What about your hands Are you using them in service for the Master Does your feet walk in His paths Is your voice used to sing His praise * * * DEFIED THE LORD: "the God in whose hand thy breath is... hast thou not glorified". (5:23) He failed to honour the true God, the God who held his life and times in His hand.

The Creator, the Sustainer of all life. Belshazzar had failed the history test, so Daniel proceeds to give him a prophecy test. 1. and then: 2. DANIEL EXPLAINS MYSTERY: For the writing on the wall contained a 3 fold message from God. " MENE", It means "Numbered". The days of the Babylonian kingdom were numbered by God. This empire would shortly collapse around the kings feet. God was saying to this wicked king, "Your number is up". My, the life of each of us is made up of numbers months of the year: days of the month: hours of the days: seconds of the minute.

The Bible says, "So teach us to number our days, that we apply our hearts unto wisdom". (Ps 90:12) Your days are numbered by God. The very day we are born we begin to die. How many more days are there in your life In mine " TEKEL", It means "Weighed". Belshazzar had been weighed in Gods scales and come up wanting! Put the United Kingdom on the scales of God and she is found wanting. Put your family on the scales of God and they are found wanting. Do you know something Only one thing can balance the scales in your life to God's satisfaction and that is the blood of the Lord Jesus!

You see, when you get Christ on the scales you're able to say with David, "The Lord... not want". (Ps 23:1) " PERES", It means "Divided". It implied that God had determined to shatter Belshazzar's kingdom and to give it to Medo-Persia. This was so certain to happen that Daniel spoke of it as an already accomplished fact. " Numbered, numbered, weighed, divided". What a striking contrast there is between Belshazzars end and Pauls end Do you recall his words to Timothy "I have a fought a good fight... the faith". (2 Tim 4:7) Tell me: will your end be like Pauls or Belshazzars (3) THE HISTORIC CONSUMMATION Do you catch the solemnity of the words of (5:30) " In that night... slain".

Now had Belshazzar studied the prophet Isaiah, he would have known just how the city of Babylon would be taken and by whom it would be taken. You see, what happened was this. The Medo-Persians under Cyrus devised a unique strategy, and the key to that strategy was the position of the Euphrates River under the massive walls of the city. On the very night the Babylonians were revelling at this feast, the Medo-Persians diverted the water of the Euphrates River from its normal channel under the city walls.

Once the water was shallow enough to be forded, Medo-Persian soldiers entered the river channel and walked underneath the walls into the city. (Isa 41:25 45:1-4) My, they could not get over the walls but they got under the walls and Babylon was taken. Do you see here: (a) THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GODS WAYS: My, God can take Whom He will: How He will: When He will, to fulfil His sovereign purposes! God is in control! Heaven rules! Now perhaps you're saying, "Well if Cyrus took the city, who was Darius the Mede" (1:21 10:1) Well, I think the problem is solved if you look at the word " took", in (5:31) It should be translated "received".

Darius (Cyrus' military ruler) received the kingdom from Cyrus, king of Persia, and ruled Babylon for him. In (6:28) we see this was a dual kingship. Cyrus was the King of the Empire while Darius ruled Babylon and the area connected with it. (6:6) It was Cyrus wasn't who issued the decree, authorising the Jews to return to their own land and rebuild the Temple. (Ezra 1:1-4 Is 44:28) "God is still... throne". (b) THE AUTHENTICITY OF GODS WORD: For this very chapter that the critics seek to pull apart is but a revelation of what God said would happen.

In (2:39) the Lord said, that the head of gold would give way to the breast and arms of silver. In (5:26) God said through Daniel that Babylon's number was up! But do you know something Two hundred years before the fall of Babylon Isaiah predicted it. (21:1-10) and Isaiah said that Cyrus would be a Scourge, Heavens Scourge to punish the haughty Babylonians, and a Shepherd the Lord's Shepherd to gather the scattered flock of Israel and bring them back to Jerusalem and to the land. (Is 44:28 -45:13) My, what a God we have SOVEREIGN!

What a Bible we have... AUTHENTIC! What a Mission we have on earth. Do you know what it is (5:23) Here's our purpose on earth. "To glorify God". Is this not what the Lord Jesus said to the Father, "I have glorified Thee on the earth". (Jn 17:4) Is this not what Paul says to the saints, "glorify God in your body and in your spirit". (1 Cor 6:20) Glorifying the Lord! Are you doing that?

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