

Unfamiliar Bible Stories 3
The writing on the wall
Daniel chapter 5

Conversation Starters:

- 1) How is the phrase, “The writing on the wall” most often used?
- 2) Does History repeat itself?
- 3) What “pearls of wisdom” did you get from your mother / grandmother?
- 4) What gets you “shaking at the knees”?

III) Digging in:

A) Background info

- 1) Nebuchadnezzar passed away in 538 BC
- 2) His “heir” was too young to assume the throne, so...
- 3) Nabonidus (brother) and Belshazzar (son) were co-regents
- 4) Many kings, emperors, and / or pharaohs thought themselves gods
- 5) Hubris / pride leads them to set themselves higher than God (Yahweh)
- 6) This pride leads to stupidity - cannot understand the things of God
- 7) God is ultimately in control of kings and leaders (Calvin really embraced this)

B) Let’s party! (Verses 1-4)

- 1) Why is Belshazzar feasting when the Medes and Persians are at the gates?
- 2) Why would he call for the sacred vessels for his feast?
- 3) How would we feel if the Communionware was used for a bachelor party?
- 4) Babylon’s gods were made of gold, silver, iron, bronze, wood, and stone
- 5) This imagery appears again in Revelation 17 & 18
- 6) How is this feast an affront to God?
- 7) How does the world view the Church as defeated?

C) The writing on the wall (verses 5-6)

- 1) Compare this passage to John 8:1-8
- 2) What is an EF 5 tornado called?
- 3) Why is Belshazzar so shaken?

D) Who can read this?

- 1) Written in Aramaic, so easily read by Babylonians.
- 2) Look at **I Corinthians 2:14**
 - * Why can’t an unbeliever understand the messages of God?
 - * What is Christmas (or Easter) to most Americans?
 - * Should the Church be rational (understandable) or mystical (otherworldly)?
- 3) Why does Belshazzar promise to make the interpreter #3 in the kingdom?

- 4) This appears as one word with no vowels
- translate: “Jesusisnowhere” - how might it be interpreted?

E) Bring in the Prophet! (Verses 10-16)

- 1) In *most* pagan cultures, older women are considered the “wise ones” (Witch!)
- 2) How does the queen mother show her wisdom?
- 3) Daniel was likely retired or out of favor with this court
- 2 years and 2 palace coups between chapters 4 & 5
- 4) What does Belshazzar know about Daniel?
- 5) Why would it be a problem to have a Judean translate the writing on the wall?
- 6) Look at how Daniel is described in 5:11 & 5:14
- 7) How does Belshazzar reveal himself as a cynic?

F) An offer he *can* refuse (17-24)

- 1) Why does Daniel breach court etiquette?
- 2) How does Daniel show that his wisdom (and his God) are not for sale?
- 3) Why does Daniel begin with a history lesson?
- 4) Is Belshazzar as arrogant as his father was?
- 5) What are the three ways Belshazzar insulted Yahweh?
- 6) Why is it important to point out the limitations of these idols?
- 7) How does Daniel “prepare your heart for evil tidings”?

G) The Interpretation of the writing (25-28)

- 1) Daniel breaks it down to three words with three consonants each
- 2) Used a standard form of vowel pointing
- 3) *Mene* (unit of weight)
 - * can also be vowel pointed as “mina” - a unit of weight = 60 shekels
 - * To weigh out or count out is the verbal form
 - * “You have been weighed” - like the Egyptian weighing of the soul
- 4) *Tekel* (again a weighing word, this one for grain)
 - * Tekel and shekel are linguistically linked
 - * Weighed in the first word, now measured (like a cup of flour)
 - * “Been found light / wanting” - not up to the proper measure
- 5) *Peres* (plural is upsharim) - to break in two
 - * Also the symantic root for “Persia”
 - * There is no Persian empire at this point - still 2 kingdoms Persia & Medes
 - * God will break Babylon in two and give it to the two kingdoms

H) The fall of Babylon the great (29-31)

- 1) The king had to honor the promise made before his nobles (like Xerxes later)

- 2) We don't know who killed Belshazzar, nor how he died (shows God's hand)
- 3) Darius receives the kingdom - like a gift of God (see Isaiah 45)

I) Some notes on Darius I / Cyrus the great 539 BC

- 1) Darius is Persian name, Cyrus is his Mede name
- 2) He is the only foreign monarch given with an age (62)
- 3) Born in 601 BC at the height of Babylonian power
- 4) This is 4 years after Daniel goes into exile (first wave of exile)
- 5) Shows that God was planning Israel's deliverance even before the exile
- 6) Darius I would decree the restoration of Israel (as a vassal state) in 538BC
- 7) Great grandfather of Ahasuerus / Xerxes whom we meet in Esther

Bringing it home:

- 1) How can we keep "the powers that be" in check / mitigate hubris?
- 2) What opens us to God's Spirit dwelling within us? (Daniel's description)
- 3) Why should we measure ourselves against God's Word?