

Daniel Prosecutes God's Case against Belshazzar

Daniel 5:10-24

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In Scripture we find that God often sent His prophets to prosecute His case against His covenant people, Israel, who had proven unfaithful to Him in going after other gods and breaking His gracious covenant made with them. But we also see in Scripture how the Lord sent His prophets to prosecute his case against Gentile nations and their rulers for their rebellion against the light that God had given to them (as we have seen in Daniel). We live in a nation in which we are not less accountable than heathen kings like Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, but more accountable, for we have more light—to whom much is given, much is required (Luke 12:48). Christ's ministers are called to bring nations before His bar of justice to show them wherein they have turned against the Lord that they might flee to Him for mercy before God judgment falls.

In our text today, God sends His prophet Daniel to King Belshazzar to prosecute God's case against this wicked king. Belshazzar profaned and blasphemed the Lord God, and Daniel reveals Belshazzar's sins before judgment falls upon Babylon. And yet, Belshazzar turns not to the mercy of the Lord, but stubbornly travels down the path to judgment.

The main points from our text are: (1) The Queen Mother Recommends Daniel Be Called (Daniel 5:10-12); (2) Belshazzar Appeals to Daniel (Daniel 5:13-16); (3) Daniel Prosecutes Belshazzar before God's Bar of Justice (Daniel 5:17-24).

I. The Queen Mother Recommends Daniel Be Called (Daniel 5:10-12).

A. God crashed the drunken and blasphemous party of King Belshazzar on the eve of Babylon being invaded by the troops of the Medes and the Persians.

1. While Belshazzar profaned the Lord God by calling for the holy vessels taken from the temple in Jerusalem and mocking the one true living God as they drank to their fill from them and as they praised the gods of Babylon in whom they trusted for their protection from the Medes and the Persians, a mysterious hand appeared in the banquet hall and wrote upon the wall in some mysterious script a message which shook Belshazzar to the core (literally).

2. He called for his "wise men" to read and to interpret the ominous writing that remained on the wall. His wise men were unable to do so. The effect upon the king and all his lords was conspicuous to all (Daniel 5:9). When all seemed hopeless to Belshazzar, there appears in the banquet hall a most influential person in the royal family.

B. The "queen" at the most opportune time appears in order to counsel Belshazzar where he would find the meaning of the mysterious words written on the wall.

1. This was most likely not Belshazzar's wife, for Belshazzar's wives and concubines were already at the drunken party (Daniel 5:2). This "queen" was likely the queen-mother (i.e. the mother of Belshazzar and the wife of the absent King Nabonidus). Scholars have likewise proposed that this queen-mother was also the daughter of the great King Nebuchadnezzar. Why has this been suggested?

a. She does not request to enter the banquet hall, but just enters as one having significant status and influence.

b. She recounts to Belshazzar (with a personal familiarity) the history of Daniel interpreting King Nebuchadnezzar's dream as one who was very close to the situation.

c. Nebuchadnezzar is called Belshazzar's "father" (Daniel 5:11), which if the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar married Nabonidus, Nebuchadnezzar would be Belshazzar's biological

grandfather (which the Aramaic word for “father” may very appropriately describe).

2. The queen-mother gives high praise to Daniel and counsels Belshazzar to call for him, and she assures Belshazzar that Daniel will interpret the writing (Daniel 5:11-12). She reasons that if the great Nebuchadnezzar (his “father”) valued Daniel so highly, then Belshazzar (his son) would do well to value Daniel’s gifts as well.

3. Is this not ironic? Belshazzar had just been daring and blaspheming the God of Daniel, and now Belshazzar is told by his mother that if he truly wants to know the meaning of the writing he must call for Daniel for in him is “the spirit of the holy gods” (Daniel 4:8,9,18; God—Daniel’s God is a holy God and has given to Daniel the knowledge and wisdom to reveal what is hidden). This is not a good sign of things to come for Belshazzar (when the God who is profaned and blasphemed is the only One who can rescue him—he must turn to Him, not just to satisfy his curiosity but to receive His mercy).

II. Belshazzar Appeals to Daniel (Daniel 5:13-16).

A. As Daniel is brought before Belshazzar, Daniel is about 82 years old, and Daniel would seem but a faint memory of the past to Belshazzar.

1. Belshazzar’s question to Daniel shows some knowledge of Daniel by way his reputation (perhaps through his mother). Belshazzar uses Daniel’s Hebrew name and reminds Daniel that he is a lowly Jew taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 5:13). Belshazzar thinks by so doing that he is putting Daniel in his place. However, Belshazzar has a surprise coming in that Daniel will soon put him in his place.

2. Belshazzar relates what he has heard about the divine knowledge and wisdom of Daniel (Daniel 5:14), and then proceeds to inform Daniel that the “wise men” of Babylon were unable to read or interpret the writing on the wall (Daniel 5:15).

3. God corners the high-minded so that they have nowhere to turn but to the very God they despise. Why do the wicked cry out to God in calamities? “O God if you are there, help me.” They bargain with God. In their heart of hearts, they know that only He can help. They profess in emergencies what they deny at other times (they profane Him and treat Him like Belshazzar, but then turn to Him in an emergency). Those who truly trust in Jesus do not just cry out to Jesus in a desperate situation; they believe that Jesus is their life (Philippians 1:21).

B. Belshazzar promises Daniel the same exaltation and honor that he had promised his “wise men” (Daniel 5:16—“the third ruler” after Nabonidus and Belshazzar).

1. This shows the desperation of Belshazzar—he not only calls Daniel, who is a prophet of the God he had blasphemed, but then promises him the same reward. Belshazzar doesn’t want to know God’s will because he delights to do it, but because he fears God’s judgment.

2. What motivates us as Christians to follow the Lord Jesus and to obey His commandments should not be fear of God’s eternal condemnation, but love to Him and delight to do His will because He has rescued us from that condemnation (1 John 4:18). We are to have a holy fear of God in taking His warnings and His promises seriously. The holy fear of God does not leave us cowering and waiting for God’s judgment. When we take God seriously, we take His everlasting love seriously. We obey God because it is our duty (God commands us), but the child of God also does so because it is our response of love and thankfulness. Fear will make serving Christ a burden—Love will make it a joy.

III. Daniel Prosecutes Belshazzar before God’s Bar of Justice (Daniel 5:17-24).

A. Daniel does not come as a mere witness against Belshazzar, but comes as God’s prosecutor.

1. Belshazzar is the accused; Daniel is the prosecutor; and the Most High God is the Judge. Belshazzar thought he was bringing Daniel into his court, but God brings Belshazzar into His court to hear the charges brought against him before the writing on the wall is interpreted.

2. There are two courts in which God renders a righteous judgment: (1) the court of justification; (2) the court of condemnation. To be declared righteous by God in the court of justification is to be forever removed from the court of God's righteous condemnation. However, to forego and reject God's court of justification is to face the court of God righteous condemnation forever.

B. Daniel refuses the reward offered by the king (Daniel 5:17).

1. Daniel wants it to be clear to the king and to all present that he will read and will interpret the writing not for some worldly honor or gain, but to be faithful to the Lord. He did not want this to be interpreted as him accepting a bribe from the king (he later accepts the honor, after he has prosecuted the king, but not before doing so).

2. We are warned about accepting bribes (Psalm 26:9-10; Proverbs 17:23). How many ministers are bribed to follow the desires of people for gain (for more people, for a new building, for a prolonged stay at a church, for more power, for sex, etc.)? What motivates the decisions we make? Is it God's honor or our honor? Like Daniel, let us do what we do because it is right before God and according to His Word, not because it will necessarily bring earthly gain to us—most of the time it doesn't.

C. Daniel then recounts the dominion and power God gave to the great King Nebuchadnezzar—his "father", likely grandfather (Daniel 5:18-19).

1. Though Belshazzar had just dared God to act, had profaned Him, and had blasphemed Him, Daniel, nevertheless, makes clear that it was this very God that gave to Nebuchadnezzar (the greatest ruler at that time) his power and dominion over all the nations. No mere human being contradicted him or challenged him—he slew or preserved whom he chose (the wise men in Daniel 2; Daniel's three friends in Daniel 3). He exalted or demoted anyone at his own pleasure.

2. There was no human law over him in Babylon—he was the law (*Rex Lex*—the king is law; rather than as it should be, *Lex Rex*—the law is king). However, God and His law were over Nebuchadnezzar as he learned (Daniel 4:34-35). This is the same truth that rulers today must learn—they are not absolute, but are under God's authority and are called to be "the minister of God to thee for good" (Romans 13:4).

D. Daniel then recalls the judgment that the Most High God brought upon the mighty Nebuchadnezzar due to his stubborn pride in setting himself above Almighty God (Daniel 5:20-21).

1. God had revealed Himself to Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2—interpretation of the dream of the great image; in Daniel 3—delivering Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace; and in Daniel 4—taking the king's mind from him and giving him the mind of a beast and returning to him his mind and royal dominion.

2. This is an important part of Daniel's testimony as God's prosecutor against Belshazzar. Daniel is building his case and now comes to his conclusion.

E. Daniel, God's prosecutor, now drives home his case with Belshazzar (Daniel 5:22-24).

1. "This is what the Most High God did to one far greater than you (thy "father"), and yet you having knowledge of these events have gone even farther by way of your outrageous, public, drunken party in which you dared the one, true, living God to act, to defend His honor, and to judge you" (Daniel 5:23-23).

2. "The Most High God has accepted your dare/challenge and has crashed your party by way of the hand that gave this writing on the wall" (Daniel 5:24).

3. God has not given us such warnings to leave with us just to scare us, but rather to teach us and move us to flee to the mercy of God in Christ Jesus so that we might not suffer God's righteous judgment (1 Corinthians 10:11). Let us learn from His Word rather than having to learn from His rod.

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