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| **Daniel Chapter 5** |
| Based on the American Standard Version of 1901  | ***Concise PRESENTATION NOTES*** **by Charles Dailey** (Black underlined words match words in the Bible text.)  |
|  | **Daniel's previous episodes have been about Nebuchadnezzar, the empire builder whom God had cut down to size. This story is about Belshazzar, a local king, who needed the same cure. However, the Lord simply terminated him. Belshazzar may have been a name assigned to indicate his relationship with the idol gods, much like that of Daniel, who was known in Neb's court as Belteshazzar in 1:7. This king was the son of Nabonidus. The narrative opens with Belshazzar, the king of the city of Babylon (not the empire) giving a party while the armies of the Medes and the Persians were camped outside of town trying to penetrate its defenses. Belshazzar should have been leading his troops, not surfeiting.**  |
| **1) Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand.** | **– Belshazzar felt safe inside the great walls of Babylon. He knew that getting over these walls was impossible. - The food and drinks were "on the house."**  |
| **2) Belshazzar, while he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem; that the king and his lords, his wives and his concubines, might drink therefrom.**  | **– To show his contempt for the God of Israel, the vessels from the Temple in Jerusalem were brought in as table service for the increasingly drunk officials and Belshazzar's family. - The term father was used more loosely by Asians than we use it today. Neb was his father, or grandfather, or his adopted father - the list goes on. They were legally related in some manner. - A concubine was a mistress with legal standing but without inheritance rights. Her children were not included in the husband's will unless they had been adopted by the wife in the family. - Neb was guilty of pride, this man was guilty of insolence.**  |
| **3) Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God which was at Jerusalem; and the king and his lords, his wives and his concubines, drank from them.**  |  |
| **4) They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone.**  | **– They had a praise service for the gods of their own making. Perhaps they toasted the dumb deities and then drank the wine to prove their devotion.**  |
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| **5) In the same hour came forth the fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote.** | **– God's move came quickly. Evidently Belshazzar was sitting on a dais or raised platform looking out at his subjects and the wall used for writing was behind the drunks. - Paul Butler writes: "Seeing only a hand, the king's imagination would have free reign to think of all manner of terrible beings who might be the owner of that hand."**  |
| **6) Then the king's countenance was changed in him, and his thoughts troubled him; and the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another.** | **– Belshazzar turned pale. The blood left his face. He realized that Someone was present that he could not control.**  |
| **7) The king cried aloud to bring in the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. The king spake and said to the wise men of Babylon, Whosoever shall read this writing, and show me the interpretation thereof, shall be clothed with purple, and have a chain of gold about his neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.** | **– The official advisors were still on the job, collecting their pay and failing all significant tests. - Terror is a horrendous experience and this king was shouting for help - he cried aloud. - He had less poise than normally because of the wine. - The playboy had three unfulfillable promises for the wise man who could explain the writings. - A successful interpreter was offered the rank of third ruler, showing that Belshazzar was second ruler. Someone else, probably Nabonidus, was top man in the empire. Belshazzar just ruled a portion of it.**  |
| **8) Then came in all the king's wise men; but they could not read the writing, nor make known to the king the interpretation.** | **– As any believing reader knows, the coy counselors would fail.**  |
| **9) Then was king Belshazzar greatly troubled, and his countenance was changed in him, and his lords were perplexed.**  | **– It is clear that one guest came uninvited and he was raining on the parade. - It upset the guests for the boss to turn pale and lose interest in drinking.**  |
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| **10) *Now* the queen by reason of the words of the king and his lords came into the banquet house: the queen spake and said, O king, live forever; let not thy thoughts trouble thee, nor let thy countenance be changed.** | **– The queen was not a wife of Belshazzar. She may have once been the wife of Nebuchadnezzar because she had a memory of Daniel.- Her salutation to Belshazzar shows that kings wanted everlasting life.**  |
| **11) 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, were found in him; and the king Nebuchadnezzar thy father, the king, I say, thy father, made him master of the magicians, enchanters, Chaldeans, and soothsayers;**  | **– Daniel had not been prominent, or even active, in government for a while and Belshazzar did not know about him. - Even this polytheistic queen-mother identified the holiness of God when compared with the wickedness of the idols. - This man Daniel had once served as the chief of the advisors to Neb – in some sense – Belshazzar's father.**  |
| **12) forasmuch as an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, interpreting of dreams, and showing of dark 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.**  | **– Daniel has the connections and qualifications to interpret this handwriting. - dissolver of doubts was literally a dissolver of knots. Some problems are so complicated, they are like untying a complex knot in a rope. - The king in this case had been Nebuchadnezzar. - The queen was quite directive toward Belshazzar and fully convinced that Daniel could handle the interpretation.**  |
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| **13) Then was Daniel brought in before the king. The king spake and said unto Daniel, Art thou that Daniel, who art of the children of the captivity of Judah, whom the king my father brought out of Judah?** | **– Daniel was first asked his identity. This is standard procedure yet for speaking in court or legislature. - Belshazzar knew something of Daniel's religious heritage and that he was from Judah. He may have known something about the God he served as well.**  |
| **14) I have heard of thee, that the spirit of the gods is in thee, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in thee.** | **– He had just been reminded of Daniel when the queen-mother had described him. - Belshazzar repeats the exact words of the queen, but omits one word: holy. He did not want to deal with a God who is set apart from the idols.**  |
| **15) And now the wise men, the enchanters, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing, and make known unto me the interpretation thereof; but they could not show the interpretation of the thing.** | **– Since all his usual advisors had failed, the king was now willing to reward this Hebrew if he could tell him the interpretation of the words on the wall.**  |
| **16) But I have heard of thee, that thou canst give interpretations, and dissolve doubts; now if thou canst read the writing, and make known to me the interpretation thereof, thou shalt be clothed with purple, and have a chain of gold about thy neck, and shalt be the third ruler in the kingdom.** |  |
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| **17) Then Daniel answered and said before the king, Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another; nevertheless I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation.** | **– Daniel knew that the offers were worthless and he would not have contracted to reveal God's word on a mercenary basis anyway.**  |
| **18) O thou king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father the kingdom, and greatness, and glory, and majesty:** | **– Even though his minutes on earth were drawing to an end, Daniel still spoke honorably to the king. - Belshazzar now received his lesson in political science and history. It was really just a review according to verse 22.**  |
| **19) and because of the greatness that he gave him, all the peoples, 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 raised up, and whom he would he put down.** | **– "Note, Whatever degree of outward prosperity any arrive at, they must own that it is of God's giving, not their own getting. Let it never be said, My might, and the power of my hand, have gotten me this wealth, this preferment; but let it always be remembered that it is God that gives men power to get wealth, and gives success to their endeavours." (from Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: New Modern Edition, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1991 by Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.)**  |
| **20) But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened so that he dealt proudly, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him:** | **– Nebuchadnezzar's case is paralleled to Belshazzar's. - Wild asses were probably Equus hemonius onager.**  |
| **21) 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; he was fed with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; until he knew that the Most High God ruleth in the kingdom of men, and that he setteth up over it whomsoever he will.** |  |
| **22) And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thy heart, though thou knewest all this,**  | **– Belshazzar has earned the same fate as his father Nebuchadnezzar.**  |
| **23) 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 from 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.**  | **– The highest evidence of rebellion was profaning the sacred vessels of the Lord's house in Jerusalem. - The vessels created to be used in the worship of the Lord of heaven were used to praise the gods of earth. - Belshazzar had not glorified God even though God had supplied his very breath.**  |
| **24) Then was the part of the hand sent from before him, and this writing was inscribed.** | **– Now comes the judgment event. Daniel knew what the hand wrote even if it was no longer present.**  |
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| **25) And this is the writing that was inscribed: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.** | **– Mene is the past participle of Menah and here means to fix the limit of. Tekel is from an Aramaic root meaning to weigh. Upharsin. The U is like and (implying division) with Pharsin, plural for Peres, a reference to the Persians who are outside of the gates of Babylon as Daniel spoke.**  |
| **26) This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and brought it to an end;** | **– Mene means "your time is up" to Belshazzar. - Tekel means that Belshazzar is a very light-weight ruler on God's moral scales. - Peres means the armies at the door are taking over.**  |
| **27) TEKEL; thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.** |  |
| **28) PERES; thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.**  |  |
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| **29) Then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with purple, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.**  | **– Purple has long been the color designating royalty. - All of this must have transpired that same evening, because Belshazzar didn't make it through the night.**  |
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| **30) In that night Belshazzar the Chaldean King was slain.** | **– Within minutes, the play-boy king was killed. - Jeremiah 51:11 reads:** **Sharpen the arrows, fill the quivers! The LORD has aroused the spirit of the kings of the Medes, Because His purpose is against Babylon to destroy it; For it is the vengeance of the LORD, vengeance for His temple. 12 Lift up a signal against the walls of Babylon; Post a strong guard, Station sentries, Place men in ambush! For the LORD has both purposed and performed What He spoke concerning the inhabitants of Babylon. 13 O you who dwell by many waters, Abundant in treasures, Your end has come, The measure of your end.**  |
| **31) And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old.**  | **– Very soon, a new 62-year-old king took over Babylon and it environs.** **Some observe that being now sixty-two years old, in the last year of the captivity, he was born in the eighth year of it, and that was the year when Jeconiah was carried captive and all the nobles, etc. See 2 Kings 24:13-15. Just at that time when the most fatal stroke was given was a prince born that in process of time should avenge Jerusalem upon Babylon, and heal the wound that was now given. Thus deep are the counsels of God concerning his people, thus kind are his designs towards them. (from Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: New Modern Edition, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1991 by Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.)** |
| http://ncbible.org/resources/belshazz.jpgThis famous painting by the Dutch Rembrandt in 1635 depicts Belshazzar at the moment the fingers write. See the shock on his face. While his bewildered eyes are fixed on the sinister glowing text, his left arm rises to protect himself, as if he faces a physical rather than a spiritual attack. His costume - the gold and silver threads, the chains, the turban with its little crown top - is one of Rembrandt's most luxurious concoctions of dress. Belshazzar sends a vessel of wine flying with his right arm as he involuntarily jerks backwards. The woman to the right, lowering her body to shield herself behind his massive arm, lets the pitcher of wine spill like a waterfall. The man and woman on the far side of the table express almost as much horror as the king. Only the woman at the left seems indifferent. http://ncbible.org/resources/BabylonMap.jpgWhat happened to Babylon? The stories vary some. While Belshazzar was having his drinking party, the armies of the Medes and the Persians were trying to get inside. Two from the Babylonian troops defected and showed the engineers how to take the city. The river was deflected around the metropolis (notice the moat in the drawing) so the river bed would be available for troop entry. The river was walled, too, but defectors let down the bridge across the river, making an access route into the city. The rest is history.  |
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