

Bi235 Old Testament 2

Lesson Bi235-37 King Belshazzar and Mysterious Words

As refugees in Babylon, Daniel and his friends remained faithful to the God of Israel. When Daniel interpreted King Nebuchadnezzar's first dream, he exclaimed, "Truly your God is the supreme God and Lord above all earthly kings. He can reveal mysteries, and helped you to interpret my dream."

Sometime later, he seemed to forget this insight about the true God. As you learned in the last lesson, he set up a golden image and commanded everyone to bow down and worship it, or be killed. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego resisted this command and were thrown into a fiery furnace to be burned alive. God rescued them, however. Again, the king acknowledged the greatness of the one true God. He blessed God, and threatened anyone who spoke against the God of Israel.

God continued to persuade the king to worship him. He sent another troubling dream. Again, none of his wise men could interpret the dream. At last Daniel came in, and the king told him the dream. In a dream he saw a tree, tall and strong. Its top reached to heaven, and everyone on earth could see the tree. It bore fruit and fed wild animals, birds, and everyone. Then he saw someone come down from heaven and cry out, "Cut down this tree. Cut off all the branches. Strip the leaves and scatter the fruit. Let the person symbolized by the tree live out in the fields like a wild animal. And let him think like an animal for seven times. Let all this happen that this person may learn that the Most High God rules the kingdoms of men, and sets over them whoever he chooses" (Dan 4:10-17).

The king asked Daniel to interpret his dream. Daniel knew immediately what it meant, but he didn't want to tell the king. He liked the king, despite the king's pride and cruel ways. He didn't want to give him bad news. Encouraged to speak, Daniel interpreted the dream. "The tree is you, O king. You have become famous, and your greatness reaches as high as heaven. The person who said, 'Cut the tree down,' was a messenger of the one true God. God has decided to humble you by driving you out into the fields to live like an animal. He is doing this until you learn that God rules the kingdoms of men, and is the reason for your greatness."

Daniel continued, "Therefore, O king, renounce your sins! Start doing what is right, and perhaps your prosperity will continue."

A year went by, and the king was still proud and cruel. Walking on the roof of his palace, he looked over the beautiful city of Babylon and said, "I did all this; I built it all by my power and my greatness!"

Suddenly a voice sounded out of heaven, "I warned you, but you didn't listen. Now all that Daniel predicted will happen to you. You will live outside like an animal, until you acknowledge the God of Israel." Immediately the king fell ill. He lived in the fields and ate grass like the ox. This lasted for months, maybe even years.

One day the king raised his eyes toward heaven, acknowledged the greatness of God, and began to regain his sanity. He praised God, and his kingdom was restored to him. He learned the

hard way that God is able to humble the proud. King Nebuchadnezzar finally became a godly king (Dan 4:22-37).

Years went by and a new man ruled the city of Babylon. He arranged a huge banquet, and showed his disrespect for God by serving drinks to his guests in the gold and silver cups stolen from Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem. They all drank and laughed and praised the gods of gold, silver, bronze, and iron. Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote words on the wall behind the king. The king watched it, and his face turned pale. He was so frightened that he could hardly stand up.

He called for his advisors and promised great rewards to anyone who could interpret the words. But none of them could make sense of the writing on the wall. The queen heard the crowd talking and said to her husband the king, "Don't be afraid. I know someone who is full of the spirit of the gods. Your ancestor, Nebuchadnezzar, appointed him chief of magicians and astrologers. He was able to interpret dreams and solve difficult problems. Call him!" (Dan 5:1-12)

So King Belshazzar summoned Daniel and said to him, "I heard that the spirit of the gods is in you and you are able to give interpretations and solve riddles. If you can tell what these words mean, I'll make you the third highest ruler in my kingdom."

"I won't accept any gifts from you," Daniel said, "but I will read the words and tell you what they mean." He went on to recount the stories about his ancestor Nebuchadnezzar, and how God had humbled him when he became arrogant. "But you, Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself. You showed disrespect to the Lord of heaven. You used the goblets taken from God's holy temple for a drinking party. You laughed and praised the gods of gold and silver, but you didn't honor the God who holds your life in his hands. Here's what the inscription means, 'God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. You have been weighed in the scales and found wanting. Your kingdom is given to the armies of the Medes and Persians.'"

The king honored Daniel as he promised. He made him the third highest ruler in the land. But that very night Belshazzar was killed, and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom of Babylon (Dan 5:14-30).

God spoke to Nebuchadnezzar for a long time until he finally decided to acknowledge God. On the other hand, we know only the final story of Belshazzar's reign. When Daniel spoke to Nebuchadnezzar, he responded. But when Daniel spoke to Belshazzar, he seemed to continue his wicked ways. It's clear that he knew the stories of his ancestor, but didn't learn to worship God like his ancestor. Let us learn from these examples in the Bible, and commit ourselves to obey God in all things.

This story is **important** because it shows that God was still working in the kingdom of Babylon through Daniel. Daniel continued to serve as a government official and was probably about 75 years old. God is no respecter of persons; he uses both the young and the old. This story also teaches us that God still has ministry for older people to do, if they are tuned to his voice.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that God was aware of what was happening in the kingdom of Babylon. God was holding rulers accountable for their behavior, even in nations that did not serve God. God was bearing witness to himself through godly men like Daniel. This has been his purpose since the time of Abraham, namely, to bless all nations and peoples through the descendants of Abraham.

Let's **review** this lesson—

1. Why did King Nebuchadnezzar finally become a godly ruler? [Pause]
 - A. If you said, “God punished his arrogance and humbled him until he began to acknowledge and serve the one true God,” you are right.

2. What did the writing on the wall mean? [Pause]
 - A. If you said, “The writing meant that God was ending the reign of Belshazzar because of his sinfulness, and giving the kingdom of Babylon to the Medes and Persians,” you are correct.

3. How did the king respond to Daniel's interpretation? [Pause]
 - A. If you answered, “He honored Daniel, but didn't honor God or change his ways; therefore, he died that very night,” you answered correctly.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to it at least three times. As you hear the story each time, imagine how it happened. See the events in your own mind. Then tell someone else the story in your own words as you remember it. Then listen to the story again and re-tell it until you feel sure you are repeating the words and actions correctly. Sometimes Christians become discouraged as they view the sinfulness and circumstances around them. They may even wonder where God is and ask, “Why doesn't he do something?” Share this story of Daniel and Belshazzar with someone you know who is discouraged by the situation they are in. Then pray that God will give them comfort and hope as they trust him to intervene.

Memorize Proverbs 3:5-6: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.”