

The writing on the wall

Lesson for Sunday, February 21, 2021

TEXT: Daniel 5

INTRODUCTION:

- What does this phrase mean: “I can see the handwriting on the wall?”
 - Does anyone have an example of when they saw it?
 - It usually means something is about to happen. We can look ahead, see where things are going, and already safely determine the final result.
- We don’t know for sure, but perhaps this saying had its beginning in Daniel 5! This one didn’t take much foresight because there was actually writing on the wall!
- King Nebuchadnezzar is now off the scene and Daniel is serving a new king. What we will learn is that no matter who the earthly king might be, Daniel would always be loyal to the King of Kings.

BIBLE STUDY:

1. Belshazzar’s blasphemy (vs. 1-4)
 - a. Belshazzar was a grandson of Nebuchadnezzar – really a co-regent with his father. His father Nabonidus was away in battle, and Belshazzar was “watching the store.”
 - i. Interesting artifact: Years ago, some skeptics denied that there ever was a king of Babylon named Belshazzar, claiming that his name and story were invented by someone unfamiliar with true Babylonian history.
 - ii. But just when it looked like all the evidence was stacked against Scripture, a series of archaeological discoveries showed that Belshazzar did exist after all, and the details given about him in the Bible are profoundly correct.
 - iii. You can read about it at: <https://creation.com/archaeology-belshazzar>
 - b. In his father’s absence, he hosted a huge party, even though the enemy’s armies were closing in on the city.
 - c. It seems that he had a great deal of confidence in the city walls.
 - i. J Vernon McGee wrote, “The city wall was 15 miles square and was constructed of brick. It was 300 feet high and wide enough for 4 chariots to race around the top side by side. He had supplies of grain and water to last for years – in fact, there was a canal channeled off the Euphrates River which went right through the city.”
 - ii. From an earthly standpoint, the kingdom was secure.
 - d. For the party, he gathered the golden vessels that had been taken from Jerusalem and used them to drink the alcoholic beverages.
 - i. This was incredibly blasphemous. They were using utensils that had been consecrated for the strict purpose of serving Jehovah God, and now using them for an out of control party.
 - ii. Discuss: Is there an application here for us? What does the Bible say about our bodies as believers? Consider 1 Thess. 5:23 – we are to sanctify ourselves as believers. What message are we communicating when we associate ourselves with unholy practices?
 - iii. Belshazzar was defying God in this act by desecrating the holy vessels. They drank and gave glory to pagan gods.
2. God “gives them a hand” (vs. 5-12)

- a. Suddenly, a hand appears and begins to write on the wall. Can you imagine the scene?
 - b. Note the change in the king's countenance – discuss.
 - i. What do these expressions mean?
 - ii. The drunken fun was over now that judgment was coming.
 - iii. What can we take away that is applicable today?
 - c. He cried for help from the “wise men” and offered gifts to anyone who could read the writing, but none of the men could help.
 - d. The queen tells Belshazzar about Daniel.
 - i. Study the description of Daniel here.
 - ii. What an example for us today!
3. Daniel lends a hand (vs. 13-31)
- a. The king offers Daniel the third position in the kingdom, but Daniel is not interested.
 - b. Daniel repeats Nebuchadnezzar's story for the king, reminding him what God had done in his life.
 - i. Belshazzar had ignored the lessons of his grandfather and had become lifted up with pride. He knew the truth, but rejected it.
 - ii. Are we learning lessons from those who have gone before us? We don't have “to live and learn.” We can learn from the lives of others. This is a great benefit to knowing the people in our Bibles.
 - c. Daniel read and interpreted the writing.
 - i. Mene: God has numbered the kingdom – your number is up!
 - ii. Tekel: You have been weighed and found wanting. You did not measure up.
 - iii. Upharsin: The kingdom will be divided and given to the Medes and Persians.
 - d. That very night Belshazzar was killed – the Medes and Persians took over.
 - i. McGee, “At the very time the banquet was being held, the Medes were marching underneath the walls of Babylon where the waters of the canal had flowed...the waters had been cut off and channeled back into the main stream of the Euphrates River. History records that the invaders were on the inside of the inner city before the guards had even detected that anything was wrong.”
 - ii. This is often how the consequences of our sin sneak up on us. We fail to see the writing on the wall before it is too late.

APPLICATIONS TO DISCUSS:

1. One cannot defy God and get away with it! Will we learn from this wicked king, or will we have to learn the hard way?
2. Is the “fun” of the world ever worth the consequences?
3. What do you have to change in your life so you could be described as Daniel was in this chapter? How would you make these changes? Why not start on them today?
4. Some of the writing on the wall can be applied to our lives:
 - a. Mene – God controls the number of our days – we cannot change His plan.
 - b. Tekel – none of us “measure up” to God (Romans 3:10, 23). We are all in need of His forgiveness and restoration.