

# THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL EXILE and KINGS GOD THE SUSTAINER

## *The Handwriting of God & God Rescues Daniel from the Lions*

Today, we will look briefly into two events in the life of Daniel under two different kings – Belshazzar and Darius. Recall that the children of Judah were destined to be captives in Babylon for 70 years. The prophet had foretold it in **Jeremiah 25:11 (ESV)** <sup>11</sup> *This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.* This captivity began during the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar. The young Daniel was taken to Babylon near the beginning of the captivity. Nebuchadnezzar’s reign lasted over 40 years. Several kings followed –Belshazzar would be the final king of the Babylonians to reign over Judah.

In chapter 2, Daniel had described Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom as the "head of gold" of the statue seen by Nebuchadnezzar in his dream. The time had come for the head of gold to be replaced with the silver arms and chest (the Medes and the Persians) seen in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream decades before.

During the time the people of Judah were brought to Babylon, the precious things of the Jerusalem temple were also taken there. Today’s focal passage begins the night when King Belshazzar desecrated those holy vessels during an ungodly party of debauchery. While another nation was standing at his door, Belshazzar made the mistake of trusting in his own strength. God warns us not to trust in the security of earthly kingdoms.

**Read Daniel 5:2-4 (ESV)** <sup>2</sup> *Belshazzar, when he tasted the wine, commanded that the vessels of gold and of silver that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple in Jerusalem be brought, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them.* <sup>3</sup> *Then they brought in the golden vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them.* <sup>4</sup> *They drank wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.*

Nebuchadnezzar is called Belshazzar’s father since the word is used to refer to any ancestor. There is no word for grandfather in either Hebrew or Chaldean. The king and his party goers were living for sensual pleasures while ignoring the realities of eternity similar to the way our world lives today. On top of that Belshazzar was playing fast and loose with holy things which is unacceptable in the sight of God *since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” (1 Peter 1:16)* How might we desecrate ‘holy things’ today? There are many ways but the one that comes to my mind first is defaming the temple of the Holy Spirit (our bodies). **1 Corinthians 6:19 (ESV)** <sup>19</sup> *Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own.*

Belshazzar’s actions by using the godly vessels mocked the God of the Jews while celebrating the gods of the Babylonians as superior. **Galatians 6:7 (ESV)** <sup>7</sup> *Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.* In today’s language, people say “I’ve seen the handwriting on the wall” when referring to impending danger. Let read where that saying originated.

**Read Daniel 5:5 (ESV)** <sup>5</sup> *Immediately the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, opposite the lampstand. And the king saw the hand as it wrote.*

Other biblical passages provide clues to whom the fingers Belshazzar saw belong. When the plagues fell upon the Egyptians because the Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites leave Egypt we read in **Exodus 8:19 (ESV)** <sup>19</sup> *Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." ... At the time that Moses received the Ten Commandments we read in **Exodus 31:18 (ESV)** <sup>18</sup> *And he gave to Moses ... tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.* Eventually, we read of the fingers of God in the New Testament: **John 8:6 (ESV)** <sup>6</sup> *.... Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground.* Although unrecognized by the ungodly Belshazzar, the fingers of God visibly reached out and wrote concerning his existence.*

When the drunken Belshazzar saw the handwriting, he knew something was amiss and it scared him and his ungodly 'spiritual advisors' could not give him an answer. The aged Daniel was no longer a central leader in the Babylonian court. But the queen had never forgotten Daniel. Notice what she remembered about him: **Daniel 5:11 (ESV)** <sup>11</sup> *There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the spirit of the holy gods...* Although the queen did not understand completely why Daniel was different from the sorcerers and magicians of the Babylonian court, we know his life was memorable because of his personal relationship with the LORD Most High. Let's read his words concerning the handwriting on the wall.

**Read Daniel 5:23-28 (ESV)** <sup>23</sup> *... the God in whose hand is your breath, and whose are all your ways, you have not honored.* <sup>24</sup> *"Then from his presence the hand was sent, and this writing was inscribed.* <sup>25</sup> *And this is the writing that was inscribed: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, and PARSIN.* <sup>26</sup> *This is the interpretation of the matter: MENE, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end;* <sup>27</sup> *TEKEL, you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting;* <sup>28</sup> *PERES, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians."*

Daniel told Belshazzar that his breath was in God's hands. It is the same for all of us. Job understood it when he said in **Job 33:4 (ESV)** <sup>4</sup> *The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.* The Creator was about to take away the breath of Belshazzar.

Possibly anyone who knew Aramaic could have read the words written on the wall, but it was Daniel who was able to read and interpret their meaning. The third word, *peres*, carried a double meaning: "divided" and "Persia." Babylon would be divided between the Medes and the Persians whose armies were at the gates of the city that very night. Immediately after Daniel read and interpreted the handwriting on the wall, Belshazzar's Babylon was conquered. Daniel would now begin his testimony for the Living God in the dynasty that would follow – the kingdom of the Medes and Persians. No matter the earthly king, Daniel remained dedicated to the LORD in his life and in his prayers.

**Read Daniel 6:1-10 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> *It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom 120 satraps...<sup>2</sup> and over them three high officials, of whom Daniel was one...<sup>3</sup> ... Daniel became distinguished above all the other high officials... because an excellent spirit was in him. And the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom.<sup>4</sup> Then the high*

*officials... sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but they could find no ground for complaint... because he was faithful...<sup>5</sup> Then these men said, “We shall not find any ground for complaint... unless we find it in connection with the law of his God.”<sup>6</sup> Then these high officials ... came... to the king and said ...<sup>7</sup> All the high officials of the kingdom... are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance ... that whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions.<sup>8</sup> ...<sup>9</sup> ... King Darius signed the document...<sup>10</sup> When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.*

The second world empire that Daniel had foretold over 40 years before was now unfolding. To administer such a large empire, the king divided it into regions to be overseen by satraps or governors. Because of his excellent spirit, Daniel was appointed as one of the rulers over these officials and the king even had plans to place him over the entire kingdom.

Daniel had an unbelievably successful future in front of him but this made him a target for jealousy and envy and his fellow co-workers began to plot against him. Bitterness and greed for what others possess or have attained, works like an acid on the soul, eating away our joy, compassion, and common sense. These jealous men remind us of the jealous Pharisees and Sadducees who sought to destroy Jesus.

Daniel’s prayer life was well known and an established part of his character. The administrators conceived an ‘ingenious’ plot. They knew that King Darius wanted to unify the kingdom quickly and transform the defeated Babylonians into loyal Persians. What better way than to focus on the great king himself and make him not just the supreme leader but the only god for an entire month! And they misled the king into believing that everyone agreed. If the king had thought about it he would have known that Daniel would never agree to such a thing because he knew Daniel. Darius is a good example of the way we don’t want to be. In the heat of the moment with his ego stroked, he made a rash decision and approved a law banning prayer. We think that the desire of some Americans to ban prayer in schools and other public places is unique – but this tool of the Devil is as old as the Bible itself.

Daniel’s name means God Is My Judge. What God thought mattered more to Daniel than what anybody else in the world thought. Daniel does not mention if he was anxious or fearful when he disobeyed and went to his knees in prayer but since Daniel was human he was bound to have been concerned about the deadly decree. Death by lion attack would not be an end that anyone would embrace even in old age. Nevertheless, he made the decision to pray publicly as before – not closing his windows and not praying silently.

We might wonder about Daniel’s public praying because of what Jesus said in **Matthew 6:6 (ESV)**<sup>6</sup> *But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.* John Piper explains, “Jesus was warning against our love of praise for prayer, not our willingness to suffer for prayer. He was not saying that it is wrong to be seen in prayer. He was saying it is wrong to want to be seen so as to be praised for your piety... For Daniel, prayer had become a public statement about the glory of God over the glory of Darius. And it was a legitimate testimony. And so it is for us, if our hearts are right.”

**Read Daniel 6:15-18 (ESV)** <sup>15</sup> Then these men came... to the king and said ..., “Know, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no injunction or ordinance that the king establishes can be changed.” <sup>16</sup> Then the king commanded, and Daniel was ... cast into the den of lions. The king declared to Daniel, “May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!” <sup>17</sup> And a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his lords, that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel. <sup>18</sup> Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; no diversions were brought to him, and sleep fled from him.

The king who loved and depended on Daniel had been trapped by his own mistake. The king tried to correct the wrong he had done but it was too late. The Law of the Medes and Persians – once made was irrevocable; therefore, the king was forced to abide by the law and place Daniel in the lions’ den just as his enemies had planned. Don’t you know they glee that night? Before Daniel was put into the den of lions, the king offered a prayer that Daniel’s God would deliver him. Darius had a bad night. Oriental kings were given all kinds of diversions to entertain them and help them relax and go to sleep, but Darius refused all of them. He spent a sleepless night because he was displeased with himself. This is a good point in the life of Darius. He accepted the responsibility of his own mistakes. Accepting responsibility for our own mistakes is not a pleasant thing to do; however, it is a necessity if we are to grow in our relationship with God.

**Read Daniel 6:19-28 (ESV)** <sup>19</sup> Then, at break of day, the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions. <sup>20</sup> ... he cried out in a tone of anguish. The king declared..., “O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?” <sup>21</sup> Then Daniel said to the king, “O king, live forever! <sup>22</sup> My God sent his angel and shut the lions’ mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm.” <sup>23</sup> ... <sup>24</sup> And the king commanded, and those men who had maliciously accused Daniel were brought and cast into the den of lions—they, their children, and their wives. And before they reached the bottom of the den, the lions overpowered them... <sup>25</sup> Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: “Peace be multiplied to you. <sup>26</sup> I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end. <sup>27</sup> He delivers and rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions.” <sup>28</sup> So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

Daniel was quick to give God the glory for his protection through the night. Daniel did not think that it was luck or coincidence that the lions overlooked him in the still of the night. Daniel knew what happened was a “God thing.” **Psalm 34:7** *The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.* We have the same God that Daniel had. God has not changed. He will protect us when we put our faith and trust in Him. As you consider the faith of Daniel, remember that God did not spare Daniel, a very old faithful child of God, from the lions’ den but God brought Daniel through the lions’ den. Daniel did not know as he continued his obedience that he was going to survive the lions but he knew what David knew. **Psalm 23:4 (ESV)** <sup>4</sup> *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*