

DIAMONDS FROM DANIEL

by

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CHAPTER FIVE

DRINKING AND DANCING ON THE VERGE OF DOOM

Belshazzar the king

The search for buried records in the ruins of old Babylonia has brought to light a cylinder tablet with a brief record of the taking of Babylon by the forces of the Medes and Persians, in the year 538 B.C. This record shows that “in the month Tammuz” (June) the troops of Cyrus defeated King Nabonidus in the open country, and then entered Babylon “without battle” (The ancient Greek historians say that Cyrus drained off the river Euphrates which ran through the city so that his troops were able to enter beneath the walls, along the bed of the river).

Evidently the inner citadel, which was a walled, fort-like enclosure with great temples and palaces, held out, under the king’s son Belshazzar. For several months this inner citadel resisted; and then, the broken tablet tells us, “in the night of the 11th day of Marchisvan” (October) the general in command made attack “Against . . .” (the writing being here defaced) evidently the citadel. In this attack, “he slew the king’s son.”

Thus the broken tablet tells in a fragmentary way of that last night of Belshazzar’s feast, so long told in its fulness by the inspired pen of the prophet. Because ancient history had never mentioned Belshazzar, critics had claimed that the record in Daniel was not true. But the ancient tablets dug up from the sands have silenced this criticism.

The three tablets of Belshazzar which the spade of the Archeologists have brought to light have fully established the identity of Belshazzar the king, routed the higher critics, and incidentally vindicated the veracity of the prophet Daniel.

The golden and silver vessels

According to Chapter one these vessels were carried by Nebuchadnezzar into the temple of his god, Bel. In his drunken frolic and frenzy Belshazzar commanded them to be brought and filled with liquor, thus adding insult to injury.

This profanation of sacred things was the filling up of the king’s cup of wickedness and brought swift judgment from God.

They drank wine and praised the gods

Drunkenness and idolatry go hand in hand. There are more gods in Japan than there are Japanese to worship them. There are at least 300 million gods in India. Man is a worshipper. Man is religious and must worship God or gods.

Upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace:

The victories, exploits and glories of kings and empires were written upon the walls of the king's palace in order to remind all who entered of the regal splendor.

The hand that wrote

The same divine hand which had previously written the two tablets of the law for God's people, the same divine hand which later wrote on the ground in defense of a poor fallen, but penitent woman, now writes the death knell of Belshazzar and proclaims his doom. Without previous warning, without being accompanied by terrifying thunder and lightning, the judgment of God fell and Belshazzar was slain.

The profanation of sacred things brings down the swift displeasure of the Lord. Sometimes God's judgments may be slow, but sometimes they may be surprisingly swift and sudden.

The joints of his loins were loosed

Four things are here declared about the profane king:

- (1) His countenance was changed
- (2) His thoughts troubled him
- (3) The joints of his loins were loosed
- (4) His knees smote one against another.

Despair swept over the drunken despot. Death, doom and damnation were just around the corner. In one brief hour the boastful, profane king becomes a shivering, shaking, helpless and hopeless mortal. He came up against the bosses of the Lord's buckler and was broken.

The king cried aloud

- If Belshazzar had never been in earnest before he was surely in earnest now.
- If he had never been in haste before he was certainly in haste now.
- If he had never been afraid before he was unmistakably afraid now.

"The king cried aloud." Unknown to him, he was within three feet from death and within twenty-four hours from the grave and hell. The measure of his days was finished, his cup of iniquity was full and his doom was fixed.

Clothed with scarlet

Gold chains and scarlet robes were only bestowed on the most meritorious persons. The vain heart of man delights in the wearing of such fantastic things. What a sight it must be to angels and devils to see human beings strutting around with lodge relics, royal robes, mayoralty chains, gold and glass necklaces and the whole catalogue of fiddle-de-dees and fol-de-rols.

- I wonder what Belshazzar thinks of scarlet robes and gold chains now?
- I wonder what Nebuchadnezzar thinks of his once glorious Babylon now?
- I wonder what Nimrod thinks of his tower building project now?

May the good Lord help us to see the childishness and vanity of chains of gold and clothes of scarlet and everything else that ministers to human pride and haughtiness.

The queen . . . said O King

During the regime and reign of Belshazzar Daniel had evidently been forgotten. He was probably set aside by the pleasure-loving, lustful lords and ladies. He was now of little or no use to them and was certainly not employed in any high office or department of state.

The queen, however, remembered his past service to his king and country and in an hour of tremendous need the queen entered the banqueting hall and addressed the king reminding him that there was a man in his kingdom through whom there may be given wisdom, light and understanding. At the right time God had the right man ready.

Dissolving of doubts

The word translated doubts may also be translated *KNOTS*. Daniel was an unraveler of knots. The world is in desperate need of men who are dissolvers of doubts. World problems are puzzling and baffling the brains of the greatest statesmen on earth. Oh for heaven-born, heaven-sent Daniels, both in churches, and nations.

The third ruler in the kingdom

In 1854 Sir Henry Rawlinson translated a number of tablets which were brought to light by the spade of the archeologist.

These tablets contain the name of Belshazzar, establish the existence of the king of Babylon and of course incidentally settle the question of the dependability of the Book of Daniel. From the expression "**The third ruler of the kingdom**" it is more than likely that Belshazzar shared the government with some other monarch in much the same way as Darius and Cyrus later jointly ruled over the affairs of Babylon. Belshazzar evidently thought of himself as the second ruler and therefore promised Daniel the third place in the kingdom. Belshazzar was evidently a joint ruler with his more illustrious father. Had he been the only monarch Daniel would have been second instead of third.

Let thy gifts be to thyself

The now highly commercialized custom of giving and receiving has become a great evil. Christmas giving and receiving as now practiced by Christians has robbed many a heathen soul of his only chance of peace here and salvation hereafter. Daniel was unconcerned about gifts for himself. He was careless about earthly rewards. He knew that gifts blinded the receiver and he refused to be blinded.

Nebuchadnezzar thy father . . . thou his son

Critics both past and present have attempted to discredit Daniel because he calls Belshazzar the son of Nebuchadnezzar.

When it is remembered however, that in the Semitic language as also in some Oriental languages there is no name for grandson and grandfather the boomerang returns to the critic's cranium.

Mephibosheth is called the son of Saul in the same way that Belshazzar is called the son of Nebuchadnezzar. It may either mean son or grandson. The neighbours of Naomi as recorded in the book of Ruth (4:17) said "**There is a SON born to Naomi.**" The word means either a son or grandson. The son was born to Ruth and hence was the grandson of Naomi.

All missionaries in the Orient are familiar with these Oriental expressions.

No one misunderstands them except the critics. In fact, "Son" in the Oriental lands may be either SON or GRANDSON or GREAT-GRANDSON. Mephibosheth is called the son of Saul whereas he was really the son of Jonathan and the grandson of Saul. Obed is called the son of Naomi whereas in reality he was the son of Ruth and hence the grandson of Naomi. The twelve tribes beginning with Reuben and ending with Benjamin are all said to be sons of Abraham whereas they were sons of Jacob and great-grandsons of Abraham. Even in the New Testament Lazarus is called the son of Abraham.

"Son" therefore may be son, grandson, descendant or offspring. It is still common in the East to call any ancestor "Father" and any descendant "Son." To this day Christians, Jews and Mohammedans claim Abraham as their father.

We are all SONS of Adam and may become sons of Abraham and SONS of God by the new birth and then we may follow the steps of that faith of our father Abraham. Blind unbelief is sure to err.

Thou . . . hast not humbled thine heart

The judgments of God are intended to humble the hearts of men. Judgment is God's strange work. All God's dealings with man are intended to lead him to repentance and redemption. God's wrath upon Nebuchadnezzar was intended for his own good and should have been a warning to Belshazzar.

Though thou knewest all this

Sins against knowledge, experience, and example are the worst of sins and have the highest aggravation and culpability. Nebuchadnezzar was dreadfully punished for his pride and Belshazzar knew all this. Example and warning alike failed to impress the impious Belshazzar and hence his sin was great and his judgment speedy. If we sin wilfully after receiving knowledge of the truth there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin.

There is a line by us unseen
That crosses every path
The hidden boundary between
God's mercy and his wrath.

Belshazzar sinned against light, hardened his heart, and stiffened his neck and was cut off without remedy. He knew about the pride of his predecessor, he knew how God had humiliated him and degraded him by depriving him of human reason and conscience, he knew that God had restored the mad monarch and had given back to him his dominion, power and glory, he knew of the edict of praise issued by the humbled Nebuchadnezzar, he knew all this and hence sinned against light and knowledge. He loved darkness rather than light and died in his sin. He loved sin rather than holiness and died without hope. Weighed and wanting he went to his own place.

God . . . hast thou not glorified

Man was created to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Belshazzar refused to humble his heart before God, sought only his own pleasure and glory and accordingly perished.

The hidden purposes of God were again revealed to God's holy prophet and through the prophet made known to the king. Without a word of warning, entreaty or exhortation Daniel pronounced the doom of the drunken monarch

Instead of proclaiming "a day of national humiliation, fasting and prayer" and devoutly recognizing the "supreme authority and just government of Almighty God," Belshazzar made a great feast and drank wine before the thousands, and forgetful of God and His glory that night he was slain.

Feasting and falling very often go hand in hand. Daniel's fasting, self-denial and abstinence even in things lawful and legitimate in themselves contributed much toward his staunch, good and great character while Belshazzar's feasts and frolics accomplished his fall and ruin.

The third step in the downfall of Samson was the making of a feast at which he invited thirty godless young men. We need to beware of our dinner parties, social feastings and fun making masqueradings. The devil is not dead and seven spirits more satanic than the one cast out in sanctification are awaiting an opportunity to enter and possess the saints of God. We must fast, watch and pray or Satan will deceive us and bring about our fall and ruin.

And God hast thou not glorified

Man was created for the glory of God and his own eternal good and happiness. Belshazzar lifted up himself against the Lord of heaven, lived for selfish pleasure and in defiance of God. Without any exhortation to repentance or amendment of life Daniel pronounced his doom. In the channel of the river Cyrus marched his host into the city and that night Belshazzar was slain.

Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin

- *Mene* means *numbered and finished*.
- *Tekel* means *weighed and wanting*.
- *Upharsin* means *to divide or is now dividing and separating* (present).
- *Peres* means *divided and separated* (past).

Between the writing and the interpretation the words were fulfilled. Between the prophecy and the explanation the divine judgment fell and the prophecy fulfilled. The change of words from Upharsin, which means dividing and Peres, which means divided, the work was done. The Medes and Persians were at the gates and the weighed and wanting, willful and wicked Belshazzar lost his kingdom, lost his life, lost his soul and his all. Sin ends in doom, death and hell.

Thou art weighed . . . and . . . wanting

A man once made a beautiful goblet. A serpent with gleaming eyes and open mouth was coiled up at the bottom. The death dealing fang was ready to sting the drinker who might empty the cup. Such is sin and its pleasures. Inflamed with wine, Belshazzar defied God, defiled God's holy things, lifted himself up against the Lord God and perished in his uncleanness. In the midst of a drunken carousal, the mysterious handwriting was seen upon the wall '*Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin.*' Yes! God weighs kingdoms and kings. By His own will He sets up or flings down. God help us to submit to Him before it is too late.

Weighed . . . and . . . wanting

Daniel exhibited none of the sympathy for Belshazzar which he had previously shown for Nebuchadnezzar. The willfulness, wickedness and recklessness of Belshazzar is revealed by him:

- (1) Drinking to excess before his own subjects.
- (2) Profaning the sacred vessels of the Lord.
- (3) Drinking before his wives and concubines who were usually not present at feasts in the East where females were kept in strict seclusion. As the reckless revelry advanced, the women were evidently introduced, and, unlike Vashti, they were willing to show themselves.
- (4) Persisting in their profanity they praised the gods of silver and gold and in the same hour God's displeasure was declared.

That night was Belshazzar slain

It is at once interesting and instructive to notice certain prophecies relating to the oppressors of God's people and the defilers of God's will.

(1) *Egypt*—The ancient world power of Egypt has been degraded and is now “**the basest of kingdoms.**” Under British protection it is however being saved from utter extinction.

(2) *Tyre*:—The Liverpool, Southampton and New York of the ancient world. Tyre, whose sailors ventured into unknown seas carrying their commerce—where is she now? Where is Egypt? Where is Tyre?

(3) *Babylon*:—Behind the magnificent and wonderful walls and gorgeous gates of Babylon the profligate king laughed at the approach of Cyrus. The Divine fiat however, had gone forth, the soldiers of Cyrus entered the Palace and that night Belshazzar was slain. Where is Egypt? Tyre? Babylon? Sodom? Nineveh? They defied God and were debased and destroyed.

In that night

There was a last night in the history of Belshazzar.

There is a last night to everything and everyone on earth. A last feast, a last fight, a last dance, a last movie, a last cigar, a last drink, a last cigarette, a last oath, a last supper, a last night. Your last night is at hand.

Your last night is much nearer than you expect or think. Tonight may be your last night. It may also be a night without a morning as in the case of Belshazzar. The Belshazzars of today may make their great feasts, drink their expensive wines, profane holy things and mock holy men, but there is a last night for them all.

~ end of chapter 5 ~

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