









The end of mighty Babylon – Dan. 5:13-31

Kingdoms rise and kingdoms fall—that has been the pattern from the very beginning of human history.

- Why do you think that is the case?
- Why is it that no kingdom/nation has persisted for the long term?

“He changes times and seasons; He removes kings and sets up kings...” – Dan. 2:21

- Why does He do that?

Take a look at Psalm 75—as God’s people sang this in worship, what thought was impressed upon their minds?

The end of mighty Babylon – Dan. 5:13-31

Ok—Here's our title for the book –

The King of the Nations

Our key verse for the book is 4:34b—“His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation.”

The book divides naturally into two halves...

- Daniel in the King's courts – chs. 1-6
- Daniel and the King's visions – chs. 7-12

Daniel 5—The last king of Babylon

- The terror of the disembodied hand – v. 1-12
- The judgment of the Most High God – v. 13-31

The end of mighty Babylon – Dan. 5:13-31

Ok—bring us up to speed: what’s happening in the first 12 vs. of this chapter that sets the stage for Babylon’s final act?

The king’s request of Daniel – Dan. 5:13-16

Finally, Daniel—the one whom Nebuchadnezzar had made “chief of the magicians, enchanters, Chaldeans, and astrologers” because of his “excellent spirit, knowledge, and understanding to interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve problems”—is brought in to have a look at the wall.

- Why in the world did King B. wait so long?

The king's request of Daniel – Dan. 5:13-16

When the Queen Mother boldly gives the king some “instruction” in v. 12, it may have come across to him more like a semi-veiled rebuke. At any rate, the way the king addresses Daniel when he is brought in to the great banqueting hall sounds a little dismissive...

- He doesn't address him as the chief of the magicians, etc., but like this: “You are that Daniel, one of the exiles of Judah...”
- Remember—right before this, the king had been mocking Israel's God, drinking wine from the vessels taken from the temple, and praising “the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.”

The king's request of Daniel – Dan. 5:13-16

King B. had no respect whatsoever for Daniel or his God—not extremely surprising, but maybe a little.

He knew at least something about Daniel—the fact that he says that Daniel is one of the exiles brought from Judah indicates that he knew of Daniel...*that is* a bit of information that the Q.M. didn't mention.

And then he says this:

- “I have heard of you that the spirit of the gods...”
- “...I have heard that you can give interpretations...”

I don't want to make too big a point of this, but judging from Daniel's response in v. 17, it may be that the king wanted to put Daniel in his place.

The king's request of Daniel – Dan. 5:13-16

A reward is offered to Daniel—if he can tell the king the meaning of the four words he will get...

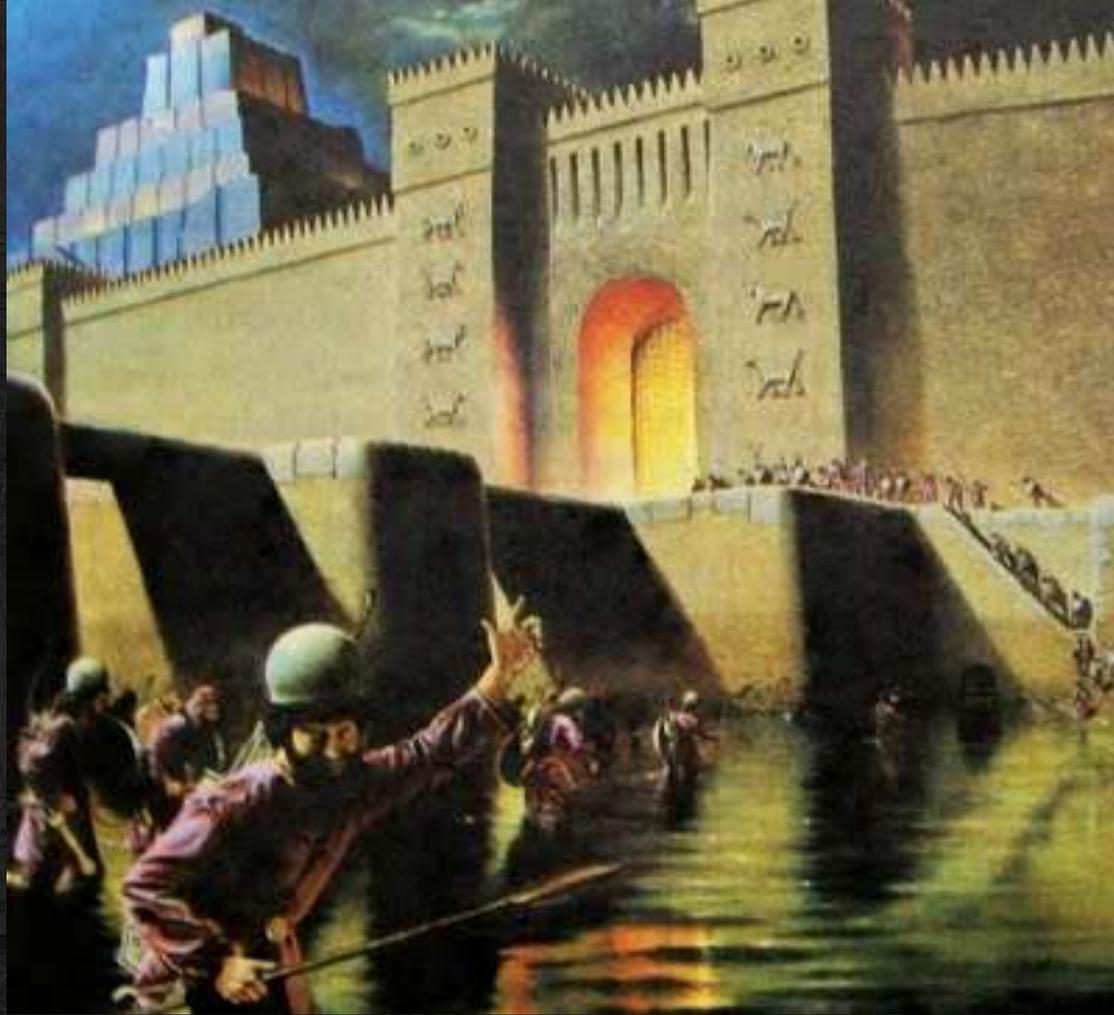
- ...a purple robe—ridiculously expensive back then, and a sign of great honor.
- ...a chain of gold around his neck—another very visible sign of wealth, power, and honor.
- ...to be the third ruler in the kingdom—third, after the two co-regent kings, Nabonidus and B.

The only one who could help the king...

- A captive Jew, a follower of the God that Belshazzar despised and mocked. How foolish.
- Yeah—kind of like us. Is. 53:3; 1 Cor. 1:18-25.

Meanwhile, as Daniel and King B. were talking...





...the army of King Cyrus was diverting the water of the Euphrates and approaching the palace. Later that night it would be theirs, and Belshazzar would be dead.

Daniel's hard message to the king ~ Dan. 5:17-23

There's a little attitude going on in the great banqueting hall of Babylon that night...notice Daniel's response to the king's offer of fabulous wealth and honor in v. 17: "Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another."

What?!? No—"O king, live forever!"?? Even the Q.M. was smart enough to address the king in a deferential manner (see also 2:4, 3:9).

- Must have been a little shocking for those nearby in the banqueting hall to hear Daniel say *that*...
- ...though these were somewhat unusual circumstances, it must be admitted. It's not every day that a disembodied hand writes on one's wall.

Daniel's hard message to the king ~ Dan. 5:17-23

From v. 18-21, Daniel gives the king a short history lesson...but that wasn't what the king had asked for.

Why did Daniel do this?

- Belshazzar had to see the contrast between himself and Nebuchadnezzar—who had been given great gifts: kingship, greatness, glory, and majesty, and who had tremendous power (v. 19).
- King B. had to understand why the judgment pronounced against him would be so severe.
- Remember what Jesus said to Pilate? “You would have no authority...unless it had been given you from above (John 19:11).

Daniel's hard message to the king ~ Dan. 5:17-23

- The king just wanted this weird mystery solved, he didn't want a history lesson. There was a party that needed to be finished.

Dale Davis likens this to Judges 6:7-10—“When Israel cries out to Yahweh, ‘Yahweh sent a prophet.’ It is almost comical. It’s as if your lawnmower won’t start so someone sends you a manicurist. What good can that do? So Israel wants relief from pressure, and they get a revelation from God, a word rehearsing His grace and charging them with infidelity. They want deliverance; Yahweh wants them to understand why they are in a situation requiring deliverance. They want a pacifier, He wants perception.”

Daniel's hard message to the king ~ Dan. 5:17-23

When Daniel had finished with the review of God's work to humble the proud heart of Nebuchadnezzar, he drove his point home: "And you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this, but you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven...but the God in whose hand is your breath, and whose are all your ways, you have not honored."

- The king knew about Nebuchadnezzar's humbling—it was no secret; but rather than see the wisdom of humbling himself, his heart grew proud.
- He knew enough to have honored the true God, but instead honored false gods.

Daniel's hard message to the king - Dan. 5:17-23

But he had another chance—Daniel went over the history one more time...maybe the king would get it *this* time and humble his heart before God.

Is God's patience infinite? Or finite?

- God is slow to anger (Ex. 34:6 Nahum 1:3)...
- ...but His patience is not infinite—it has an end (Romans 2:4-5).
- See Ecclesiastes 8:10-13—trust God's revelation, not your observation. In every case, trust God's revealed word and will, not what your eyes and experience tell you. Examples?
- Ezek. 33:10-11, the great patience of God.

Daniel's hard message to the king - Dan. 5:17-23

- In 1 Tim. 1:15-16 Paul describes God's patience as "perfect." How is that different than "infinite?"
- See also 1 Pet. 3:20, looking back at the days of Noah and the building of the ark.

What is Paul saying in Rom. 9:22-23?

ESV Study Bible: "God created a world in which both His wrath and His mercy would be displayed. Indeed, His mercy shines against the backdrop of His just wrath, showing hereby that the salvation of any person is due to the marvelous grace and love of God. If this is difficult to understand, it is because people mistakenly think God owes them salvation."

Daniel's hard message to the king - Dan. 5:17-23

God gave to King Belshazzar the very breath (v. 23) he used to give praise to the "sightless, heedless, witless bastard deities of Babylon." The king was doing Rom. 1:21. "The God in whose hand is your breath...you have not honored."

The interpretation of the writing - Dan. 5:24-28

After the combination rebuke/final opportunity to humble himself, the king gets the interpretation of the words that he (thought) he wanted.

- How sobering is it to realize that this was this man's last opportunity in life to get right with God. This is a good time to read Luke 12:13-21.

The interpretation of the writing – Dan. 5:24-28

You have to admit, this is a strange verse—v. 24:

“Then from His presence the hand was sent...”

Figure that one out. Was the hand just waiting around to be sent, to serve its Creator? Well, enough speculation on that. Notice the first word, “Then...”

What does that imply?

NIV has “Therefore” as the first word. God’s perfect patience had reached its end, “for the haughtiness was now desperate, and the impiety no longer tolerable” (Calvin). Like this: “But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed.” (Rom. 2:5)

The interpretation of the writing – Dan. 5:24-28

The words on the wall themselves were fairly simple, everyone there could read the words—it was the meaning of the message that was hidden.

Once again, the ESV Study Bible has a great explanatory note on this – “The words are clearly Aramaic and form a sequence of weights, decreasing from a mina, to a shekel (1/60 of a mina), to a half-shekel. It was not that the king and wise men could not read them, but they failed to understand their significance for Belshazzar. Read as verbs, the sequence becomes: ‘Numbered, numbered, weighed, and divided.’”

The interpretation of the writing – Dan. 5:24-28

That is the reading Daniel gives them as he interprets their meaning in v. 26-28. Belshazzar had been “weighed in the balances and found wanting,” and his kingdom taken from him.

- The one piece of information he did not know at this point was how quickly it would happen.
- He had no way of knowing that the King of the nations, who “changes times and seasons; He removes kings and sets up kings” (2:21), had been working behind the scenes to elevate Cyrus of the Persians—whose army was even now crossing the lowered Euphrates.

The interpretation of the writing – Dan. 5:24-28

Belshazzar's kingdom was numbered, numbered—the word is repeated for emphasis: in other words, it is confirmed that the number is complete, no time can be added to it.

- The mighty kingdom of Babylon had a fixed end, unalterable now, apparently.
- It was common to address the king in this way: “O king, live forever!” Maybe it went to his head. Psalm 90:12 is a better way to approach life (see also Ps. 39:4).
- And then, ultimately, there is Acts 17:30-31. For every king, kingdom, nation, person, there is a fixed end coming.

The keeping of promises – Dan. 5:29-31

The king kept his promise: Daniel was given the purple robe, the chain of gold, and the place of third ruler in the kingdom.

- And I'm sure King B. was happy and excited to give it to Daniel, right? Right?
- We don't know if the king even believed what Daniel had told him—he may have felt pressured in some way to give Daniel this stuff and get him off his back.
- Regardless, they were empty gifts. Well, at least the robe and the gold had some value. Being the third ruler in the kingdom didn't mean much—the kingdom was going to end in a few hours.

The keeping of promises – Dan. 5:29-31

God kept his promise: “That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed.”

- At some point later that night the army of Cyrus the Great entered the royal palace, killed the king, and Babylon was no more. It was enveloped into the growing Persian Empire.

Who is in the greatest danger when a kingdom falls?

- Its rulers.

Who was in the greatest danger that night?

- The rulers: #1-Belshazzar, #2-Nabonidus, #3-Daniel, clothed in his royal purple robe and gold chain. God protected His prophet; his work was not yet done.

The keeping of promises – Dan. 5:29-31

John Calvin, commenting on Daniel that night: “He could scarcely have escaped the tumult, unless God had covered him with the shadow of His hand. We see, then, how God takes care of His own, and snatches us from the greatest dangers, as if He were bringing us from the tomb. There is no doubt that the holy prophet was much agitated amidst the tumult, for he was not without sensibility. But he ought to be thus exercised to cause him to acknowledge God as the faithful guardian of his life, and to apply himself more diligently to His worship, since he saw nothing preferable to casting all his cares upon Him!”