

05–11–2020 Daniel 5:17–31 Bible Study

Read Daniel 5:17–31 on your favorite translation. I will print the NET–2 translation.

17 But Daniel replied to the king, “Keep your gifts, and give your rewards to someone else. However, I will read the writing for the king and make known its interpretation. 18 As for you, O king, the most high God bestowed on your father Nebuchadnezzar a kingdom, greatness, honor, and majesty. 19 Due to the greatness that he bestowed on him, all peoples, nations, and language groups were trembling with fear before him. He killed whom he wished, he spared whom he wished, he exalted whom he wished, and he brought low whom he wished. 20 And when his mind became arrogant and his spirit filled with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and his honor was removed from him. 21 He was driven from human society; his mind was changed to that of an animal. He lived with the wild donkeys, he was fed grass like oxen, and his body became damp with the dew of the sky, until he came to understand that the most high God rules over human kingdoms, and he appoints over them whomever he wishes.

22 “But you, his son Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself, although you knew all this. 23 Instead, you have exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven. You brought before you the vessels from his temple, and you and your nobles, together with your wives and concubines, drank wine from them. You praised the gods of silver, gold, bronze, iron, wood, and stone—gods that cannot see or hear or comprehend. But you have not glorified the God who has in his control your very breath and all your ways! 24 Therefore the palm of a hand was sent from him, and this writing was inscribed.

25 “This is the writing that was inscribed: mene, mene, teqel, and pharsin. 26 This is the interpretation of the words: As for Mene—God has numbered your kingdom’s days and brought it to an end. 27 As for Teqel—you are weighed on the balances and found to be lacking. 28 As for Peres—your kingdom is divided and given over to the Medes and Persians.”

29 Then, on Belshazzar’s orders, Daniel was clothed in purple, a golden collar was placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed third ruler in the kingdom. 30 And that very night Belshazzar, the Babylonian king, was killed. 31 (6:1) So Darius the Mede took control of the kingdom when he was about sixty-two years old.

COMMENTS:

Daniel shows his contempt for Belshazzar by declining his gifts and by his reminder that even though he knew the story of Nebuchadnezzar’s seven years of living as an animal because of his pride, Belshazzar hadn’t learned anything about avoiding pride and humbling himself before god.

Daniel emphasizes the greatness of his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar. He pointed out that Yahweh had given him greatness, honor, and majesty. The whole known world of that time feared him. He had the power of life and death over his subjects. But the earthly king’s authority came from the heavenly king, God.

Whereas Daniel had been hesitant to tell Nebuchadnezzar the meaning of his dream and even offered counsel how he might postpone the anger of Yahweh, he seems eager to tell Belshazzar the meaning of his dream.

Daniel retells the story of the king’s madness which came about because of his arrogance and pride. But he points his finger at Belshazzar and says you are even worse than he was. You made the holy articles from the Temple of Yahweh your drinking cups. And while you were doing this, you were praising your gods who cannot see, hear, or understand anything.

Yahweh saw his foolishness and sent him a message immediately writing it on the palace wall. There is some debate over the meaning of the words written, but all we care about is the meaning of the message God was sending. God has numbered Belshazzar's days and they will end. He had been weighed and found lacking. The kingdom is divided.

Then on that very night he is killed. We know very little about Darius except his age. It was common when a major military conquest occurred for the conqueror to return home with the spoils of war and get the praise and honor of his nation. He would leave a trusted warrior in charge to rule in his stead.

The reference to his age is to clarify that he is not the famous Darius I, king of Persia from 522–486 BC. This Darius the Mede is not mentioned in any other ancient document. This may be an alternate name for some other person who governed Babylon after its capture in 539 BC.

A likely candidate is Cyrus, whose mother was a Mede and did not give him the name Cyrus (cf. 6:28). The prophets attributed the conquest of Babylon to the Medes (Is. 13:17; Jer. 51:11). There are further references to Darius the Mede in Dan. 6; 9:1; 11:1.

Despite the negative interpretation of the writing on the wall, Belshazzar kept his promise to Daniel even though he had declined it. Nor did he express any misgivings about the meaning which was shared with him.

REFLECTION QUESTION: What do you control? In truth, nothing. We only have the illusion of control. God alone is the controller. We will not understand all of God's ways, but we need to face the changes and challenges in life with the confidence that God is good and he loves us, not just us, but all people. We might have to ride some rough seas with some God is trying to call to himself. The truth is, we know more people find God in time of trials than in days of ease. I am not a good sailor. I get sea sick easily and quickly. My prayer is that God will help me when I travel through rough seas because I want others to find God's love and grace.