

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDUCTIVE STUDY OF THE BOOK OF DANIEL

PART FIVE – WARNING A DRUNKEN KING OF THE CONSEQUENCE OF HIS ARROGANCE

At least 25 years had elapsed between chapters 4 and 5. Nebuchadnezzar had finally faced the obstacle to knowing the blessing of the God of heaven in his life and leadership. God had to be his King if he was to be the kind of king his people needed. How many more years Nebuchadnezzar had left to live after his life-changing discovery, we do not know. He died in 562 BC after which there were several short lived leaders before Nabonidus came to power. After three years he decided to share rule with his relative, Belshazzar, Nebuchadnezzar's son, possibly to allow Nabonidus to be absent while he was leading the army to expand the empire. This new story took place in Belshazzar's last year, 539 BC.

Daniel had not been silent however during the earlier years of Belshazzar's reign because chapters 7 and 8 record the prophecies which were given to him during that time.

While Nabonidus was a successful general, his co-ruler appears only to have been remarkable for the size of the parties he held for the elite of Babylon. Like many modern parties this particular one was notable mainly for the quantity of wine which was consumed. Like many other drunks through history, Belshazzar wanted to show off to his guests and his many women. He came up with the idea of drinking from the gold and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had looted from the temple in Jerusalem in 597 BC, as described in II Kings 24:13. To make the insult to God more pointed, as they drank, they toasted their many Babylonian gods. Paul warned Timothy of the hazards of excess wine for Christian leaders.(I Tim.3:3,8)

One can imagine the roars of laughter as God was ridiculed by the guests in the party. Suddenly the jokes stopped and a terrified silence fell on the drinkers. A mysterious hand with no visible person attached to it was writing on the palace wall. Strange words in a foreign language none of them could understand appeared on the wall. The king was panicking and sobered up rapidly. He did the same as his father, Nebuchadnezzar, had done when he had unpleasant dreams and called for his experts to translate and explain the message. He offered even greater reward than his father had done to anyone who could successfully do this. Whoever succeeded would be made the third ruler of Babylon after him and Nabonidus. At first no-one could help. Belshazzar's terror increased.

Belshazzar's queen had stayed away from the party, probably used to how it would get out of hand once her husband had had too many to drink, but word reached her of what was happening and she came to see for herself. She reminded her husband of the reputation Daniel had had in Nebuchadnezzar's time which he had chosen to forget. Daniel, she knew, was a man in whom the spirit of God lived. She urged Belshazzar to seek his help. For once Belshazzar listened to his wife and summoned Daniel, promising wealth and the same role he had exercised under Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel agreed to help but declined the promised reward – in the light of the bad news he had for the king, it would not have been worth having anyway! First he reminded him of the story of his father, Nebuchadnezzar, and the lesson he had had to learn about the consequence of arrogance. Belshazzar had made exactly the same mistake even though he knew the message of his father's madness and recovery. It is one thing to sin in ignorance but it is the ultimate in foolishness to go against God with full knowledge. It is the only sin which will not be forgiven.(Matt.12:31,32) Daniel spelled out to Belshazzar what he had done and why he would be judged. He then turned to the message on the wall and translated it from Hebrew into the Babylonian language, Aramaic. God had numbered the days of his kingdom after weighing up his sin, and decided to allow his rule to end because he refused to listen. The Medes and the Persians, the new power rising to the East, would conquer Babylon.

Belshazzar rewarded Daniel for his explanation as he had promised, but there was no repentance and no change of heart. His last opportunity was wasted. For one night Daniel was the third ruler of Babylon. By morning, Belshazzar was dead and Darius was the new king. We might think that Daniel after 66 years of serving God in Babylon, and well into his eighties, would see this as his time to sit back and relax, but God still had work for him to do. The Bible says nothing about Christian retirement.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY ON DANIEL, CHAPTER FIVE

Q.1 Nebuchadnezzar's son became king after him? What had he learned from his father's experience of God? What does this tell us about the result of having a Christian father?

Q.2 A wild party was going on! What did too much wine finally do to the king? How do people go overboard in the same way these days? Did God decide to judge them because they were drunk? How did He go about intervening?

Q.3 A whole generation later, Daniel was still the one people looked to when they were in trouble. What does this tell us about his Christian life? What did Daniel do that we too can do for the worried people of our day? Why didn't Daniel accept a reward from the king?