

Daniel: The Man from Babylon

Much time and five kings had past by since God had dealt with King Nebachadnezzar through his prophet Daniel. Belshazzar had stayed in Jerusalem, taking care of the kingdom, while his father Nabonidus (who happened to be first in command in Babylon) was taking care of battles elsewhere. It was during a sumptuous banquet of his that he remembered about the gold and silver drinking vessels that Nebachadnezzar had stolen from the temple so long ago. He decided to bring out the lovely utensils for the merrymaking of his guests and their wives while they toasted their gods of gold, silver, rock, wood, brass and iron. Which, of course were not gods at all; they couldn't even talk.

Suddenly, as the drunken group carried out this blasphemy using the temple vessels, they saw the fingers--- just the fingers, mind you--of a man's hand writing on the plaster wall. They were all frightened, looking toward their leader Belshazzar for word of what this could be. He, too, was terrified, so much so that his face blanched white and his knees knocked together.

"Bring the magicians and the astrologers!" he shrieked. "If anybody can tell me what it says on that wall," he

motioned toward the writing, "he'll be third in my kingdom, and will be clothed royally!" But no one could tell him what the writing said or meant. Growing even more hysterical, Belshazzar was a little relieved to see his mother entering the banquet hall, having heard of her son's upset. "Now, calm down, your majesty--there used to be a man in the kingdom during your father's reign. He was so filled with wisdom that some thought he was even a god. He was made the head of Nebachadnezzar's astrologers and soothsayers. I think he's still alive. Send for him; he'll know just what the writing says. Let's see...", she thought briefly "...his name was Daniel, or the king called him Belteshazzar (Bel-te-shaz-zar), I think. He knows how to find answers to all kinds of riddles." Daniel was summoned as quickly as possible.

When he entered, the King asked, "Are you the man my father brought from Israel as a captive long ago? I have been told of the spirit in you that seems to be from the gods. My wise men and astrologers have looked at this writing and cannot tell me what it says or means; I've been told that you solve mysterious things. See here now, he promised. If you can tell me what this means, I'll have you clothed in purple and made third ruler in the kingdom!"

Daniel, very composed, but definitely older now, said, "Keep your gifts for someone else, but I'll tell you about the handwriting. He went on, "Your predecessor,

Nebachadnezar, received from God in Heaven a kingdom, glory, honor, and power." He went on, " But his heart became hardened in pride, and he didn't give God credit for being his strength. He was chased out into the fields, away from the palace, and was made to live like the beasts, until such time as, seven years later, he realized that God Himself sets up kings and has all power on earth.

And you, Belshazzar, have been the same way as was your forefather. Tonight you and your guests have really had a party, and have used the vessels that were stolen from the temple to toast strange gods, who are not gods at all; they can't talk or see or hear.. So God instructed this hand to write 'Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin', which means,

'Mene'- God has decided that your reign is about to end.

'Tekel'- God has weighed you on His scales...and you're not measuring up.

'Parsin'... It means divided -- Your kingdom is about to be divided and given to the Medes and the Persians."

Belshazzar then called for Daniel to be robed in purple and a chain of gold was put upon his neck; he was also made third ruler of the land, as the king had promised.

It was that very night that Belshazzar was killed by the Medes and Persian armies. His throne became occupied by Darius, a Mede, who divided it later into 120 provinces, under governors. The governors of the provinces were responsible to one of three presidents; one of these was

Daniel. Soon it became evident to everyone who was doing the best job; the new king Darius even thought of having Daniel as his chief administrator, over the entire kingdom. Naturally, the other presidents didn't think very much of this notion, and they together pooled their ideas of a way to complain about him to the king. When they could find nothing wrong, they agreed, "It'll have to be *something* to do with his religion."

After some consideration, the presidents and the governors decided to present this idea to the king: "O great king", their spokesman said, "We leaders...that is...hrumpfh...think that you should make a law to say that no one is to ask anything of anyone but you for a whole month". He paused. "Now, doesn't that sound great? And it ought to be one of the laws of the Medes and Persians that cannot be canceled under any circumstance. You are a truly benevolent king!"

Surely enough, it did sound good, and the king signed the law. The other presidents chuckled, ever so quietly.

Daniel knew about the law, but he knelt, regular as clockwork, at his open bedroom window, three times a day as he always had, and talked to his God and petitioned Him for things.

Outside gathered a throng of governmental leaders, waiting to see if Daniel was going to be trapped. When they learned about his praying, they went directly to the king and

said something like, "Hey, king. Didn't you make a decree that no one was to ask for anything from god or man but your majesty? Well, Daniel didn't pay any attention. He is calling out to his God three times a day, just like he did before. The law you made says he should be thrown into the den of lions, right?"

The king just could not believe his ears! Had he really allowed himself to be tricked into signing that law? He tried to come up with a way to save Daniel, but to no avail. Finally he agreed to his arrest, and the old man was taken to the den of lions. That night the king ate no supper, had no entertainment, and didn't sleep at all. It was very early in the morning when he hurried out to the den and called out in a worried tone, "Daniel, was your God able to rescue you from the mouths of the lions?"

"Long live the king!" shouted a voice from below. "God sent his angel to help me, and he wouldn't let the lions open their mouths, because I am guilty of no wrong. "The king was fairly beside himself with joy. He had Daniel drawn up out of the den. He signed a decree to put Daniel's accusers in instead, where they were promptly eaten up. Then to all his kingdom he sent this notice:

"To my subjects: The God of Daniel is alive, and His power is limitless. His people He protects from harm; he delivered Daniel from being eaten by the lions."

Daniel is said to have prospered in the reigns of Medes and Persians, as he had been under Belshazzar and Nebachadnezzar and lived to the old age of ninety. All the days of his life, he remained true to the God of Israel, and lived as a real example of one of his followers. God honored him, too, and so did his associates, even in a strange land. (This story is told in the book of Daniel.)