

Monday - Week Twenty-nine

Lesson Eighty-four: Daniel and Belshazzar

Read: Daniel 5.

Summary: Belshazzar tried to make a fool out of God. God showed him that He was still in control of world events.

Background and Comments

- For many years critics of the Bible used this chapter of Daniel to say that the Bible was not historically accurate. Not only wasn't Belshazzar listed in Babylonian history, Darius the Mede was not listed in Medo-Persian history. Recent archeology has shed new light on the situation. Scholars have found that Belshazzar was the co-regent with his father when Babylon fell. Belshazzar was Nebuchadnezzar's grandson (the Bible often uses the word "son" to mean any descendant). Scholars also found out that Cyrus (the leader of the Persians) installed a governor named Gubaru over Babylon. Darius was no doubt Gubaru's throne name in Babylon. These Bible critics had been silenced. The Bible is true no matter what the "scholars" say ... but it's nice to see that archeology backs up the perfect historical record of God's Word!
- Belshazzar's drunken orgy took a blasphemous turn when he ordered that the cups and dishes from the temple be used. He and his friends were planning to ridicule God's name in the midst of their sinful party.

Lessons for Today

- The king's reaction to the handwriting on the wall was instant. Have you ever seen someone react like that when they heard bad news? Have you ever reacted in this way? What "safety net" do we Christians have in times of shockingly terrible news?
- Daniel must have been an old man when he appeared before Belshazzar. His view of life had been sharpened by years of walking with God. It's no wonder that he so easily refused the king's offer of wealth and power. What sort of priorities and goals do you have in your life?
- Daniel told the truth even though the truth was "bad news". We need to tell people the truth about their sin.

Read: Psalm 120; Hebrews 9.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, give me the boldness and wisdom of Daniel. Amen.

Tuesday - Week Twenty-Nine

Lesson Eighty-five: Daniel in the Lion's Den

Read: Daniel 6

Summary: God protected His faithful and godly servant Daniel in a thrilling and miraculous way.

Background and Comments

- Daniel didn't hesitate to pray in his usual fashion when he heard about the new law. Daniel had the custom of praying facing Jerusalem. This was no superstition for Daniel; this act reminded him that the temple was symbolic for God's presence on earth. In the same way we pray in Jesus' name; remembering that our prayers are heard in heaven because of the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross.
- Darius was a coward. His conscience told him that he was wrong in allowing this bad law to be carried out against Daniel. He was the king! He should have reversed his decision and then dealt with the consequences.
- The king's conscience kept him awake all night!

Lessons for Today

- If a powerful group of people tried to uncover any embarrassing or damaging things about you how much would they come up with? The fact that they couldn't find ANYTHING concerning Daniel shows us just how faithful Daniel was. He kept God's law and in the process kept everyone else's law too. In general this still works. If we keep God's law we will be good citizens, spouses, friends and workers.
- Darius didn't think through the law before he signed it. Making good decisions includes the discipline of thinking through major decisions before you make them. It also helps to talk through a decision with a trusted Christian friend.
- When we teach this story to children we need to make sure that we don't teach them that God always physically protects His children. Church history is full of the courageous stories of the martyrs (starting with Stephen in Acts) who were kept safe spiritually but gave their lives.

Read: Psalm 121; Hebrews 10

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, guide me to make good decisions. Make me thoughtful and wise. I ask this in Jesus' name; Amen.

Wednesday - Week Twenty-nine

Catechism Review

Read Questions 235-250

1. Are you a member of the visible or invisible church? Explain.

2. How do you know which church you should join? Why are you a member of your congregation?

3. Why don't we join in worshiping in churches that don't believe everything that the Bible says?

4. How would you respond? "You people in the Wisconsin Synod think that you will be the only ones in heaven!"

5. How would you respond? "If a person says that they believe in Jesus why shouldn't I worship with them? Aren't we both Christians?"

6. How can your church grow stronger as a congregational family?

Read: Psalm 122; Hebrews 11.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for placing me in a church that teaches what the Bible says. Never let me take this congregation for granted. Make me quick to reach out to others. Amen.

Thursday - Week Twenty-nine

Lesson Eighty-six: The return from exile

Read: Ezra 1-6; Haggai 1

Summary: God used King Cyrus to send a group of Israelites “home” to the Promised Land. This group was quite dedicated to God.

Background and Comments

- The Jews had been carried off from Israel in 606 BC. In 536 BC King Cyrus allowed the Jews to return home to Jerusalem. Jeremiah had prophesied that 70 years after the exiles left Jerusalem they would return. The prophet Isaiah had prophesied that Cyrus would be the one to let the people go home (Note: this was 200 years before it happened!). God was true to His Word. He never forgot His people.
- Not all the Jews returned home. In fact, most of the Jews in Babylon stayed there because they enjoyed their prosperous life. Cyrus did order them to help the returning Jews by helping to finance the trip.
- The Samaritans wanted to help build the Lord’s temple. The Israelites didn’t fall into the sin of comprising with evil (the Samaritan mixed heathen worship with the worship of the Lord). May God give us courage as we stand firm in God’s truth today!

Lessons for Today

- King Cyrus let the Jews go home just as he let other peoples go back to their lands. This was Cyrus’ national policy. God used Cyrus even though Cyrus thought he was simply being a wise king (note: in Ezra 1:2 it seems that Cyrus thought he was God’s tool. Unfortunately there are records of Cyrus speaking the same way about the idols of other people.). God still uses people today ... even when they don’t realize that they are doing God’s will. This is comforting since there are so many godless rulers these days.
- In Ezra 3 we see that the people put the worship and temple of the Lord in front of their own homes and lives. What an outstanding attitude for God’s people to have. How can you foster that attitude in your heart and in your church?

Read: Psalm 123; Hebrews 12.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, give us the courage and determination that these 50,000 exiles had as they returned home against all odds. Amen.

Friday - Week Twenty-nine

Life Questions

Topic/Question: What principles should guide me when I give my offerings?

Bible References and Considerations

- The Bible has quite a bit to say about how we use our money. In fact, people who say that pastors shouldn't talk about money are not keeping that fact in mind. God has plenty to say about money!
- Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians about a special offering he was collecting for the Christian Jews in Jerusalem who were suffering through a famine. His words in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 have much to say about our giving. 2 Corinthians 8:1 sets the whole tone of the section. Being able to give to the Lord is an example of His **grace**; unbelievers cannot give from a heart of faith (they have no faith).
- Paul used the Macedonian Christians as examples of giving. He didn't pont to the amounts that they gave but their attitude in giving. They were hard-pressed themselves but gave even more than Paul thought they should have given. Why this intense desire to give? They had given themselves to the Lord (8:5); giving money was simply an outgrowth of their commitment.

Practically Speaking

- When we talk about giving our offerings to church we often use the word stewardship. A steward is a person who takes care of someone else's possessions. We need to remember that we are taking care of God's possessions. He is the One who gave us health to work (and earn money), our possessions to enjoy and the time to use the things of this world. Giving our offerings is one way to say thank You to God for what He has given to us (especially for His gift of the salvation). We will also want to use our time and talents in His kingdom.
- The Bible talks about giving a portion of our income to the Lord on a regular basis. Giving a percentage of our income is a good way to make sure that our giving is planned and regular. Some Christian refer back to the 10% that was required of the Old Testament Israelites. God has not given us such laws in the New Testament. We are free to give as our heart moves us (perhaps even more than 10 %!).

Read: Psalm 124; Hebrews 13.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for the grace of giving. Amen.