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BIBLE ADVENTURES SCRIPT:

A2347 ~ Belshazzar's Feast.

Welcome to Bible Adventures. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow. Jesus is Lord of all.

We hear no more of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in the Bible once God restored his sanity and rulership after humbling him through 7 years of insanity and living like a wild animal. This strange event was God's punishment for Nebuchadnezzar's great pride over his building achievements and world-wide rulership. But from this experience, Nebuchadnezzar finally gave great respect for the Lord, the King of heaven. He then died in 562 BC but his dynasty only lasted for six years after his death, as his two sons failed to rule well after him. One of his diplomatic officials, named Nabonidus, succeeded him as king.

Nabonidus ruled as emperor from 555 BC to 539 BC, but he didn't live in Babylon for most of that time. This decision cost him the loss of support from the Babylonian army and his son, Belshazzar, ruled as co-regent for him in Babylon from 550 BC onwards. This is where Daniel takes up the record of Belshazzar in Chapter 5 of the Bible book of *Daniel*. Belshazzar was another proud man who believed that he was secure living within the walls of Babylon, even though an army of the Medo-Persian Empire, under Cyrus the Great, was surrounding the city. So confident of the city's security was Belshazzar that he put on a great banquet for 1,000 of his noblemen and their families. This banquet would have been better described as being a drunken party for his court.

Although it says in this chapter that Belshazzar was Nebuchadnezzar's son and Nebuchadnezzar was Belshazzar's father, these relationships are only of general political succession as there was no blood relationship between them. When Judah and Jerusalem were taken and destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar, the kings of other cities and nations thought that the God of heaven worshipped by the Jewish people was rather weak. However, Nebuchadnezzar learnt the hard way that God had sovereign purposes over the earth which the king didn't understand. God gave Nebuchadnezzar a full 12 months to turn from his pride before God's judgment of insanity came upon him. But in the case of Belshazzar, God gave him no time at all after His warning, and Belshazzar's kingdom was gone in one single night in 539 BC.

When Nebuchadnezzar had taken the golden utensils from God's temple in Jerusalem before destroying it, he kept the items in a store house for his Babylonian gods and never touched them. But Belshazzar, in his drunken state, ordered the sacred vessels to be brought out and used for the purpose of mocking the God of heaven. He and his guests drank from God's property and with them, praised Babylon's false gods of gold and silver. God immediately intervened: suddenly on the banquet wall near Belshazzar, the fingers of a man's hand appeared and began writing an unknown message. Belshazzar grew very frightened and called for his wise men to tell him what the words meant. At this point, the banquet quietened down considerably.

Daniel was brought in before the king; and by now, he was about 80 years old. Before explaining what it meant, Daniel gave the king a stern rebuke: he reminded Belshazzar of how Nebuchadnezzar had learnt to be humble before the Most High God of Israel. But as Belshazzar had not humbled himself, he set himself against the one true God by using His holy utensils and praising false gods. Therefore, God sent the hand to write his judgement on the wall.

The inscription consisted of three words, the first one being repeated, with all three words referring to weights or measurements. The words meant the same as “‘numbered,’ ‘weighed’ and ‘divided.’ The first word meant: God had numbered the days of the king’s reign and brought it to an end. The second one meant: the king had been weighed on the scales and found wanting – which meant that Belshazzar had not ‘measured up’ to God’s standards. The third word meant that the Babylonian Empire would be divided among the Medes and the Persians.

Belshazzar couldn’t have liked hearing what Daniel said, but in front of his court, he kept his promise to make him the 3rd highest ruler in the kingdom. Perhaps he reasoned that if Daniel was his ‘prime minister,’ then God wouldn’t bring down the judgment upon Babylon? But when the Medo-Persian army came against Babylon that night, the Babylonian army joined them and so Belshazzar was killed and the city of Babylon captured without a fight.

It's not easy to work out the rulers of the Medo-Persian Empire. 'Darius the Mede' as shown at the end of the chapter is a 'throne name.' When Cyrus captured Babylon, he put one of his generals in charge for nearly two years. Cyrus the Great then ruled over the whole known world, which included his reign over Babylonia for 9 years, from 539 BC to 530 BC. His successor son, however, received a greatly reduced kingdom and he reigned for 8 years. The third king after Cyrus was his son-in-law, Darius the 1st, who ruled from 522 BC to 486 BC. Only a few kings in those days had a grandson sit on the throne after them. For in that region of the world, there seemed to be constant struggles and battles for supremacy between the nations. When a king from one nation conquered the other nations around his, it becomes difficult to work out the succession of kingships and their timelines.

The historical and spiritual relevance of the events described in Chapter 5 is highly important. The Babylonian Empire symbolises the powers of this world, yet with one battle, like Belshazzar's, these powers can quickly be lost. The Babylonians didn't believe that Cyrus king of Persia would overcome them. But 150 years earlier, God had revealed to the prophet Isaiah, in chapters 44 and 45 of his book *Isaiah* that Babylon would fall to Cyrus. The leaders of our present-day world need to know and understand that their times of rulership are set by the God of heaven and not by their own hands.

Every day and often before we go to sleep, our reflections of the day can show us things that we need to get right with God about. Christ taught us to pray daily for God's forgiveness and so we need to exercise spiritual discipline in examining ourselves and letting the Holy Spirit show us what actions, either done or left undone, that we need to ask pardon for. Were our attitudes godly or mean towards other people? Were our intentions to do God's will or were we self-centred? The precious blood of Christ cleanses faithful repenters from all sin. This is the only way to start our next day with a clear conscience and without the burdens of today's guilt.

The Lord Jesus defined sin as being more than just the things done or left undone. Sin is still sin, even if we only think about doing something wrong and don't actually carry it out. The religious leaders of Jesus' day taught that it was alright to think about anything you liked, as long as you didn't act out any immoral or evil desires. But Jesus in Luke's Gospel, Chapter 6, said: "A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. What you say flows from what is in your heart."

Jesus told the religious leaders that God judges a person's thoughts as well as their actions. We must be very careful, and especially about what we consider as small sins. Sometimes we look at something and say, "That's just a small sin. Surely it won't do that much harm in my life." Christians can fall into sin about sin, and so be deceived by this. In Hebrews, Chapter 3, it says: "Make sure that your own hearts are not evil and unbelieving, turning you away from the living God. You must warn each other every day, while it is still 'today,' so that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God." And so here's God's promise: "For if we are faithful to the end, trusting God just as firmly as when we first believed, we will share in all that belongs to Christ."

As God has provided for our salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ, the forgiveness of our sins is found exclusively in Christ. To reject the only Saviour God has provided is to be left with no means of salvation from sin at all. To reject the only pardon available is, obviously, unpardonable.

Are you looking for Christ's return? To look for His return means to live your life in anticipation of Him coming back and being ready to meet Him. Keeping your heart clean and avoiding anything that could hinder your spiritual life is important while waiting for Him. If there's anything in your life that should be changed, anything in your life that is not right with God, deal with it now.

The drama is from The Bible In Living Sound.

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