

**THE ERROR OF BELSHAZZAR IN THE BOOK OF DANIEL: A WARNING TO
NIGERIAN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP**

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ABSTRACT

Misplacement of God which is a deep nature of sin has been in existence from generations past. Nothing is new under heave says the preachers son. Thus, this generation is only following in the steps of people that had lived in the past. It is either one does good or bad, he/she cannot sit on the fence and this is the reason for the write up in this paper where the act of man in belittling Yahweh is seen and the resultant effect was very hazardous and not limited to an individual but the entire nation. Belshazzar who is the central figure of discussion in this paper is seen to have acted rudely to God by using the vessels of the house of the Lord and this led to a history that cannot be recovered from. The replica of the life that Belshazzar lived is being seen in the daily activities of the “so-called” leaders in government today and the act has promoted vices and non-moral characters in the midst of the leaders thereby making the followers to look confuse as the leaders got to position through the vote of the common men but they have neglected their duties to hunt for personal interest. This paper will therefore address the issue and give the warning about the end result of the act of Belshazzar as a case study for the government leaders if they fail to turn from their self centeredness.

Keywords: Belshazzar, Daniel, Government, Nigeria.

The Book of Daniel

Before proceeding in analyzing the main goal of this term paper, this part of the book is set to write about the book that carries the record of the events which is the template for this tm paper. The book of Daniel is classified under the Major Prophets in the biblical arrangements according to the canon and this is because of the events recorded in the book which comprise of the future events that would take place at the end of the world and even at the end of the exilic “tour” of the Israelites. Traditional has it that Daniel is the author but it is quite evident in the book especially in the first part of the book (Ch. 1-6), where the use of third person singular is employed

revealing that there is another writer while the latter part of the work suggests that Daniel himself wrote the book especially with the use of first person singular. Deane puts it that "... a conclusion might be drawn that we have traces of two authors, a biographer and an autobiographer and that the book is a compilation taken from the two sources."¹

The opinion stated above really sounds good but might not be totally followed although it is not disputable that there is an iota of truth therein but the probable solution that would be given to the issue by this paper is that the writer of the first part of the book might have been dictated to by Daniel which automatically makes him the owner of the work, since tradition does not recognize dual authorship of the book in question.

The generally accepted writer of the book which is Daniel was even referred to as a representative of God in a strange land as he was able to serve in both the Babylonian empire and the Medo-Persian Empire. Daniel outlived the Babylonian empire. He did serve in the highest official posts in both the Babylonian and Medo/Persian empires. He was used by Yahweh to protect His name in the face of the captivity of His covenant people. Daniel prophesied the course of world history for the next several centuries and He recorded these prophecies in the book bearing his name.²

The Man, Belshazzar

There have been many issues surrounding the personality of Belshazzar in which the trueness of his existence and his kingship has been a bone of contention and a consensus has not really been reached about who he is.

A particular section of arguments holds that he is not Nebuchadnezzar's son but instead, he is the son of a king called Nabonidus as the encyclopedia puts it that, "In the Bible (Daniel 5), Belshazzar is identified as the son of Nebuchadnezzar, but cuneiform inscriptions indicate that

¹H. Deane, *The Book of Daniel* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1959), 7-8.

²www.valleybiblenet History of Old Testament Israel Period (Accessed March 9, 2017), 146.

Nabonidus is his father”³. Some proponent of this point of discussion holds, according John Calvin, that “Some reckons two kings before Belshazzar; for they place Regassar after Labassaradach; and this two will occupy eight years”⁴ while to other proponents also holds that it is not necessarily taking about the biological father but rather it could only mean nothing more than a predecessor. A strong view is the fact that evil-Merodach also ruled before Belshazzar if truly he was a king.

Another tradition holds that Nebuchadnezzar could be his father but there was no record of his kingship which implies that the night recorded in Daniel chapter 5 is the night of his coronation and the feast was meant for celebrating his installment to office. While another is of the opinion that the passage was only a representation of an individual who cannot be identified and the message that someone who breached the order of God ones lived the arguments further goes on in giving the reality or the possibility of who the Belshazzar really stands to be and in addition to the various positions that had been discovered, another position in regard to the passage also says it in another way as Grabbe puts it that “The aim of the chapter is surely to depict an arrogant king who flouts the majesty of the true God by drinking out of the temple vessels from Jerusalem and, moreover, by praising his idolatrous gods while doing so.”⁵

The Silly Act of Belshazzar

The act of Belshazzar in drinking with the vessels of the house of God appears to be beyond just an ordinary event as the act was preceded by a celebration that took place during the time that shouldn't as there were surrounding enemies at the time of the feast.

The passage of Daniel chapter 5 presented the narration of the act of Belshazzar as a form of intentional molestation of Yahweh because the verse reads that “Belshazzar while he tasted the wine commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple in Jerusalem; that the king and his princes, his wives and his concubines

³*Encyclopedia Americana Vol. 3* (Danbury: Scholastic Library Publishing Inc., 2006), 530.

⁴John Calvin, *A Commentary on Daniel* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1966), 305.

⁵Lester L. Grabbe, “The Belshazzar of Daniel and The Belshazzar of History” in *Andrews University Seminary Studies, Vol. 26*. (1988). 63.

might drink therein.” (Dan. 5:2). John Walvoord also explained that, “The implication in the clause “whiles he tasted the wine” is that Belshazzar in his right mind probably would not have committed this sacrilegious act.”⁶ Following the idea from the previous section in this term paper, it had been revealed that Belshazzar was not the direct successor of Nebuchadnezzar which indicates that the vessels of Gold and silver had been in the temple of Merodach for years before his reign. The question to be posed now is why did the king thought of using the vessels of the temple of Yahweh in the midst of his tipsy act? The answer to the question could be that “it may have been that some drunk fancy seized him, it may have been that he had been warned that the prophets of Jehovah had foretold the overthrow of Babylon by Cyrus whose army where now in the neighborhood.”⁷

This could have been said to be the reason for his action but the fact discovered therein is that the king intentionally acted that way as verse 23 of that chapter tells that he lifted his heart against God. The action of Belshazzar was further discussed by John Calvin in talking about the observation of that feast where he expressed his mind that,

Here we must consider the providence of God in arranging the times of events so that the impious, when the time of their destruction is come cast themselves headlong of their own accord. This occurred to this wicked king. Wonderful indeed was the stupidity which prepared a splendid banquet filled with delicacies, while the city was besieged. For Cyrus has begun to besiege the city for a long time with a large army⁸

The point of Calvin here is telling that there is more to the act than the ordinary as the act was to bring to fulfillment the prophesy about the fall of Babylon and that could be very rational on the path of the reformer as the act really look stupid to be carried out at a particular point that the enemies are surrounding the city.

⁶www.walvoord.com *Daniel the key to Prophetic Revelation* (Accessed March 9, 2017).

⁷ Charles John Ellicott, *Ellicott's Commentary on the whole Bible: A Verse by Verse Explanation Vol. V* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.), 375.

⁸John Calvin, 306-307.

The act of Belshazzar was further refuted as Awokoya stated that "...Belshazzar's profane use of the sacred vessels Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple was an act of defiance against God's sovereignty".⁹ Thereby insinuating that the act on the part of the king was to molest, (so to say) the God of the Jews and the act was to diminish the sovereignty of God which made the act of God in the chapter to be instant and the writing was visible to all the witness of that event.

This chapter would be concluded on the note that there is the prophesy of Jeremiah that the kingdom of Babylon would fall but that singular act of Belshazzar wrought the anger of God against the entire nation to the extent that Belshazzar was killed that night and his subjects were enslaved that night. Probably Cyrus saw the instance as an opportunity to deal with the king as he is now drunk from feasting, in other words, he was feasting when he ought to be ready for war, what an exchange of priority.

Finger on the Wall

This section of the work is set to tell of the basically address the warning/verdict passed to Belshazzar through writing on the wall, the writing which could not be read by Belshazzar and other astrologers and wise men probably because God had blind folded them not to be able to read it only Daniel was then able to read the writing on the wall. Thus, the writing on the wall reads, MENE MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. These three words would quickly be discussed in this section of the paper. The interpretation of the writing would be guided by the interpretation given to them by the Daniel in chapter 5 verses 26-28.

The word "Mene" which appears twice in the inscription is seen to be found only once in the interpretation making some scholars to ascribe the second to be media or Medes which is not really substantial in support, although this has been the belief of many scholars for years but the position does not hold water to go by. But the meaning of the word is "Number" and it is being repeated for the sake of emphasizing the saying. Charles in his opinion puts it that "The days of Babylon are numbered; it is God Himself who has numbered them. "Mene" is used in the double

⁹S.O David Awokoya, *Daniel and Revelation: An Introduction to Biblical Apocalyptic Literature* (Oyo, Oyo State: Refrost Nig. Limited, 2016), 93.

sense of numbering and bringing to an end”.¹⁰ This proposes that the act was not of mortal but there was the divine influence upon the event as it went ahead to unwrap little by little.

This word is with the interpretation of weighing and he (Belshazzar) is found wanting signifying that he is not up to the expected level he ought to be. John expressed Daniel’s speech in a way that, here Daniel shews God so moderating his judgments, as if he was carrying a balance in his hand. The emblem is taken from mankind; for men know the use of the balance for accurate measurement. So also God is said to treat all things by weight and measure, since he does nothing with confusion, but uses moderation; and according to ordinary language, nothing is more or less than it should be.¹¹ The illustration of John in the above saying is something to go by as it presents that God is justified in any act he takes, it is only man that flouts the order of God.

Upharsin is the third word in the sentence on the wall apart from the one repeated. The word is split into two where the “U” means conjunction “and” and the “Pharsin” means the plural of Peres. The word signifies division and it also refers to the Persians. Making it clear that the kingdom had being taken from the Babylonians and now given to the Medes and Persians.

From the above explanations about the event that took place in Daniel 5, it would be discovered that Belshazzar was directly responsible for his misfortune and from the verdict that God sent to him through the finger on the wall and the interpretation given by Daniel and which thus paper has also analyzed, the act of Belshazzar was reaped by himself but the implication of the act was not limited to him alone but it also affected his subjects. And this paper also asserts that the thousand who were mentioned in verse 1 of the chapter were also “beneficiary” of the wrath of God on the land (possibly they are not citizens of the land).

Acts of Nigerian Government Rulers

This chapter is set to state in relation to the attitude of Belshazzar analyzed in Daniel chapter 5, what the people in Government are also doing today that the end result would be very hazardous

¹⁰C.J Ellicott, 377.

¹¹John Calvin, 343.

to those in power and even those that are subjected to them and fail to refute them from proceeding in the act. Because, there are some cases where the subjects will discover that a particular inhumane character is going on with the leader but because of what they will receive, they will rather decide to keep mute and the fellow persist in doing it but they have forgotten that “the watchman who fails to blow the whistle when danger is coming, would be held responsible for the blood of the victims” of that attack as Ezekiel 33 tells.

Abuse of Power

The saying is true that “Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely” Awojobi, talking about power said that, “Power can be defined as the capacity to influence others to do something they would not have done without having been influenced”¹² which connotes that the one exercising power can cause others to do contrary to their will at a given time. This act of abuse of power is common in life of the people in government and it appears that successive government and individual are building on this; they could not take the life of Belshazzar as a precaution to stop the act of abuse which they are in to. Belshazzar was discovered to have gone ahead to use the vessels of the house of God because he has the authority to command that the vessels be brought for his own use. This paper looks at the scenario from the perspective that the messengers might not be willing to bring the vessels for the king use as it had been in the treasury for years and they have heard of the history about it, but since it was an order from the king, they are compelled out of their own will to do that.

Misplacement of God

Another act of the people in government is the misplacement of God in the daily activities and even in making by-laws. The people in government today do not see any importance to include godly activities in their budget in other words they have sidelined God in the rulership of the citizens. Just as Belshazzar had heard of God and His activities in the time of his father, he still went ahead to lift his heart against God (vv. 23) and the end result was not rosy for him at all.

¹²Peter O. Awojobi, *Church Management* (Ilorin, Kwara State: Kingdom Power Communication, 2003), 55.

The government rulers today just like Belshazzar has looked down on God and this days it seem to more brutal than that of Belshazzar because in his own case, the judgment was immediate but because God appears to be lenient and merciful, He has been taken for granted and this should not be. As it is known that one of the theme of the book of Daniel is to reveal the sovereignty of God over the affairs of men and this was really established therein and the likes of Nebuchadnezzar who disrespected God, was sent to an “adventure” with animals in the forest where he lived for seven years without living like a normal man. And the same error these me f old committed and were punished for it, is the same that the people in government today are committing increasingly everyday because God is giving a long rope to pull.

Misplacement of Priority

On the note of wrong acts of the people in government in relation to the life of Belshazzar, it is discovered that the people in government today has dropped their priority for less important things, instead of addressing the immediate needs of the people and cleaning the tears on the poor thereby securing the nation from being affected by famine, they are into the act of promoting red carpet events that does not increased the economy status of h nation but rather it is to the detriments of the populace. Just as it has been said earlier from Calvin’s analysis of the act of Belshazzar where he referred to his act as “stupidity which prepared a banquet filled with delicacies while the city was besieged”.

Pride and Selfishness

This is the act of being basically filled with self. Awojobi speaks about self in relation to leaders that a leader that is ruled by the flesh (self) is carnal.¹³ Thus, there is nothing he sees wrong in trying to accumulate all wealth for himself and himself alone. The act of pride further goes on in manifesting in the life of the government leaders today where the heart is lifted up and the leader sees himself as the only one capable. The saying is true that “pride goes before a fall.” This act of pride in Belshazzar is found in the act of lifting himself against the Lord (v. 23) and just like this king, the leaders in the government today are self centered, proud and inconsiderate of their citizens in all they do, they are filled with what they can gain to their own self. They did not see the post of public service as a selfless position where the leader goes hungry for his followers to

¹³Peter O. Awojobi, 62.

be full and where they should go naked for their followers to be clothed. Instead, reverse is the case.

The Result of Belshazzar's Act

This paper would quickly analyze the end result of the actions taken by Belshazzar as a warning to the Nigerian rulers who are also in his shoes today as it is not disputable that there are some few individuals that are still responsible to their citizens but the majority of the bad eggs has caused those people who remain faithful to be seen but rather they are all painted black. The result in implication to the unrepentant government leaders are as follows:

Death

The first thing to note in the result of Belshazzar's act is that he died the night. The Bible stated it emphatically that Belshazzar was slain that same night that he committed that great treason to the Lord. Thereby revealing that the sin he sinned caused him his dear life possibly without a chance to turn back for repentance. Thus, this should also sound as a warning to the government leaders in their dealings that they should remember that God can decide to take their lives at any time he wants and no one will question him. And it is good to note that the kind of death that killed Belshazzar is not a befitting one for his status and also the leaders should take a look at history and learn their lessons as their death would be hazardous.

Fall of Babylon

Another effect of the act of Belshazzar was that he brought about the immediate fall of his nation which includes his subjects and his families, thus the act was not only suffered by him alone but all those he is governing over were partakers in the outcome of the act.

The people in government should remember that while they were seeking the public post, they were down and humble to the level of the populace and this people voted them into the various offices they are occupying. Thus, it will be an anathema if this same people would have to go through pains because of their sins and inhumane character.

Uplifted Enemy

It is not disputable that the Israelites saw the Babylonians as enemies and Daniel being one of the Israelites in captive was exalted in the kingdom even while the kingdom was about to be chartered like the “Broken China”, seeing this act, Wolvoord expressed his mind that,

The drama of the writing on the wall and its interpretation is now brought to its fulfillment as Belshazzar keeps his promise. Daniel is clothed with scarlet, a chain of gold put about his neck, and a proclamation issued that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom. All of these honors, however, were short-lived and useless, as Daniel well knew, and typical of the honors of this world. In its rise to power the Babylonian Empire had conquered Jerusalem, taken its inhabitants into captivity, looted its beautiful temple, and completely destroyed the city. Yet this empire was to have as its last official act the honoring of one of these captives who by divine revelation predicted not only the downfall of Babylon but the course of the times of the Gentiles until the Son of man should come from heaven.

Man may have the first word, but God will have the last word.¹⁴

This speech of walvoord is expressing that, despite being in the territory of the enemy, God still permit Daniel to shine and uplifted even among the citizen. He was not chastised for speaking the doom of the land but he was rather uplifted. The ideology behind this is that Daniel was shining when the nation that took him and his people captive are falling. Thus, he made the pronunciation that eventually cased great disaster for the kingdom. And the king not knowing what to do went ahead to honor his “enemy” without knowing it.

Same thing applicable to the people in government, rather than to be able to have the effrontery to punish someone that is speaking to the doom of the community, state, jurisdiction and event the nation as a whole, they will be powerless to do that as there will be deterioration in sovereignty of the state which in other words will lead to mockery of the entire nation.

Conclusion

¹⁴www.walvoord.com *Daniel the key to Prophetic Revelation* (Accessed March 9, 2017)

Luke 22:25 reads that “The Kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves benefactors”. This statement of Jesus was in reference to the people in power that are using the power in their own way of manipulating things to dance to their own tune. Making it known that there had been in existence the abuse of power for a very long time. The National Network Newspaper stated in talking about this verse of the bible where it stated that, “This is an accurate description of the way many high government officials have acted down through history, and also of the way many government official acts in Nigeria.”¹⁵

Just like the Belshazzar in Daniel 5, the leaders in government today have made themselves to be filled with self satisfaction and this has cost a lot of stagnancy and deterioration in the economic and moral life of the populace. They became the direct victim of the saying that, “power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” As it had been discussed at the course of this work, that the end of Belshazzar was nothing to write home about as he died in the prime of his days, making it clear that the use of power in ungodly manner is not profitable at the end and the example should explain that without further argument

This paper is therefore recommending that the leaders who are in power should take heed of their lapses and turn a new leaf as the wrath of God will be kindled against them if they refuse to turn away from their evil ways. The followers who are also in support of their evil ways because of the so-called benefits they are enjoying now should desist and caution those leaders to do the right thing so as not to suffer God’s wrath together when the anger of the Lord is poured. They should also note that the period of Belshazzar was not a period of grace. Therefore, the grace given to this dispensation should not be abused as the same God that is the GOD OF PEACE could also turn out to be the GOD OF WAR.

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¹⁵The National Network Newspapers - Vol. 9 NO 12 March 28 - April 3, 2012.

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