

## 507 Light, wisdom and understanding

(This Weekly Reflection was first written on the morning of 8<sup>th</sup> September 2022. Her Majesty the Queen died that afternoon, necessitating a new Reflection (504 “Two Days”). As the theme of this Reflection will be ever-relevant - the need for God-honouring leadership, now with particular regard to our new King and new Prime Minister - it serves well as this week’s Reflection, with a new title but with its original wording unaltered):

“Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand” (Daniel 5.1, KJV).

Belshazzar of Babylon served as “the second string” in a co-regency with his father, King Nabonidus. In 539 BC this “great feast” was a case of Belshazzar “living it up” with his pals while his father was away elsewhere. On such occasions it was the custom for the host to sit apart from his guests on a raised platform, which explains the expression that he “drank wine before the thousand”.

It was quite a party! To show off yet more, and to demonstrate Babylonian supremacy over Judah, Belshazzar commanded that “the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple in Jerusalem be brought in, so that “the king, and his princes his wives, and his concubines, might drink therein” (from 5.2; apparently the word “father” used here with reference to Nebuchadnezzar could have at least eight different meanings concerning an ancestor! - and in this case means “grandfather”).

As Belshazzar knew very well, those “golden and silver vessels”, which had been made in the times of David and Solomon, were used for sacred purposes within the temple of the Lord (II Samuel 8.11 / I Kings 7.51 / II Kings 25.9,15). So for him to use them in a wild, pagan “booze-up” seemed the jolliest of fun! “They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone” (Daniel 5.4).

Then we come to this wonderful passage – “In that same hour came forth the fingers of a man’s hand, and wrote ... upon the plaister of the wall ... and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. Then the king’s countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another” (from 5.5-6, KJV). Marvellous! – and famously pictured by Rembrandt -



The mood of the king and his guests changed rather abruptly! Despite the fine reward offered (5.7), none of the astrologers, soothsayers or wise men “had a clue”. Then the queen “came into the banquet house” – (interestingly, she had not been at “the great feast” herself). She spoke of “a man in thy kingdom”, Daniel, known as Belteshazzar, who possessed “light, understanding and wisdom”, having “an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, interpreting of dreams, and shewing hard sentences, and dissolving of doubts ... let Daniel be called” (from 5.11-12).

In came Daniel, and after setting the scene regarding Nebuchadnezzar’s finally knowing “that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and [that] he appointeth over it whomsoever he will”, Daniel spoke plainly to Belshazzar – “thou ... hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this ... and the God in whose hand thy breath [is], and whose [are] all thy ways, hast thou not glorified” (from 5.21-23).

So now, MENE - Belshazzar’ kingdom was finished; TEKEL - in the balances he had been found wanting, and PERES - his kingdom was to be divided, and given to others (from vv.25-28). At least Belshazzar rewarded Daniel as promised (v. 29), but then, “In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain” (v.30), by the invading Persian army which had literally walked into unsuspecting Babylon without firing a shot.

What salutary lessons can be learned from these events ever since! On a smaller though still important stage for example, those words on the

will apply to Boris Johnson, a man who has lost his Prime Ministership by his own slippery behaviour and who refuses to acknowledge any responsibility for his downfall; and history is filled with similar downfalls of powerful figures who forgot their accountability to Almighty God our Creator.

By contrast, our gracious Queen Elizabeth, now evidently feeling her age, is a shining example of “a powerful figure” who remained humble and faithful to the Lord throughout her long life and reign. When the Lord does call her home, whenever that may be, she, (along with all others “in Christ”), will be given a greater crown than she has ever encountered, “a crown of righteousness”, at present “laid up” for her (from II Timothy 4.8).

Meanwhile we pray for our Queen, and we pray for her new, fifteenth Prime Minister Liz Truss, who greatly needs the help of “a man ... of light, and understanding, and wisdom”. The Lord Jesus Christ comes to mind!

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