

Daniel 5:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified:

Analysis

Daniel specifies the sacrilege: 'But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee...and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified.' The indictment contrasts Belshazzar's worship of lifeless idols with the living God who controls his very breath. The irony is devastating—praising objects 'which see not, nor hear, nor know' while ignoring God who holds his 'breath' and controls 'all thy ways.' Every breath Belshazzar took was gift from the God he insulted.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern temple vessels captured in warfare were placed in victors' temples, symbolizing one god's supremacy over another. Nebuchadnezzar had stored Jerusalem temple vessels in Babylon god-houses (1:2). Belshazzar's use of these sacred objects for drunken revelry while praising Babylonian gods

constituted deliberate sacrilege. The catalog of idol materials (silver, gold, bronze, iron, wood, stone) mocks their composition from created matter. This echoes prophetic ridicule of idolatry throughout Scripture (Isaiah 44:9-20; Psalm 115:4-8).

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does the contrast between lifeless idols and the living God who controls our breath expose idolatry's ultimate foolishness?
2. What does Belshazzar's use of sacred vessels teach about how treating holy things with contempt reveals the heart's rebellion against God?

Interlinear Text

דְּ וְלֹמַדְתִּי אֶת־הַתְּרוּמָה מִתְּשִׁמְעֵי אֱלֹהִים מִרְאֵת־לְעֵינֶיךָ
 thyself against the Lord of heaven But hast lifted up the vessels H1768
 H5922 H4756 H8065 H7313 H3984

וְכִבְרַבְבָּן יְהֹוָה וְאֶת־בֵּית־הַמִּלְכָה
 of his house and they have brought before thee and thou and thy lords H7261
 H1005 H858 H6925 H607 H7261

וְלֹא־לְכָבֵד אֶת־בָּהָרָה שֶׁתִּשְׁתַּחַת־יְהֹוָה
 thy wives and thy concubines wine have drunk H0 and the God H426
 H7695 H3904 H2562 H8355 H0 H426

דְּ וְאֶבֶן אֶת־אֶת־פְּרַזְלָה אֶת־נְחַשְּׁה אֶת־דְּבָבָה כְּסֶפֶא
 of silver and gold of brass iron wood and stone H1768 H69
 H3702 H1722 H5174 H6523 H636 H69

לֹא שָׁמַעַת יְהֹוָה יְדַעַת יְהֹוָה
 hast thou not which see hast thou not hear hast thou not know H3046
 H3809 H2370 H3809 H8086 H3809 H3046

בַּיָּד הַנְּשָׁמֶת מִתְּשִׁבְבָּשָׁת וְלֹא־לְכָבֵד
 in them and thou hast praised and the God H1768 thy breath in whose hand H3028
 H7624 H426 H5396 H3028

פְּרוּתָה לֹא אֶרְחַת מִכְלָה
 is and whose are all thy ways H0 hast thou not glorified H1922
 H3606 H735 H3809 H1922

Additional Cross-References

Job 12:10 (Parallel theme): In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind.

Daniel 4:37 (Resurrection): Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.

Isaiah 2:12 (References Lord): For the day of the LORD of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low:

Isaiah 37:23 (Parallel theme): Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? even against the Holy One of Israel.

Jeremiah 10:23 (References Lord): O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.

Job 31:4 (Parallel theme): Doth not he see my ways, and count all my steps?

Proverbs 20:24 (References Lord): Man's goings are of the LORD; how can a man then understand his own way?

Jeremiah 50:29 (References Lord): Call together the archers against Babylon: all ye that bend the bow, camp against it round about; let none thereof escape: recompense her according to her work; according to all that she hath done, do unto her: for she hath been proud against the LORD, against the Holy One of Israel.

Hebrews 4:13 (Parallel theme): Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

Isaiah 37:19 (References God): And have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them.