

Daniel 5:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone.

Analysis

While drinking from Jerusalem's holy vessels, the revelers 'praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone.' This catalog of materials emphasizes idolatry's absurdity: worshiping man-made objects rather than the living God. The comprehensive list (six materials) suggests Babylon's pantheon—multiple idols made from various substances, all inanimate, all impotent. The juxtaposition is stark: vessels consecrated to the living God are used to honor dead idols. This reversal—treating holy things as profane while treating profane things as holy—epitomizes covenant rebellion. The act combines multiple sins: idolatry, sacrilege, pride, and drunkenness. It represents the fullness of ungodliness provoking immediate divine judgment. Within moments, the handwriting appears (v.5), bringing terror and doom. This teaches that God tolerates much, but certain provocations—particularly direct mockery of His holiness combined with idolatrous worship—trigger swift response.

Historical Context

Babylon's polytheism worshiped multiple deities: Marduk (chief god), Nebo (god of wisdom), Ishtar (goddess of war and love), and numerous others. Archaeological discoveries reveal elaborate cult statues made from precious metals, brass, iron, wood overlaid with gold, and carved stone. These idols received daily offerings, ritual washings, and ceremonial processions. The feast's participants praised these inanimate objects while drinking from vessels consecrated to Yahweh—the ultimate irony. Ancient paganism believed gods inhabited their images; biblical

faith affirmed one transcendent God who cannot be represented materially (Exodus 20:4-5). The contrast between living God and dead idols is prophetically mocked in Isaiah 44:9-20 and Psalm 115:4-8. Belshazzar's feast validated these critiques: while praising impotent idols, the living God wrote judgment on the wall.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does the catalog of idol materials (gold, silver, brass, iron, wood, stone) emphasize idolatry's absurdity?
2. What modern 'gods' do people worship despite their obvious impotence and man-made nature?
3. Why is combining sacrilege with idolatry particularly provocative to God?

Interlinear Text

נָחַשׁ א	וְכֶסֶף א	זָהָב א	לְאֱלֹהֵי י	וְשִׁבְחוּ	חֲמֶכָּה א	אֲשֶׁת יו
of brass	and of silver	of gold	the gods	and praised	wine	They drank
H5174	H3702	H1722	H426	H7624	H2562	H8355

אֶבֶן א	עֵץ א	פְּרָזֶל א
and of stone	of wood	of iron
H69	H636	H6523

Additional Cross-References

Daniel 5:23 (Resurrection): 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:

Habakkuk 2:19 (Resurrection): Woe unto him that saith to the wood, Awake; to the dumb stone, Arise, it shall teach! Behold, it is laid over with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in the midst of it.

Isaiah 42:8 (Resurrection): I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.

Acts 17:29 (References God): Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.

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