

CORE Seminar
Spring 2024
Book of Daniel: Part 1 [Chapters 1-6]
Session 6: Daniel 5

ICE BREAKER

If you could have an endless supply of any food, what would you get?

What is one goal (main goal) you'd like to accomplish during your lifetime?

INTRODUCTION

Ok...let's talk about where we are. After 4 chapters in Daniel, King Neb is gone. He reigned for 43 years and then died in 562 BC. We won't go into it here – but after Neb died there was a succession of rulers – and within a period of 20-25 years all that Neb had achieved as king of Babylon is gone.

So, as we move into **chapter 5** we need to know two things:

1. **Number 1** is that the Babylonian army has been defeated by the **Persians**. As a result, the Persians have marched on Babylon and are actually fully encamped around the walls of Babylon.
2. **Number 2**, the current king of Babylon is Nabonidus... and Nabonidus had a problem. His problem is that he serves the Egyptian gods – specifically the moon god “Sin” - and that doesn't really go over well with the Babylonians – who worship the god Marduk. So, Nabonidus remains king but is moved out of Babylon to Arabia [500 miles from Babylon] – he's a king in **exile**.

His son is Belshazzar. He acts as the king's Regent in Babylon – which means he rules in his dad's place while in Babylon. He's number 2! [**Verses 7, 16 & 29 will make more sense if we realize this. It is why Belshazzar mentions that he would give away “3rd place” in the kingdom. He was 2nd and his father – Nabonidus – is first.**] And, now you know why - as we begin **Daniel 5** – that Belshazzar is on the throne.

And guys let me tell you - this chapter is a hard lesson to teach. The primary reason – is that this chapter deals with God's **judgment**. And teaching God's judgment and hearing about God's judgment is very difficult for us. I don't think any of you would say, **“I really like reading about God judging people. It gives me the warm and fuzzies.”** But, in this chapter, we will see the judgment of God – and Belshazzar will see the judgment of God. We will also see

again the truth of **Daniel 4:25**, “*that the Most High is ruler over human kingdoms, and he gives them to anyone he wants.*”

And this is where we begin **chapter 5**... so, let’s start off with a prayer and then we’ll move to **Daniel 5**.

PRAYER

Have someone in your group read Daniel 5:1-4

King Belshazzar made a great feast for a thousand of his lords and drank wine in front of the thousand.

² Belshazzar, when he tasted the wine, commanded that the vessels of gold and of silver that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple in Jerusalem be brought, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. ³ Then they brought in the golden vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. ⁴ They drank wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

Remember, when **chapter 5** starts, Babylon is under siege by the Medio-Persian army. The Persians had completely encircled the city. While their enemies were invading, Belshazzar seemed oblivious, with little care for the goings on outside the city walls. So, he throws this big **party** - he has this feast to show that he can. He invites his wives [plural] and his concubines [again, plural] to this party.

So, how can a king under siege have such confidence to throw a party with the Persian army camped outside his gates? Here’s why – Babylon was famous for its massive and seemingly impregnable walls.

- Babylonian walls were 56 miles long
- They were 350 feet high – think about 35 story massive skyscrapers
- The walls were 90 feet thick

And here’s another thing... a siege would not work because the Euphrates River runs through the city. So, Babylon can grow their own food. It was said to have twenty years of food and a water supply.

Thus the feast was likely partly due to Belshazzar’s arrogance in thinking that they were invincible. And Belshazzar not only throws a party but he’s going to double down and bring in the Temple vessels King Neb confiscated from Jerusalem.

Not only is he going to use them BUT he is also going to idol worship WITH the confiscated vessels taken from the Temple in Jerusalem. He is spitting in the eye of God when using them AND then toasting the false gods of Babylon

This dude is CRAZY – he has a need to feel significant. So the servants bring in the vessels, and **“they drank wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.”**

QUESTIONS: What kind of feast do you think this was?

- **What was going on outside the Babylonian walls at the time of this feast?** [*The Persians were laying siege to Babylon.*]

What attitude can you see from Belshazzar in these verses?

Why do you think Belshazzar viewed himself as indestructible or untouchable?

- **Are there times when we view ourselves as indestructible or untouchable?**

Why do you think he specifically brought out the vessels from the Jewish temple to desecrate?

- **How do Belshazzar’s actions mock God and His glory?**
- **What are some ways we mock God’s glory?**

How and why does sin make us foolish?

Have someone in your group read Daniel 5:5-9

⁵ Immediately the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, opposite the lampstand. And the king saw the hand as it wrote. ⁶ Then the king's color changed, and his thoughts alarmed him; his limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together. ⁷ The king called loudly to bring in the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers. The king declared to the wise men of Babylon, “Whoever reads this writing, and shows me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around his neck and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.” ⁸ Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or make known to the king the interpretation. ⁹ Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, and his color changed, and his lords were perplexed.

Ok...so your Belshazzar – feeling pretty good about your position in the walls. Throw yourself a party. Invite all the wrong people – bring in the vessels from Jerusalem. Use them to worship idols and false gods. I mean, I don’t know what kind of picture you have of

Belshazzar floating through your head – but this guy doesn't seem like the sharpest pencil in the box.

And in the middle of his party, **“the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, opposite the lampstand.”** And this didn't happen discreetly – everyone saw the fingers appear and write on the wall. And these fingers, are of the “hand of God.” God is visibly showing up. In fact, He is never not there. In this instance, He is making Himself visible by the finger writing on the wall.

And God writes on the wall – not on a piece of paper or a scroll – but on the wall. And the hand writes on the wall. And it doesn't write, “look how cool y'all are!” Nope, it writes to reveal who Belshazzar really is.

And when the finger appears – Belshazzar changes color and sobers up fast. [verse 6] **“Then the king's color changed, and his thoughts alarmed him; his limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together.”** When it mentions that his limbs gave away and his knees knocked together – it means that the joints of his hips were loosened. Which in the original language refers to the fact that Belshazzar soiled himself. He lost complete control of his bowels and his bladder. This man was **scared**.

He does the same thing Neb did and yelled out for the professionals to interpret the writing. He says whoever interprets would be #3 in the kingdom – after his daddy and Belshazzar... and did I mention that there is an army outside the walls? *[how long will this promotion really last??]*

Why is he not calling out to the “gods” that he was just toasting with the vessels from Jerusalem? Because he KNOWS! They aren't real! He made them or had them carved. They can't read or answer what the hand wrote.

And as we will discover, in our next section, being scared doesn't make him **smart** AND being helpless does not make him **humble**.

QUESTIONS: When the message is written, Belshazzar can't read the message and he is overtaken with so much fear that “his limbs give way.” Even though he can't read what's on the wall, why do you think that his first reaction is one of fear and dread?

What kinds of things does God use to wake us up to our foolishness or our sin?

- **Do we listen?**

Have someone in your group read Daniel 5:10-12

¹⁰ The queen, because of the words of the king and his lords, came into the banqueting hall, and the queen declared, “O king, live forever! Let not your thoughts alarm you or your color change. ¹¹ There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the spirit of the holy gods. In the days of your father, light and understanding and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods were found in him, and King Nebuchadnezzar, your father—your father the king—made him chief of the magicians, enchanters, Chaldeans, and astrologers, ¹² because an excellent spirit, knowledge, and understanding to interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar. Now let Daniel be called, and he will show the interpretation.”

Basically – even the queen looks at Belshazzar with disgust. To give the cliffs notes of her speech, the queen says, “You are not Neb you aren’t even close... In fact, you are several steps down from Neb.” So, just do what King Neb did and call on Daniel. Through God, Daniel **“will show the interpretation.”**

QUESTIONS: Why do you think in verse 12 that the queen mentioned Daniel’s Babylonian name and then his Hebrew name?

Let’s keep reading

Have someone in your group read Daniel 5:13-28

¹³ Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king answered and said to Daniel, “You are that Daniel, one of the exiles of Judah, whom the king my father brought from Judah. ¹⁴ I have heard of you that the spirit of the gods is in you, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you. ¹⁵ Now the wise men, the enchanters, have been brought in before me to read this writing and make known to me its interpretation, but they could not show the interpretation of the matter. ¹⁶ But I have heard that you can give interpretations and solve problems. Now if you can read the writing and make known to me its interpretation, you shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around your neck and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.”

¹⁷ Then Daniel answered and said before the king, “Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another. Nevertheless, I will read the writing to the king and make known to him the interpretation. ¹⁸ O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father kingship and greatness and glory and majesty. ¹⁹ And because of the greatness that he gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whom he would, he killed, and whom he would, he kept alive; whom he would, he raised up, and whom he would, he

humbled. ²⁰ But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit was hardened so that he dealt proudly, he was brought down from his kingly throne, and his glory was taken from him. ²¹ He was driven from among the children of mankind, and his mind was made like that of a beast, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. He was fed grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, until he knew that the Most High God rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he will. ²² And you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this, ²³ but you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven. And the vessels of his house have been brought in before you, and you and your lords, your wives, and your concubines have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see or hear or know, but the God in whose hand is your breath, and whose are all your ways, you have not honored.

²⁴ “Then from his presence the hand was sent, and this writing was inscribed. ²⁵ And this is the writing that was inscribed: Mene, Mene, Tekel, and Parsin. ²⁶ This is the interpretation of the matter: Mene, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; ²⁷ Tekel, you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting; ²⁸ Peres, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.”

Daniel is before Belshazzar and – even in his fear – Belshazzar attempts to speak down to Daniel by calling him, **“one of the exiles of Judah, whom the king my father brought from Judah.”** He even attempts to tempt Daniel with that “highly regarded” 3rd position in the kingdom – which has no value.

Daniel obviously doesn’t have much respect for Belshazzar. He too realizes that Belshazzar is no King Neb. He tells him to keep his promotion – and he interprets the writing. And in **verses 22-23**, we see Daniel’s interpretation and we see 14 uses of “you” or “your.” It’s a rapid fire attack on Belshazzar’s blasphemy against God.

Now remember, Daniel is in the midst of a drunken party – and he doesn’t mention the drunken party. He mentions the blasphemy against God. And Daniel interprets the writing IN FRONT of everyone.

- **Mene, Mene, Tekel, and Parsin** - this means: **Numbered, Numbered, Weighed and Divided.**
- **Mene, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; ²⁷ Tekel, you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting; ²⁸ Peres, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians**

Belshazzar's sin has been laid bare and "God is closing the books on Belshazzar's kingdom. "God's measuring standard proves the king to be a lightweight, a loser. He challenged the Most High God and **lost**."

QUOTE: Martyn Lloyd Jones

The reason we feel as if divine wrath can easily be overstated is that we do not feel the true weight of sin. You will never make yourself feel that you are a sinner, because there is a mechanism in you as a result of sin that will always be defending you against every accusation. We are all on very good terms with ourselves, and we can always put up a good case for ourselves. Even if we try to make ourselves feel that we are sinners, we will never do it. There is only one way to know that we are sinners, and that is to have some dim, glimmering conception of God.

That dim, glimmering conception of God is that He is the Ruler of the universe – the Judge of all. He is the One who hands down all final judgments.

And because of who God is – in His Holiness – **He has to judge. And this means He does not have to always show mercy... He doesn't always have to save [like we saw last week with King Neb]**. In this judgment on Belshazzar we see a clear picture of the consequence for all unholiness has to be **judgment**.

QUESTIONS: What is God's judgment on Belshazzar?

- **What does this mean for Belshazzar and his kingdom?**
- **Is it final?**
 - **How do we know this?**

Have someone in your group read Daniel 5:29-31

²⁹ Then Belshazzar gave the command, and Daniel was clothed with purple, a chain of gold was put around his neck, and a proclamation was made about him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

³⁰ That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed. ³¹ And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.

Belshazzar doesn't learn and he doesn't honor God, instead... he honors Daniel – and dresses him up like MR. T. He even gives him the corner penthouse office in a kingdom that -

¹ Daniel Akin, Christ Centered Exposition: Daniel. Page 63.

Daniel just said - was going to be destroyed in like 4 minutes – because Assyria is still camped around the walls!

We see a picture of Belshazzar's disillusionment. He does heed God's judgment through Daniel's words. He doesn't feel conviction and he doesn't **repent**. Belshazzar doesn't feel judged. But in reality, HE IS JUDGED! And that night, he receives the judgment of God and dies.

And we see, that God doesn't wring His hands trying to figure out who is going to take the throne. He already had the successor ready to go – Darius the Mede.

QUESTIONS: What does the end of chapter 5 teach us about God and man?

God again demonstrates His control over kings and kingdoms and that His plan will not be thwarted. How does this encourage you?

- **How does this challenge you?**

How does Daniel 5 inspire you to understand and respond to the sovereignty of God in your life?

CONCLUSION

Daniel really writes each chapter as an encapsulated moment in history. He's not trying to give us the history of Babylon, OR even the history of Israel while in captivity. He is giving us the fulfillment of God's plans, and purposes, and promises FOR His people AND through His people. He is also revealing God's judgment against those who blaspheme His name. This is what we saw today – the Babylonian Empire is no more as we end **chapter 5**. This chapter serves as a reminder of the consequences of pride, arrogance, and disrespect toward God, as well as the certainty of divine judgment upon those who defy His authority.

This is also a reminder for all of us. As we study the book of Daniel, we need to pay attention to everything that is written in Daniel so that we may know, believe and dwell in the heart of God!