

Lecture #6

Daniel 5:1-30

When Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream, he told him that Babylon would be replaced by another power (Dan. 2:39). Daniel 5 is the place Babylon literally goes down. But it is also the place where God shows He is God!

One of the most "complicated problems" in the entire book of Daniel is the controversy concerning the individual who takes center stage in chapter 5—Belshazzar. The thing that makes this complicated is the fact that many historical documents do not name him as being a Babylonian king. In fact, histories such as those written by Josephus and Berosus suggest that Nebuchadnezzar died in 562 B.C. and then was replaced by other kings; Merodach, Neriglissar, Laborosoarchod and Nabonidus. But nowhere is the name Belshazzar given. As a result, the book of Daniel has been attacked as not being historically accurate. For years the book of Daniel was alleged to be unreliable, until a cylinder was discovered which contained the name Belshazzar in which he is called the son of Nabonidus.

In 1854, a British counsel (J.G. Taylor) was exploring ruins in southern Iraq and he came across several small cylinders. The cylinders contained inscriptions that had been written at the command of Nabonidus, who ruled Babylon from 555-559 B.C. **One of the cylinders was a prayer for a long life for Nabonidus and his oldest son Belshazzar.**

It is known, according to Herodotus, the Greek historian, that Nabonidus left Babylon for awhile to fight the Medes and Persians and he stayed at the oasis of Teima in modern day Saudi Arabia. During that time, he appointed his son Belshazzar to be king in his absence. Belshazzar was a real person, in the royal line of Nebuchadnezzar who did reign about 553 B.C., about nine years after his death. Belshazzar's mother—Nitrocris—was Nebuchadnezzar's daughter (Unger, p. 155).

The story in chapter 5 occurs about seventy years after Jerusalem had been captured in chapter 1. We may recall that in chapter 2, Daniel predicted that after Nebuchadnezzar there would arise another kingdom which is inferior to the Babylonian kingdom (2:39). This chapter fulfills that prediction. Now about twenty-five years have elapsed since the events of chapter 4 and the events of chapter 5. During those twenty-five years, Nebuchadnezzar died. Nebuchadnezzar was succeeded in 562 B.C. by Evil-Merodach, who was killed in 560 B.C. He was succeeded by Neriglissar, Nebuchadnezzar's son-in-law, who died in 556 B.C. He was succeeded by Laborosoarchod, the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, who was assassinated after less than a year. He was succeeded by Nabonidus in 556 B.C., who reigned from 556 B.C. until 539 B.C. when conquered by the Medes. Belshazzar was Nabonidus' son who reigned when his father was away.

WHEN LEADERS BECOME SO ARROGANT THAT THEY SECULARIZE THAT WHICH GOD DEEMS SACRED, GOD WILL EVENTUALLY REMOVE THAT LEADERSHIP AND IN THE PROCESS HE WILL RAISE HIS FAITHFUL PEOPLE TO POSITIONS OF HONOR.

This chapter is a warning to any who think God just sits idly by watching arrogant people make a mockery of His sacred things. Although His judgment does not come immediately, it does come eventually.

Daniel 5:1-4 – The party of King Belshazzar .

Belshazzar throws a huge party featuring music, wine, women and laughter. **At this party Belshazzar will make a fatal mistake when he decides he will mock God.**

Now the background of this party in Babylon is bizarre. The Medes and Persians had already captured Belshazzar's father and all of the surrounding territory around Babylon. As this all was taking place, Belshazzar throws a wine drinking feast and party to perhaps bolster support and a false sense of security that everything was okay. **Verse 1** indicates that Belshazzar was drinking from some kind of pedestal position because he was "in the presence of the thousand." When archeologists excavated the area they discovered a huge hall that was sixty feet wide and 172 feet long.

Verse 2 indicates that he gave orders to get the sacred gold and silver vessels taken from the temple of Jerusalem and bring them so that his nobles and wives and concubines could drink out of them. Herodotus said this became a drunken orgy dedicated to pagan "gods." Belshazzar is basically saying I can do what I want and I do not fear any God of Israel. Notice the verse says he did this when he "tasted the wine." This may mean he did this as he drank, or he did it before he was drunk, while he was still able to taste the wine. In other words, he arrogantly knew what he was doing when he ordered them to get the sacred things and the crowd cheered. But to God, this was absolutely detestable.

Daniel 5:5 – The response of God .

Suddenly there appeared the fingers of a man's hand that wrote on the plastered wall. **God values the written word.** The exact spot where this appeared was well lit—"opposite the lampstand." Some believe that this was the seven branched candlestick from Jerusalem's Temple. This would not be missed.

God is presently writing at least three books:

1. Book of sinful condemnatory works for those who do not believe on Christ (Rev. 20:12-13).
2. Book of eternal life for those who do believe on Christ (Rev. 20:12).
3. Book of remembrance works for those who are faithful (Malachi 3:16-17).

Daniel 5:6-9 – The reaction of Belshazzar .

(Reaction #1) - The reaction of his face—it became pale. **5:6a**

(Reaction #2) - The reaction of his thoughts—was alarmed. **5:6b**

(Reaction #3) - The reaction of his body—hip joints went slack and knees started knocking. **5:6c**

(Reaction #4) - The reaction of his voice—he called all wise and religious people to interpret.

5:7-8

(Reaction #5) - The reaction of his thoughts and face. **5:9**

This proud, puffed up king was now a shivering, shaking, sniveling coward. There was nothing he could do to stop the judgment of God.

Daniel 5:10-12 – The reaction of the queen.

Josephus claims this was Belshazzar's grandmother. It is quite obvious that when this happened, Daniel was not present. Daniel was apparently not one of the 1,000 who got an invitation to this party. He was kind of living his life in obscurity. Daniel was not part of the high echelon, the cabinet elite. In fact, historians say that after the death of Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel was banished and sent away from the throne. He had been out of sight and out of the political loop for about ten years (*Jeremiah*, p. 99). But during that time he was still a powerful man of God. He was still a faithful man of God. He was still highly esteemed by God. Two observations:

- 1) Just because some are in the loop does not mean they are right with God;
- 2) Just because one is not in the loop does not mean he is not right with God.

The queen entered and told the king that there was one who could unravel this and his name was Daniel. God can surface the power of His man in situations that are bizarre. Here is Daniel being summoned to a wine drinking party, because God has so moved at this party and now his instruction, his leadership, his knowledge is needed and wanted.

Daniel 5:13-16 – The king asks Daniel to read and interpret the inscription.

As in all other episodes, the wisdom of secular leaders cannot figure out or solve matters pertaining to God's future and even pertaining to present day life. Human, godless leaders are in a fog as to what God was saying or doing, and only Daniel could give sense to the situation.

Daniel 5:17-21 – Daniel answers the king by rehearsing what happened to Nebuchadnezzar.

Nebuchadnezzar had been given his authority by God and he left God out and became proud and arrogant so God humbled him. That is precisely what God was going to do to Belshazzar.

Daniel 5:22-23 – Daniel informs Belshazzar that he had not humbled himself before God.

Belshazzar knew what God had done to Nebuchadnezzar, but he still proudly exalted himself by daring to take the sacred vessels of God and use them at his wine drinking party. He had not glorified God, but had demeaned God in this. Daniel was not afraid to tell the truth of God even to a godless king who could sentence him to die. True men of God do not back down from presenting truth just because the situation is not conducive to it. Daniel was no milquetoast preacher; he aims his message straight at Belshazzar even though it means his end.

Daniel 5:24-28 – Daniel interprets the inscription for Belshazzar.

"Mene, Mene"—counted, counted and numbered. God is the great counter of sin.

"Tekel"—weighed. God weighs the individual as sovereign Judge and Jury.

"Upharsin"—is the plural of "peres" which means two—your kingdom is divided into two powers—the Medes and the Persians.

Daniel gave a word-by-word breakdown of what was written. Notice carefully how Daniel approaches God's Word—word for word in the exact order God gave it.

God found Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom lacking and He was taking it away and giving it to the Medes and Persians.

God weighs what leadership does. If what they are doing is wrong, He will eventually intervene and put an end to it.

Daniel 5:29-30 – Belshazzar rewards Daniel and is killed.

God had His hand on His man Daniel and He also had His hand against Belshazzar. On the same night Daniel is honored, Belshazzar is killed. It is interesting that Belshazzar's last official act before his death was to honor a man of God.

According to Herodotus and Xenophon, the night of the banquet the enemy diverted the Euphrates through a canal that flowed into a lake and that enabled the soldiers to enter under the gates on October 12, 539 B.C.. The Babylonian power was gone.

What a bizarre party—it starts out festive and ends frightening. That is the way it will be for many. Life is a party. Nothing is sacred. Things seem to be going good. That will all end very quickly. The judgment of God will come and humble the proud. It will break the arrogant and crush those who exalted themselves. Humble yourself or you may be certain you will be humbled.

STUDY QUESTIONS – LECTURE #6
(Daniel 5:1-30)

1. Discuss the things that happened in the time gap between chapters 4 and 5.

A time gap of 25 years - Nebuchadnezzar dies and is replaced by 5 different kings until Nabonidus whose son was Belshazzar.

2. Identify Belshazzar.

Belshazzar was the son of Nabonidus who reigned when his father was away.

3. State the bizarre background of Belshazzar's party.

The Medes and Persians had captured Babylon and he has a party.