

THRIVING IN BABYLON • THE JUDGMENT AND GRACE OF GOD • DANIEL 5:1-31 • 6/18/2023

# MAIN POINT

We are working through a sermon series called: Thriving in Babylon that covers Daniel chapters 1-6. It's not easy to live a godly life in an increasingly godless society. An Old Testament hero named Daniel, shows us that it can be done. He not only survived but thrived and impacted an entire empire while he was at it.

Today's sermon will focus on The handwriting on the wall - Daniel 5.

However, this lesson take a similar passage in a new direction. The theme of this lesson is: Anyone can humble themselves and be accepted by the Lord.

# INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Did you ever misbehave as a child and have one of your parents tell you that they would deal with it when you got home? What was worse for you in those times: the actual punishment or the anticipation of punishment?**

**What are the purposes of punishment? What are the dangers of it?**

Many, many children have trembled at the words, “Just wait until your father gets home.” Many children have dreaded taking their report cards home from school when they’ve gotten bad grades. It’s so much fun to neglect homework and to play with friends, but eventually, we wind up paying the price for our neglect.

God is just, and because He is just, He will not ignore wickedness. Sin may be fun for a season, but eventually we must pay the consequences for our actions. This is a lesson King Belshazzar would learn in Daniel 5. Fortunately for those who believe, the atonement that Christ made on the cross will deliver us from the punishment we are due. But for

those that do not embrace Christ by faith, they have nothing to look forward to except “a terrifying expectation of judgment” (Hebrews 10:27).

# UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

## ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ DANIEL 5:1-9

**Why do you think the writer mentions that Belshazzar brought in the vessels from the temple under the inﬂuence of wine?**

**What do you think King Belshazzar was so afraid of? Was it only the disembodied hand that frightened him?**

King Belshazzar was showing oﬀ his wealth in front of his 1,000 guests. In the middle of this celebration, Belshazzar had too much to drink, and to show oﬀ even more, he ordered the things from the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem to be brought in. The writer of Daniel mentions that Belshazzar was under the inﬂuence of wine to indicate he was not using good judgment. In verse 22 of this chapter, Daniel indicates that Belshazzar knew what the Lord had done to his predecessor Nebuchadnezzar, and yet Belshazzar still did not fear the Lord.

So Belshazzar and his guests used the vessels dedicated to the Lord God to praise their own false gods. Belshazzar was afraid, not just because of the disembodied ﬁngers writing on the wall, but because he probably remembered what had happened to Nebuchadnezzar. The hand-writing on the wall would have indeed been terrifying, but knowing that you had oﬀended the God of Israel by your foolish conduct would be even more terrifying!

## ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ DANIEL 5:13-21.

**What do you think of Daniel’s reply to King Belshazzar’s oﬀer? Why wasn’t Daniel still a high ranking oﬃcer from the days of Nebuchadnezzar?**

**Why do you think Daniel reminds Belshazzar of Nebuchadnezzar and his rule?**

Belshazzar tried to be complementary of Daniel by telling him that he had heard that Daniel had “the spirit of the gods” in him. The problem was that Belshazzar should have known better, but since he didn’t know better, Daniel set him straight. He told Belshazzar that “the Most High God gave sovereignty, greatness, glory, and majesty” to his predecessor Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel served the Most High God, not the gods of Babylon.

Daniel had no interest in Belshazzar’s oﬀer for a couple of reasons. One, as we will see, judgment was about to fall on Belshazzar and Babylon. Secondly, Daniel had already been in power before in Nebuchadnezzar’s court. Perhaps he simply had no interest in it, but most likely Daniel knew that anything Belshazzar oﬀered was practically worthless. Finally, Daniel did not interpret on behalf of the Lord just for monetary gain. He came to give the Lord’s Word to the King so that others might learn to fear the Lord.

## ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ DANIEL 5:22-31.

**Why do you think the writer includes the fact that Belshazzar “knew all this” about the life of Nebuchadnezzar?**

**What does this passage teach us about God’s judgment?**

Belshazzar knew about God’s humiliation of Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar himself had issued proclamations honoring the God of Israel after he regained his sanity, declaring that God’s “dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation” (Dan. 4:34). Belshazzar was without excuse for acting so arrogantly towards the vessels of the Lord, and he knew better than to use the things of the Lord to praise his false gods.

In this passage we learn that God’s judgment comes swiftly. At the ﬁrst of the chapter, Belshazzar is wealthy enough to dine with a 1,000 nobles. He’s eating and drinking and having a great time. By the end of the chapter, he is dead. His sons did not sit on the throne after him, either. He lost everything through God’s judgment, and even though he was the sovereign king of Babylon, he was powerless to stop it.

The bright side of this passage is that, even though God’s judgment fell on Belshazzar, we see that God was just in His judgment. He had given Belshazzar an example in Nebuchadnezzar. Belshazzar had heard of God’s might and power, and he had refused to humble himself. That’s bad news for Belshazzar, but it teaches us that anyone, even a gentile king of a country that had brought Israel into captivity, can humble themselves and be accepted by the Lord.

# APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**Though we hope never to follow Belshazzar’s example, how can we avoid misusing sacred things of the Lord?**

**How can Belshazzar’s bad example help us to live in humility?**

**Why might the judgment of Belshazzar encourage us to be more bold and be more urgent with the gospel?**

# PRAYER

In a time of group prayer, ask the Father to help love and fear Him, and to remember that He is sovereign. Thank the Father for saving us from judgment through our Lord Jesus Christ, and ask Him to give us the courage to share this good news with others.

# COMMENTARY

## DANIEL 5:1-31

The events of chapter 5 occurred in 539 B.C., twenty-three years after Nebuchadnezzar’s death. Belshazzar was now ruling Babylon in the absence of his father, Nabonidus.

5:1–12. Belshazzar held a great banquet for all his nobles and their wives. He ordered that wine be served in the golden and silver goblets Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Lord’s temple in Jerusalem years before. While Belshazzar and his guests drank from the goblets, a hand appeared in thin air and wrote a mysterious message on one of the palace walls. The frightened king sent for his wise men and diviners and decreed that whoever was able to interpret the message would be elevated to third in the kingdom. (Technically speaking Nabonidus was still the king, with Belshazzar being his vice-regent.) When they were unable to decipher the message, the queen (or queen mother) reminded Belshazzar of Daniel, who years before had gained a reputation as a skillful interpreter of dreams and riddles.

5:13–31. When summoned by the king, Daniel agreed to interpret the writing, though he declined the king’s gifts. Before interpreting the message, however, he reminded Belshazzar of how God had humbled proud Nebuchadnezzar. He also denounced the king

for his arrogance and for his disrespect for the temple vessels. Finally, Daniel turned to the cryptic message, which read, “Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin.” He interpreted the message as being an ominous warning of impending judgment on Belshazzar’s kingdom. “Mene,” meaning mina (ﬁfty shekels), sounds like a related word meaning numbered. Belshazzar’s days were numbered and his reign about to come to an end. In similar fashion “tekel,” meaning shekel, was a play on a related word meaning weighed. Belshazzar had been weighed like a shekel on the scales of divine justice and had been found lacking. “Parsin,” meaning half-shekels (in 5:28 the singular form “peres” is used) was taken as a play on a related word meaning divided. Furthermore, it sounds like Persian. Belshazzar’s kingdom would be divided between the Medes and Persians. This prophecy of Belshazzar’s demise was fulﬁlled that very night.