

Bible Study Daniel 5

[PPT 1] When we come to chapter 5, we are given another example of the arrogance of world rulers and their confrontation with YHWH who is the sovereign controller of history. But before we begin reading Chapter 5, we need a very short look at some history.

[PPT 2] The fall of Babylon to Medo-Persia was in 539 B.C. (*red arrow*) Based on that date it has been 30 years since Nebuchadnezzar's insanity and healing were recorded in chapter 4 (*green arrow*). When we come to chapter 5 Nebuchadnezzar is no longer king of Babylon, he has been dead for about 23 years. Following his death Babylonian rule was characterized by mismanagement and instability. By the end of chapter 5, for the most part, the people of Babylon will welcome the Persian armies of Cyrus (*in yellow*) to deliver them from the oppression of their current king. There were four administrations (*dark blue line*) over the twenty-three years following Nebuchadnezzar's death, ending in the coregency of (Nab-o-nah-duhs) Nab/o/ni/dus and his son Belshazzar (*light blue line*). Lastly, notice the prophet Jeremiah lived in Babylon during Nebuchadnezzar's rule (*purple*) whose prophecy we will read later.

Daniel does not record Nebuchadnezzar's immediate successors, and extrabiblical literature is somewhat uncertain. The best account is of Berosus, in his third book, found in a fragment preserved by Josephus. Based on that the Babylonian Rule after Nebuchadnezzar was:

[PPT 5x's *West Texas accent*]

Reign	Name	Relation	Length of Rule	End of Rule
562-560 B.C.	Amēl-Marduk	Son of Nebuchadnezzar	2 years	Murdered by brother-in-law (Neriglissar)
560-556 B.C.	Neriglissar	Son-in-law of Nebuchadnezzar	4 years	Killed in battle

556	Labashi-Marduk	Son of Neriglissar	few months	Murdered by Nabonidus
556-539	Nabonidus	Son-in-law of Nebuchadnezzar	17 years	Medo-Persia
550-539 Ch.5	Belshazzar (coregent)	Grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, Son of Nabonidus.	14/11 years	Medo-Persia

The reason for the coregency of Nabonidus and Belshazzar was about 550 B.C. King Nabonidus moved from the city of Babylon to Tema leaving his son, Belshazzar, in charge. This move was because he angered the powerful priests of Baal and much of the general population of Babylon. He did this by neglecting the city's patron God of Babylon, Bel-Marduk, and elevated the moon god, Sin, of whom his father and mother were priests.

[PPT 8] This is a drawing of the king's palace and the walled city of Babylon in the background. Some months before Chapter 5 the army of the Persians had captured Nabonidus and they were encamped outside Babylon's walls. Inside the walls, Belshazzar felt secure since the city's drawbridges had been drawn up and the metal gates barred. The double walls of the city were too thick to be broken through and the soldiers on the walls would destroy any who attempted to break down the gates. The city also was provisioned for several years of siege and with the farmland within the city walls its capture could be postponed indefinitely. With that introduction, we begin Chapter 5.

Vs 1 begins with: "Belshazzar the King" [PPT 9] I want to point out verse 1 is not using Daniel's Babylonian name. Daniel's Babylonian name, Belteshazzar means "*wife of Bell, protect the king*" while Belshazzar means "Baal protect the king".

The unhindered advance of Cyrus and the Persian army against the capital probably convinced Belshazzar that the gods of the realm were offended. He wanted his people to placate the offended gods of the realm, especially the god Bel-Marduk. This would also distance him from the unpopular religious views of his father who worshiped the mook god Sin. In verse 1 Belshazzar is holding a pagan revival meeting for Bel-Marduk.

Vs 1-2) This feast tells us a lot about Belshazzar's regard for the Persian army. Even today power can give people the false impression that they are protected from harm.

In God's sovereignty, the prophet Jeremiah, who, as we saw in the timeline, lived and died before verse 2 in Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar, tells of the willful drinking of the king as part of God's plan for the overthrow of Babylon.

[PPT 10 READ] Jer. 51:56-57 *For a destroyer is attacking Babylon. Her warriors will be captured; their bows will be broken. For the Lord is a God who punishes; he pays back in full. "I will make her officials and wise men drunk (vs2), along with her governors, leaders, and warriors. They will fall asleep forever and never wake up," says the King whose name is the Lord who rules over all.*

Verse 2 tells us Belshazzar gave orders to bring the gold and silver vessels (from) which Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem, so (they) might drink from them. Of course, it's not as if they ran out of drinking utensils and had to drink out of the temple vessels. Verse 2 also says "*his wives and his concubines drank from them*". To the Jewish mind, the presence of wives and especially concubines would have been an additional offense to YHWH. Almost always in the ancient Near East men and women were segregated; but not at this party. Verse 2 indicates that this was a very wild, immoral, and extravagant party.

[PPT 11] *Since the Temple of Bel-Marduk held vessels of the gods of other conquered peoples, why would Belshazzar single out the vessels of Jehovah for his defiling use?*

1) To show his contempt for the God of Israel and Yahweh's prophecy along with Daniel's interpretation in chapter 2 concerning the fall of Babylon. It was his way of shaking his fist at God and saying: "You have said that Babylon will fall to the Medo-Persians who are now outside our gates and I am saying Babylon will not fall."

2) To demonstrate his preference for the gods of Babylon over the God of Israel whom his grandfather, King Nebuchadnezzar had honored in public in chapter 4 and also the moon god Sin his father worshiped. But the king's main goal was to placate his gods by insulting the God of Israel.

[PPT 12] Ironically (and there is much irony in Ch5), while pride exalts a man, he is all the more willing to bow himself before various idols. This is a tragic pattern we see again and again in the Bible.

Vs3-4) [PPT 13] Notice the six materials used to make their gods in Vs 4 are basically the same materials used in the statue of Chapter 2. In the next verse God will intervene. The Bible reveals that mankind will not give up its idolatrous practices throughout the Times of the Gentiles (which we are living in today) until God intervenes in judgment.

[PPT 14] Rev. 9:20-21 *The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues (Trib.), did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols (made of what?) of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.*

Belshazzar's actions tell the sobering truth that sometimes people can become so hardened that they are beyond the point of redemption so, the only thing remaining for them is judgment. While God is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, his mercy does have limits.

[PPT 15] Heb 10:26-27 *For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.*

Belshazzar experienced God's judgment against his sin. But the book of Hebrews says that those who are privileged to come to hear about the good news of Jesus Christ are liable to an even more severe judgment should they reject that knowledge and profane Jesus' sacrifice.

[PPT 16] Two verses later in Heb 10:29 *How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?*

God has a limit to how far He will allow men to go in their sins; there is a time for judgment. Belshazzar and his dinner guests crossed the line that night in the banquet hall of Babylon.

Vs5) [PPT 17] Many people who know little or nothing about Babylonians, or Daniel's prophecies use the phrase "the handwriting on the wall". The phrase comes from 5:5 and means impending judgment.

The first word of verse 5, "*suddenly*" emphasizes how quickly judgment fell in response to Belshazzar's actions in verse 4. This response to his blasphemy is like the response to Nebuchadnezzar's prideful boasting in 4:31 where judgment came "*while the word was in the king's mouth*". In both, the judgment is connected to a very extreme action, beyond which God no longer patiently endured sin. His punishment at exactly this time (suddenly) was so that Belshazzar might recognize that this judgment was for no other reason but his blasphemy.

Vs6) The king, full of prideful blasphemy, has been the focus of the party. Now he collapsed in fear as he considered the implications of the hand and its unknown message.

The loud laughter of the party would have turned to deafening silence with all eyes on the king and the king's eyes fixed upon the hand as it wrote the message. Arrogant self-confidence could not keep Belshazzar's face from turning pale, his heart from being gripped by fear, and his knees from knocking together. It must have been humiliating for the great ruler of Babylon to be out of control before 1,000 important people.

Vs 7-12) [PPT 18] Remembering that Daniel's Babylonian name Belteshazzar means "protect the life of the king" makes it a bit ironic since soon after verse 6 he will lose his life.

Vs 13) Again, it seems a bit ironic that Daniel who is from the same land whose God Belshazzar was holding in contempt is called in for help.

Vs14-17) Vs 18-21 are a summary of God's humbling of King Nebuchadnezzar which we covered last week in chapter 4 so, I am skipping to verses 22-23.

Vs22-23a) Having known the historical background of Belshazzar's grandfather in verses 18-21, Daniel criticized the king in front of his thousand nobles and their women.

[PPT 19] W. Wiersbe = *Like King Belshazzar and his guests, many people in our world today are unmindful of the lessons of the past, unintelligent when it comes to interpreting the present, and totally unprepared for the consequences that lie in the future.*

In your past what are some areas in your life where you saw "the writing on the wall"? In the present what are the clear messages God is giving you regarding your attitudes or behaviors (*pause*)? Are you prepared for the consequences of those coming in the near future?

Daniel is going to spend more time on the king's guilt than on his punishment. He will take more time explaining the reason for the writing than the meaning of the writing and the reason given that God judges Belshazzar in verses 22-23 is Belshazzar's knowledge of Nebuchadnezzar's humbling made his using the vessels to drink wine in and praising the gods of Babylon all the more blasphemous. Belshazzar was judged for his pride and for not learning humility from his grandfather's history.

Last sentence Vs 23b-24)

[PPT 20] God holds in His power the life of every living thing. If He were to withdraw His Spirit and breath, all flesh would perish.

Vs25) [PPT 21] *Mene* could mean mina which was a measure of money, or the word numbered. *Tekel* could mean shekel, another unit of money listed in decreasing order, or the word weighed. *Pres* could mean half-shekel, half-mina, or the word divided. The majority say the word means divided. Some say it could also mean Persia. We are told the wise men of Babylon could not read the writing. Some suggestions for this are: 1) The message may have been written in a language unfamiliar to them.

[PPT 22] 2) The message may have used only consonants, lacking vowel points.

N S R H P L K T N M N M

[PPT 23] 3) Some think the words were written right to left, top to bottom, and vertically in columns instead of horizontally which caused the meaning to be hidden.

P T M M

R Q N N

S L ''

[PPT 24] We also, like Belshazzar ought to see the writing on the wall. The Apostle Paul says in Rom 1:18 *“the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men”*. And yet God, in his grace and mercy, has sent his son to be a sin offering in our place, so that instead of having to see the writing on the wall, we can hear the cry from the cross: *“It is finished”* in Jn 19:30.

[PPT 25] 2 Cor 5:21 explains it this way: *“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*

[PPT 26] In Belshazzar’s life, the writing on the wall told him something too late to avoid. He was killed that night. For those who have trusted in Jesus’ death and resurrection it’s never too late to change our ways. I would suggest we take some time this evening to spend a few moments thanking God for the second chances you and I have been granted by His grace.

After that ask God to show you areas in your life where you can learn from His word to avoid having to face a “writing on the wall” experience in the future.

Going back to Dan 5: 25 a rough translation of the words on the wall would be:

[PPT 27] *numbered*, [PPT 28] *numbered*, [PPT 29] *weighed* and [PPT 30] *divided*.

Daniel will turn these NOUNS into VERBS to interpret their meaning. In addition, Daniel will give a double interpretation to each word in verses 26-28.

Vs26-28 notes) The end of Belshazzar’s reign was in agreement with the prediction Jeremiah made when his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar was king that his family’s reign would last only two generations.

[PPT 31] Jeremiah 27:6-7 *Now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, my servant, and I have given him also the beasts of the field to serve him. All the nations shall serve him and his son and his grandson until the time of his own land comes. Then many nations and great kings shall make him their slave.*

[PPT 32] Without Christ, the condition of every person before our God is like that of Belshazzar: weighed and found wanting. A time is coming when all the unrighteous dead will undergo God's evaluation and be found wanting (Rev. 20:12-15). Even those who trust in Jesus Christ and obtain eternal life will have their works judged for reward, some of those works weighed and found wanting for some of their rewards (1 Cor. 3).

[PPT 33] Vs 29 *Then Belshazzar gave orders, and they clothed Daniel with purple and [put] a necklace of gold around his neck, and issued a proclamation concerning him that he [now] had authority as the third [ruler] in the kingdom.*

The fact that Daniel is made the third ruler of the land is important. King Nabonidus had been captured and exiled, and Belshazzar was killed later that night which left Daniel as the ranking ruler in Babylon. The Persian policy of conquest was, as far as possible, to continue the government of a conquered people.

[PPT 34] As Chapter 6 will show, this left Daniel as a supervisor over all the satraps of Babylon. Is it, not poetic justice that the very empire that destroyed Jerusalem and carried the Hebrews into captivity would have as its last official act the promotion of one of the very people that it conquered?

Vs30-31 No Notes) [PPT 35] Who was Darius? Some say he never existed since "*Darius the Mede*" is unknown outside the Bible. There have been two reasons given to explain this. 1) For the first year of their reign eastern monarchs often used a throne name. The word Darius means "*royal one*" which may have been someone's throne name.

2) [PPT 36] A little bit more history. The Nabonidus Chronicle (larger rock on your right) mentions two Medo-Persian military leaders in the fall of the city of Babylon, Ug-bar-u and Gu-bar-u. Ug-bar-u was the primary military leader of Cyrus' forces who captured the city of Babylon, but in doing so he was wounded and died several weeks later. It was the second in command, Gu-bar-u who was appointed by Cyrus as governor of the province of Babylon. Darius may have been the throne name for Gubaru.

As is often the case with evil men, such as Belshazzar, their sins ultimately come back on their heads. In another example of poetic justice, Xenophon records that both of these two men Ug-bar-u and Gu-bar-u had suffered at the hands of Belshazzar. Ugbaru was made a eunuch by the command of Belshazzar. Gubaru's son was murdered by Belshazzar. These same two men were the first ones who broke into Belshazzar's throne room and killed him. Daniel omits these details, perhaps because they would take away from the rapid fulfillment of prophecy. In verses 30-31, Daniel intends for us to grasp just one thing:

[PPT 37] *The Word of God is sure.*

God brought about the downfall of Babylon and Belshazzar its king, just as He prophesied through Jeremiah. While the archeological discoveries provide extra details of this defeat, Daniel chapter 5 underscores the one thing they all omit: the death of Belshazzar and the defeat of Babylon was the judgment of God on a city and a people who profaned the name of the God of Israel.

[PPT 38] God will not be mocked. Gal 6:7 "*Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.*"

Lessons from Chapter 5 that we can apply in our own lives.

[PPT 39] Daniel states in verse 22, *“But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this.”* This is a power of pride; it interferes with our ability to learn.

[PPT 40] The source of Belshazzar’s judgment was his failure to learn from the lessons of his grandfather. We ought to gain wisdom from what has taken place in past times. We should learn what God approves and what he disapproves from history.

[PPT 41] chapter represents the third time in the first five chapters of the book of Daniel in which human wisdom is inadequate and unable to solve God’s message; the most urgent and eternal matters of life. Only God’s wisdom, as revealed through His servants the prophets and apostles have the words of life by which men may be saved and spared from God’s eternal wrath.

[PPT 42] While the ungodly, like Belshazzar, are in power, it requires much patience by the people of God. Based on Scripture we are to be convinced that God’s justice will ultimately prevail. The book of Daniel would encourage the Jews by reminding them that all of the oppressive forces that Israel would experience during the times of the Gentiles would only be allowed for a limited duration. Each oppressive empire would only be allowed to stay in power for a specific amount of time.