

The news is full of stories of people who use their wealth and influence to seemingly live above the law. I believe that God gave us the account in Daniel 5 to testify from generation to generation that no one is above God's law. To this point, we've witnessed God's abundant mercy lavished on the proud Nebuchadnezzar. Today, we'll witness the swift hand of God to bring judgment on a king who thought he could flaunt his sin in the very face of God and get away with it. We'll learn that no one is above God's law!

The events of Daniel 5 come 70 years after the arrival of Daniel and his three friends in Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar passed away leaving the kingdom to his son Amel-Marduk, who was assassinated by Nabonidas, a high priest and part of the king's court. Prior to the assassination, Nabonidas raised his son, Belshazzar, as one of the king's court. Belshazzar was 14 when God humbled Nebuchadnezzar. Unfortunately, neither Nabonidas nor Belshazzar learned to humble themselves before the true God. Instead they conspired to assassinate Amel-Marduk and ruled Babylon as co-regents. Nabonidas spent most of his reign in Arabia and left Belshazzar to rule Babylon in his absence.

Also, during this time, God was raising up Cyrus to unite two peoples, the Persians to the east of Babylon and the Medes to the east and north. The Medes and the Persians were a direct threat to Belshazzar, so he stockpiled provisions for 20 years in case of siege. Since the city had walls that were nearly impregnable and a river that flowed through it, he felt invincible. So much so, that he decided to enjoy a time of revelry on the grandest scale imaginable while his enemies encircled the city.

#### 1. Belshazzar's Wicked Feast (5:1-4)

- a. It was sinfully sensual – “Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords” (1). Food was served in such abundance that those in attendance would gorge themselves, go vomit, and return to feasting once again.
- b. It was unrestrained – “and drank wine before the thousand” (1). In that day, kings would eat and drink separately from their guests. In this instance, the king publicly indulged himself before his 1,000 guests.
- c. It was blasphemous (2-4).
  - i. Why Belshazzar chose to use the golden vessels taken from the Temple in Jerusalem to use to toast his pagan gods, we don't know. But it was a direct affront to God.
  - ii. Galatians 6:7 “Be not deceived; God is not mocked”
- d. It was foolhardy.
  - i. Jeremiah prophesied that Babylon would be attacked by an invader from the north – “For, lo, I will raise and cause to come up against Babylon an assembly of great nations from the north country: and they shall set themselves in array against her; from thence she shall be taken” (50:9).
  - ii. Jeremiah 51:11 “Make bright the arrows; gather the shields: the LORD hath raise up the spirit of the Medes: for his device is against Babylon, to destroy it; because it is the vengeance of the LORD, the vengeance of his temple.”
  - iii. Jeremiah 50:24 “I have laid a snare for thee, and thou art also taken, O Babylon, and thou was not aware: thou art found, and also caught, because thou hast striven against the LORD.”
  - iv. Jeremiah 51:36 “Therefore thus saith the LORD: Behold, I will plead thy cause, and take vengeance for thee; and I will dry up her sea, and make her springs dry.”
  - v. Jeremiah 51:39 “In their heat I will make their feasts, and I will make them drunken, that they may rejoice, and sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake, saith the LORD.”
  - vi. Herodotus, the Greek historian tells us that the events unfolded just this way. After losing to Cyrus in the field, the Babylonians retreated behind their walls to wait out an inevitable siege. While Belshazzar was feasting, Cyrus stationed troops on either side of the river where the river entered and exited the city. A third portion of his army diverted the river into a reservoir that was created during the construction of the walls around the city of Babylon. Once the river was shallow enough to walk in, the armies rushed in and took the city from both sides just as Jeremiah foretold!

#### 2. God's Ominous Sign (5:5-9)

- a. The sign came suddenly when they least expected it – “In the same hour...”

- b. The sign was unavoidable – “came forth fingers of a man’s hand, and wrote over against the candlestick up on the plaster of the wall of the king’s palace:” (5)
    - i. For this hand to be visible, it must have been very large. The great central room of the palace along with the throne room was 100 yards in length. The walls were very tall and covered with inscriptions celebrating the triumphs of the empire.
    - ii. The hand wrote in a well-lit place on the wall, so the writing was unmistakable.
  - c. The sign was terrifying – “Then the king’s countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another” (6).
  - d. The sign was astonishing (7-9).
    - i. Belshazzar’s wise men could not understand the inscription even when offered being elevated to the third ruler of the land (7-8).
    - ii. Belshazzar was completely powerless to understand his situation (9).
3. God’s Pronouncement of Judgment (10-29)
- a. The Queen’s Visit and Suggestion (10-12)
    - i. The Queen was possibly the wife of Nabonidas, and possibly a former wife of Nebuchadnezzar.
    - ii. The Queen refers repeatedly to Nebuchadnezzar as Belshazzar’s father. This is because Belshazzar insisted upon everyone referring to him as the son of Nebuchadnezzar in an attempt to rewrite history and minimize his murder of Nebuchadnezzar’s son, Abel-Marduk.
  - b. Belshazzar Admission: Belshazzar admits that he has heard of Daniel (13-16). Since Belshazzar was raised in the court of Nebuchadnezzar, he would have learned of Daniel’s interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and the king’s humiliation and restoration.
  - c. Daniel’s Message (17-24)
    - i. His message was sharp – “Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another” (17).
    - ii. His message held him accountable for the truth he knew – “And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this” (22).
    - iii. His message exposed his pride – “But has lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven” (23).
    - iv. His message exposed his idolatry – “thou has 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, has thou not glorified” (23).
    - v. His message was from God (24).
  - d. Daniel’s Interpretation of the Sign (25-29).
    - i. Mene – Your reign is finished (26).
    - ii. Tekel – You have fallen short (27; cf. Romans 3:23).
    - iii. Peres – Your kingdom is (already) divided and given to the Medes and Persians (28). At that moment, the armies of Cyrus were silently diverting the river in preparation for invading the city.
  - e. Belshazzar’s Response (28-29)
    - i. He promoted Daniel as if his monarchy would continue.
    - ii. He did not repent.
4. God’s Faithfulness to His Promises (30-31)
- a. Belshazzar was slain that very night (30).
  - b. Cyrus set up his son, Darius to be co-regent over the city of Babylon just as Jeremiah prophesied.
  - c. Cyrus would later rebuild the temple just as Isaiah prophesied over 100 years prior.
    - i. Isaiah 44:28 “That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.
    - ii. Isaiah 45:1 “Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut.”

Conclusion: God will hold you accountable for the truth you know. Are you living in the light of it, or are you making light of it? God keeps his promises both to His people and to His enemies. Do you need to renew your faith in His faithfulness?