

Cottonwood Creek Church

DANIEL

SESSION SIX: THE NEED FOR FAITHFUL REPENTANCE

DANIEL 5:1-31

10.13.24

MAIN POINT

Because God takes sin seriously, the proud will be humbled, and the unrepentant will be judged.

INTRODUCTION

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

We often have to learn lessons the hard way. Can you think of a time when someone warned you about a dangerous choice you were considering, but you did it anyway? What was the outcome?

How have moments like that shaped you for the future? How has God grown you through instances like that?

In Daniel 5, the last ruler of Babylon came face to face with the hand of God. Though he took great pride in his power and prestige, through Daniel's obedience, Belshazzar would be humbled before the Most High God, and his earthly kingdom would come to an end.

UNDERSTANDING

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

READ DANIEL 5:1-4.

What differences do you notice between Belshazzar and Nebuchadnezzar (look back at Daniel 4)? Though neither were godly rulers, how did their character and actions differ?

Belshazzar led the people to worship false gods and material things instead of God the creation rather than the Creator. How do you see this happening all around us today? Where might the church be in danger of this?

In Daniel 5, Belshazzar was the ruler of Babylon, but he would be the last monarch before the Persians took over (5:30). He was likely co-ruling with his father, Nabonidus. The king hosted a lavish banquet for a thousand of his lords, which was common in Babylon. At some point, the king demanded the vessels from the temple be brought to him. These were the vessels of gold and silver from the temple in Jerusalem, which meant they would have been devoted to Israel's God. Even for a proud pagan, this action

was bold. Even one who didn't believe in Israel's God likely would have been superstitious about using a sacred item for such a common use. Nevertheless, he took them as he pleased, drank from them, and praised the gods of gold and silver.

READ DANIEL 5:5-12.

How did the king's offer of money and status reflect the culture's values? What reflects the values of our culture today?

How did Belshazzar shift from the beginning of this passage (5:1-4)? When was a time fear or desperation led you to seek the truth about God?

Daniel's reputation reflected his character. How does our character influence our reputation? How does our reputation inform our influence?

While Belshazzar and his guests were enjoying themselves, a mysterious hand appeared and began writing on the wall in his palace. It was in plain sight, opposite the lampstand so it could be seen clearly.

READ DANIEL 5:13-31.

Why do you think Daniel recounted his experience with Nebuchadnezzar? Why would it be significant for Belshazzar to know about this (5:22)?

How does Daniel's boldness in interpreting the writing on the wall inspire us to speak the truth in difficult situations?

Compare Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar's responses to God's judgment (see Dan. 4:34-37).

What was the meaning of the writing on the wall? How was this fulfilled at the end of chapter 5?

Once Daniel was brought to the king, Belshazzar recognized and praised him for his reputation. He promised him many gifts and great status if he proved up to the task. But Daniel wasn't interested in the king's material incentives. He didn't need lavish things. He was only interested in communicating the truth of the Most High God.

APPLICATION

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

Looking at both Nebuchadnezzar's and Belshazzar's lives and responses to God, what are some of the observations you make? Are there any tendencies you share with them? What might you need to change in response to these two examples?

How can you learn from others who have gone before you? How can you position yourself in humility so as not to have to learn lessons of disobedience the hard way?

What are changes you can make in an effort to take sin as seriously as God does? How might this allow you to share the gospel with others?

How can we encourage others to take God's warnings seriously in their own lives?

In what ways does this chapter call us to be more vigilant in our faith and witness, especially in a hostile culture?

PRAYER

Take some time to repent of the ways you have walked in pride and sin despite knowing the truth of God and His word. Ask the Lord to bring others into your life who you can learn from and who can help guide you toward obedience and humility.

COMMENTARY

DANIEL 5:1-31

5:1. The developments in Dan. 5 occurred about twenty-three years after the events in the previous chapter. Nebuchadnezzar had died in 562 BC, shortly after his time of madness and subsequent repentance. After his death, a series of intrigues and assassinations resulted in several obscure kings ruling Babylon until Nabonidus took the throne (556-539 BC). Beginning in 1914, thirty-seven separate archival texts have been discovered documenting the existence of Belshazzar as crown prince. King Belshazzar held a great feast for a thousand of his nobles, probably to bolster morale after Nabonidus had experienced a crushing defeat at the hands of the Persians. The Greek historians Herodotus and Xenophon confirm that Babylon fell while a great feast was in progress (v. 30). Excavations have uncovered a throne room that could accommodate one thousand nobles.

5:2-4. By drinking libations to Babylonian gods with the vessels . . . taken from the temple devoted to the true God of Israel, Belshazzar was acting in an unusually aggressive and blasphemous way. Nebuchadnezzar is called Belshazzar's predecessor (lit his father). Most likely, Belshazzar's father, Nabonidus, married Nebuchadnezzar's daughter to establish his own claim to the throne of Babylon, making Nebuchadnezzar the grandfather of Belshazzar. The Aramaic word for father is flexible, capable of referring to a grandfather, ancestor, or even a predecessor to a king without any lineal tie.

5:5. The appearance of a man's hand beginning to write was not a vision seen by Belshazzar alone, but a miracle seen by everyone present. Afterward, the wise men called to interpret could still see the words written on the plaster wall. According to the archaeologist who excavated it, the throne room (see v. 1) had walls covered with white gypsum or plaster.

5:6. This account of the king's response to the writing was apparently reported to Daniel by those who were there.

5:7. The king shouted for his wise men to come and offered great honor to anyone who could interpret the words on the wall. He even offered to give the successful wise man the third highest position in the kingdom after Nabonidus and Belshazzar.

5:8. None of the wise men of Babylon were able to interpret the inscription on the wall, showing the futility of their pagan religion. Only Daniel, prophet of the one true God, could discern its meaning (1:17).

5:9. That the message was incomprehensible terrified the king even more.

5:10. The queen who came to the banquet hall was the queen mother, not the wife of King Belshazzar since all his wives were already present (cp. v. 3).

5:11-12. Daniel was approximately eighty years old at this point and was either retired or forgotten. The queen mother, being the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar, remembered Daniel's extraordinary spirit and ability to interpret dreams during her father's reign.

5:13-29. When Daniel was brought before the king, he did not demonstrate the same level of respect that he had consistently shown Nebuchadnezzar. Instead, he rebuked Belshazzar for his brazen attitude and failure to learn from Nebuchadnezzar.

5:16-17. Daniel refused to accept any reward for interpreting the inscription not because he was rude or arrogant but because he was indignant at the king's disregard for Nebuchadnezzar's experiences with God and the blasphemous use of the temple vessels.

5:18-24. Writers of historical narrative frequently communicate the essential message of a text through dialogue. In this case, Daniel's words served as a rebuke of Belshazzar for his failure to learn from the experience of Nebuchadnezzar (as described in Dan. 4). Daniel reprimanded Belshazzar because he had not humbled his heart, even though he knew what had happened to Nebuchadnezzar. According to ancient Babylonian texts, Belshazzar had served in the government of King Neriglissar in 560 BC. This indicates that he had been old enough to be aware of the events at the end of Nebuchadnezzar's life. Instead of learning to submit to the Almighty, he exalted himself against God by using the temple vessels to blaspheme God. The specific sins Daniel cited were pride, blasphemy, idolatry, and failure to glorify the true God. For this reason, the writing was inscribed on the wall as a message of judgment and doom.

5:25-27. The three Aramaic words on the wall were MENE (numbered), TEKEL (weighed), and PARSIN (divided).

5:28. Although the third word was written in the plural form (parsin), Daniel explained its meaning by using the singular form (Peres). The prediction that Belshazzar's kingdom has been divided does not indicate that the Babylonian Empire would be divided equally by two kingdoms (Medes and Persians) but rather that Babylon would be destroyed or dissolved and taken over by the Medo-Persian Empire. The third word

on the wall (PARSIN) has the same letters as the Aramaic word for Persian. It was a play on words, indicating that the kingdom would fall to the Persian army.

5:29. It seems that the king did not take the message seriously.

5:30. Having lost a brief skirmish outside the walls of Babylon, Belshazzar retreated to the city and made light of the coming Persian siege. The Babylonians had twenty years of provisions, and the city was a seemingly impregnable fortress. Nevertheless, Darius diverted the waters of the Euphrates River so his forces could enter through the channel, passing below the water gates. He took the city that very night without a battle and killed Belshazzar, who was engaged in a drunken feast. The kingdom of Babylon fell just as foretold by Daniel (2:39). The colossus head of gold (Babylon) had fallen. It was replaced by the chest and arms of silver, representing Medo-Persia (see 2:40).

5:31. The identity of Darius the Mede, who received the kingdom at the age of sixty-two, is uncertain. Some believe he was Gubaru, the governor of Babylon, called Darius, an honorific title meaning royal one. Others maintain that Darius the Mede was an alternate title for the Persian emperor, Cyrus the Great, also viewing the word Darius as a royal title.