

Series: The Book of Daniel

Title: "The End Result of Pride"

Daniel 5

Introduction

When we get to Daniel 5, Nebuchadnezzar is no longer the king of Babylon, and we're thrust into a disturbing message from God. How did it pass from Nebuchadnezzar to Belshazzar? The ancient historian Berosus gives us the order of events:

- Nebuchadnezzar died after a 43-year reign.
- His son, Evil-Merodach, is described in 2 Kings 25:27-30 and Jeremiah 52:31-34. His rule was arbitrary and licentious. He ruled for only two years and was assassinated by his brother-in-law Neriglassar.
- Neriglassar, called Nergalsharezer in Jeremiah 39:3, 13, ruled for four years and died a natural death.
- His son, Laborosoarchod, a child of diminished mental capacity, ruled for only nine months and was beaten to death by a gang of conspirators.
- The conspirators appointed Nabonidus, one of their gang, to be king. He ruled until Cyrus the Persian conquered Babylon.

Chapter 5 begins with King Belshazzar's great, blasphemous feast. "Belshazzar, the king, made a great feast for a thousand of his lords and drank wine in the presence of the thousand. While he tasted the wine, Belshazzar gave the command to bring the gold and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple which *had been* in Jerusalem, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken from the temple of the house of God, which *had been* in Jerusalem; and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone." [\(Daniel 5:1-4 NKJV\)](#)

For a long time, historians and archaeologists knew that Nabonidus was considered to be the last king of Babylon, not Belshazzar. Belshazzar was Nabonidus' eldest son. However, evidence was later uncovered that revealed not only Belshazzar's association with Nabonidus on the throne but also demonstrated that during the last years of his reign, Nabonidus lived in Arabia and left the Kingdom of Babylon in the hands of his eldest son Belshazzar. When the Nabonidus Cylinder was discovered, it verified that Belshazzar was Nabonidus's eldest son and co-regent with Nabonidus. That Cylinder is on display in the British Museum.

According to Babylonian records, Belshazzar became co-regent in the third year of Nabonidus' reign (553 B.C.) and continued in that capacity till the fall of Babylon (539 B.C.). Some historians think that by Daniel 5, Nabonidus had gone out to fight the Medo-Persian army and had already been captured. Those armies now surrounded Babylon and were looking for a way into the strongly defended city.

Belshazzar wasn't afraid of the siege surrounding the city. He was confident in Babylon's impressive defenses and vast supplies.

Conservative calculations set the dimensions of the ancient city of Babylon like this:

- The outer walls were 17 miles (27 kilometers) long.
- The walls were 22 feet (7 meters) thick and 90 feet (28 meters) high.
- The outer walls also had guard towers another 100 feet (30 meters) high.
- The city gates were made of bronze.
- A system of inner and outer walls and moats made the city very secure.

We also know Nebuchadnezzar was not the direct father of Belshazzar. Belshazzar's probably claimed him as his father because he now sat on the throne that once was occupied by Nebuchadnezzar. Either usage of the term was acceptable in ancient times.

The scene of partying while a hostile army surrounded the city reminds us of the spirit of our present age. Many today believe the best response to the dangers of our times is to minimize them and escape into the pursuit of pleasure. In Ephesians 5:18 Paul calls drunkenness a *waste* of resources.

Belshazzar foolishly lost all self-control at this party and began openly mocking God. He committed the sin of blasphemy, something few people are concerned with today. Belshazzar sent for the vessels taken from the Jewish temple. They were in the temple of Bel as a reminder of Babylon's victory over Israel. They brought the vessels out to use at Belshazzar's party. Maybe he hoped it would boost morale, believing the Babylonian deities had mastered and spoiled the God of Israel. But this blasphemy was about to be punished by God.

A large court, 56 feet by 170 feet in Babylon, has been unearthed where probably where the feast of Daniel 5 took place.

Verse 5 says that while they were partying, God writes a message on a wall. "In the same hour the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. ([Daniel 5:5 NKJV](#))

A hand mysteriously appears and writes on a wall. The king saw the part of the hand that wrote, which is where we get the proverbial phrase, the handwriting on the wall.

In verse 6, Belshazzar reacts to the message and calls for someone to interpret it. "Then the king's countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other. The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. The king spoke, saying to the wise *men* of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing, and tells me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and *have* a chain of gold around his neck; and he shall be the third ruler in the kingdom." Now all the king's

wise *men* came, but they could not read the writing, or make known to the king its interpretation. Then King Belshazzar was greatly troubled, his countenance was changed, and his lords were astonished." (Daniel 5:6-9 NKJV)

Daniel's vivid description reveals that Belshazzar was terrified. His carefree partying turned from merry to terrified in a moment, showing his conscience was active beneath his energetic partying. The king didn't need a definition of the terms. He needed to learn their significance.

Archaeologists later discovered why Belshazzar offered the interpreter of the dream the third place in the kingdom. The real king was Nabonidus. His son Belshazzar ruled as second in the kingdom. Since Belshazzar was second in the kingdom, he could only offer third place to an interpreter. All of Belshazzar's nobles and magicians could not interpret the writing. So once again, Daniel is summoned.

Verse 10 says, "The queen, because of the words of the king and his lords, came to the banquet hall. The queen spoke, saying, "O king, live forever! Do not let your thoughts trouble you, nor let your countenance change. There is a man in your kingdom in whom *is* the Spirit of the Holy God. And in the days of your father, light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, were found in him; and King Nebuchadnezzar your father—your father the king—made him chief of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, *and* soothsayers. Inasmuch as an excellent spirit, knowledge, understanding, interpreting dreams, solving riddles, and explaining enigmas were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar, now let Daniel be called, and he will give the interpretation." (Daniel 5:10-12 NKJV)

Daniel was not called to appear with the first group of wise men and may have been summoned out of retirement. The queen refers to Daniel by his Jewish name, showing respect for his faith and background.

In verse 13, Belshazzar asks Daniel to interpret the message. "Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king spoke, and said to Daniel, "Are you that Daniel who is one of the captives from Judah, whom my father the king brought from Judah? I have heard of you, that the Spirit of God *is* in you, and *that* light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you. Now the wise *men*, the astrologers, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing and make known to me its interpretation, but they could not give the interpretation of the thing. And I have heard of you, that you can give interpretations and explain enigmas. Now if you can read the writing and make known to me its interpretation, you shall be clothed with purple and *have* a chain of gold around your neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom." (Daniel 5:13-16 NKJV)

When everything seems great, the party is in high gear, and God and His servants are being mocked and ridiculed, the hand of heaven writes a sobering message. And it isn't long before a panic-stricken worldly king cries out for someone who has the Spirit of God.

Belshazzar didn't think to call for Daniel himself; his memory of Daniel had long since faded. But his wise grandmother finally intervenes, and Daniel is called upon once again to interpret the message from God.

In verse 17, Daniel describes Belshazzar's sinful pride. "Then Daniel answered, and said before the king, "Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another; yet I will read the writing to the king, and make known to him the interpretation. O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father a kingdom and majesty, glory and honor. And because of the majesty that He gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whomever he wished, he executed; whomever he wished, he kept alive; whomever he wished, he set up; and whomever he wished, he put down. But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him. Then he was driven from the sons of men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling *was* with the wild donkeys. They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till he knew that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses. "But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this. And you have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven. They have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your lords, your wives and your concubines, have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know; and the God who *holds* your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified." (Daniel 5:17-23 NKJV)

Daniel was troubled when he had to give Nebuchadnezzar bad news in chapter 4. That wasn't the case here. Daniel was not impressed with this successor and told him he could keep his gifts. Daniel is harsh with the king because Belshazzar should have known better.

Belshazzar knew the stories of how the God of Israel worked miraculously to protect Israel and bring Nebuchadnezzar to an understanding of the power of Israel's God and the importance of having faith in Him. We are all responsible for honoring God according to the revelation we have. With our very breath we should praise the Creator, but Belshazzar used his breath to blaspheme God.

Belshazzar's ways only mocked and offended God. If God held Belshazzar responsible for the light that shone across his pathway, what would He say to those of us who live in the brilliance of light that shines upon our pathway every day? Today's most sinful person has more light of God's love and grace than Belshazzar had.

In verse 24, Daniel tells Belshazzar that God's judgment is at the door. "Then the fingers of the hand were sent from Him, and this writing was written. "And this is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. This *is* the interpretation of *each* word. MENE: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it; TEKEL: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; PERES: Your

kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians." [Daniel 5:24-28 NKJV](#))

Each word stands for a short sentence; mene signifies number and duration; tekem, stands for weighing a matter and making a decision about something; and peres, means dividing something.

- Belshazzar's number had come up, and He fell short.
- God was weighing Belshazzar's actions, and he came up light in the scales of righteousness.
- Therefore, God would divide Belshazzar's kingdom and give it to the Medes and the Persians.

The armies of the Medes and Persians conquered Babylon because Belshazzar and his kingdom no longer acknowledged the spiritual and moral values of Israel's God.

The ancient Greek historian Herodotus wrote that the Persian King Cyrus conquered Babylon by diverting the flow of the Euphrates into a nearby swamp. That lowered the river level and allowed his troops to march through the water and under the river gates. The irony is they still wouldn't have been able to enter the city if the bronze gates of the inner walls hadn't been inadvertently left unlocked. God predicted all this in Isaiah 44:28-45:7 two hundred years before it happened.

In October 539 BC, Cyrus conquered all of lower Mesopotamia, leaving the city of Babylon till last. One commentary says, "Empires do not stand by human might, man-made machines, and missiles. There is not a wall high enough nor thick enough to prevent a nation from falling when God pronounces that nation's doom." (Strauss)

In verse 29, Belshazzar does promote Daniel. "Then Belshazzar gave the command, and they clothed Daniel with purple and *put* a chain of gold around his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom." ([Daniel 5:29 NKJV](#))

This was a pretty empty coronation. Maybe Belshazzar hoped that by promoting Daniel, God wouldn't destroy Babylon. We don't know his motives, but we do know that Daniel didn't hold the position very long.

Verse 30 reports the death of Belshazzar and the rise of Darius the Mede. Verse 30 says, "That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, *being* about sixty-two years old." ([Daniel 5:30-31 NKJV](#))

Darius the Mede, who conquered the kingdom of Babylon, was a subordinate king under Cyrus, the Persian. He is referred to in secular history as Gubaru. Once again, God's word was fulfilled just as Daniel said, affirming its reliability and truth.

So, what lessons can we learn from Chapter 5?

I. Sin Will Be Judged

The first lesson is an obvious one; sin will be judged. In Matthew 7, Jesus warns about the tendency to condemn others without examining our own hearts first. It's always easier to see the flaws in others without searching our hearts for personal flaws and wrongdoing. That is how pride takes root. Jesus warns us against this kind of hypocrisy. Measuring your life by others doesn't count nearly as much as being measured by God.

As Christians, our number one priority is to put God first. Belshazzar put himself first, and it cost him everything in the end. Galatians 2:20 says, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." ([Galatians 2:20 NKJV](#))

In God's eyes, sin is sin, no matter what a person has done. Sin is disobedience against God. Sin is choosing something you know God wouldn't choose for you! Thank God for His grace through Jesus. Jesus Christ is the only atonement for our sins.

Someone once said, "The problem with pride is that you're usually the last to know you have it." Pride is the deep pleasure or satisfaction you derive from your own achievements. There's no acknowledgment or thanks to God. Rather than singing to God, "It's all about you!" we sing, "It's all about me!" Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin *is* death." God is patient and longsuffering, but don't think for one minute that God will forget about your sinning or that you'll get away without it costing you. 2 Peter 3:9 says, "The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." ([2 Peter 3:9 NKJV](#))

God would much rather forgive you of your sins than judge you for them. But He's prepared for both! And sin will be judged.

II. God's Timing Is Perfect

The second takeaway from this chapter is that God's timing is always perfect timing. God has perfect timing. He's not early, but He's never late. God is not in a hurry; He's always on time. Even when it comes to the birth of Jesus as our Savior, the Apostle Paul writes in Galatians 4:4 that, "when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law." ([Galatians 4:4 NKJV](#))

God's perfect timing grows faith in the faithful and brings judgment upon the unfaithful. Perfect timing lends credibility to those who believe in and support God's work. But it brings disgrace and humiliation to those who mock and sneer at God. God tells Isaiah to write, "For My thoughts *are* not your thoughts, Nor *are* your ways My ways," says the LORD. "For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, So

are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:8-9 NKJV)

In Psalm 31:15, the Psalmist says, "My times are in Your hands." God's ways are not our ways. He sees from an eternal perspective. He knows the past, present and future – all at one time!

Daniel is not impressed with the king's offer of promotion. He knew that seeking the king's offer would also end in disaster for him. We really need to be careful of our associations with others. The most important relationship you have is with Christ! The world will promise you everything and anything – fame, fortune, riches – you name it. But the end result will only be loneliness, fear, anxiety, and hopelessness.

Without faith, the future holds only despair and futility. In the midst of his partying, living it up, reckless celebration, the devastation came. The bragging, overconfident king of the moment fell silent in paralyzing fear. Belshazzar's countenance changed. He no longer had all the answers. He had that sick feeling in his stomach, and his knees knocked against each other. And the horror and fear were so great the king cried out loud for help!

Daniel stood in the same space as Belshazzar with peace and confidence that God would prevail and he would be saved. No matter how terrible and impossible your situation may seem, even if there appears to be no answer, no help, no hope, and no way out – there is still good news! God can bring you through it because He alone has the final say.

Timing matters, and God's timing is always perfect! And maybe it's your time to put your faith in someone who can really help you! Maybe it's time to put your faith in Jesus Christ to be your Savior. It is never too late to put your faith in God.

III. God Is Always True to His Word

Finally, God is always true and faithful to His word. All of the prophecies of God will be fulfilled. God is faithful (reliable, trustworthy, and therefore ever true to His promise, and He can be depended on); by Him, you were called into companionship and participation with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. God is faithful to His Word. His promises are trustworthy, and God always does what He says He will do. We live based on God's promises; we pray based on God's promises, and we serve based on God's promises.

God is always true to His Word. He is faithful to His plans and purposes. In Deuteronomy 28, God told Israel, "Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God: (Deuteronomy 28:1-2 NKJV)

Faith in God opens up tremendous possibilities for blessing and success. But going your own way and resting in yourself causes you to ignore or disobey God, leaving you on your own and ultimately under divine judgment. That is something Belshazzar experienced.

God also warned Israel about this in Deuteronomy 28, "But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: [\(Deuteronomy 28:15 NKJV\)](#)

The most important decision you will make in your life is to choose your own way or choose God's way. God can never be defeated, distracted, or disappointed. Whatever He plans, He accomplishes. What He starts, He finishes. God never gives up. According to Ephesians 1:11, "He works all things according to the counsel of His will." Isaiah 46:10 says, "He knows the beginning and end of all things." God is always true to His Word.

Conclusion

God wants to restore, heal and help us see that eternal life is a much better choice than eternal death. Proverbs 16:18 says, "Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall." C.S. Lewis wrote, "There are two kinds of people: those who say to God, Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, "All right, then, have I your way." Belshazzar's experience reminds us that even the mightiest of men quake when God speaks.

God weighs our actions, numbers our days, and decides our future. The pleasures of sin only last for a season, but God's word is always reliable and eternally true.