

"GOD'S DEADLINE"

Daniel 5:1-31

Tonight, I want you to open your Bible to Daniel 5. In the flow of the book of Daniel, this chapter comes out of nowhere, though there is a clear theological connection to the last verse of chapter 4—**"Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride."**

Babylon was at this time the most magnificent and luxurious city in the world—devoted to every vice, and the center and mother of idolatry. From the days of Nimrod and the tower of Babel, till it was blotted out from under heaven, Babylon was the headquarters for many heathen mysteries.¹

I want you to consider with me this subject—*"God's Deadline."* There is a fundamental principle that runs throughout the Bible. It is called the law of sowing a reaping. Here's how it is stated in the Bible. . .

Galatians 6:7–8... Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. **8** For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

Try as hard as one may, he/she cannot skirt this spiritual law. Listen to the clear words of the Bible...

Romans 14:12... So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.

¹ Henry Allan Ironside, [*Lectures on Daniel the Prophet*](#), 2d ed. (New York: Loizeaux Bros., 1953), 82.

Hebrews 9:27... And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this *comes* judgment.

Ecclesiastes 12:14... For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.

In Daniel 5, we are introduced to this principle of God's judgment up close and personal. Nebuchadnezzar has already died. Seventy years have elapsed since the time of Daniel 1. Daniel, the great prophet of God, is now approaching 90 years of age. Nabonidas, the son-in-law of Nebuchadnezzar, is now ruling the kingdom. He has placed his son (Nebuchadnezzar's grandson) on the throne as his vice-regent. This son's name is Belshazzar.

Nebuchadnezzar is called Belshazzar's father six times (vv. 2, 11, 13, 18), and the king is designated as the son of Nebuchadnezzar once (v. 22). In light of the relationship of Belshazzar to Nabonidus, how may these statements be accounted for? ²

"Father" may refer to one's immediate father, grandfather, ancestor, or as in the case of kings, a predecessor. Likewise, **"son"** may mean one's immediate offspring, grandson, descendant, or successor. Jesus was called the **"son of David"** (e.g., Matt 1:1; 9:27; 12:23; 20:30–31; 21:9; etc.), although David was not Christ's immediate parent but an ancestor. Israelites called themselves **"sons of Jacob"** (Mal 3:6) and proudly proclaimed Abraham to be their **"father"** (John 8:53). Of course, the Jews meant that they were descendants of Jacob and that Abraham was their ancestor.³

The obvious reason that the relationship with Nebuchadnezzar is stressed and that of Nabonidus omitted is that only Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar

² Stephen R. Miller, [*Daniel*](#), vol. 18, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 148–149.

³ Stephen R. Miller, [*Daniel*](#), vol. 18, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 149.

are key figures in the story. Belshazzar should have learned the lesson of humility and submission to Israel's God from the episode in the life of Nebuchadnezzar (not Nabonidus).⁴

1. THE DEVIANT PARTY

The city of Babylon, by all appearances, seemed to be a secure fortress. The Euphrates River flowed through the city and supplied it with fresh water. I mean what could possibly go wrong?

Daniel 5:1–4... Belshazzar the king held a great feast for a thousand of his nobles, and he was drinking wine in the presence of the thousand. 2 When Belshazzar tasted the wine, he gave orders to bring the gold and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple which *was* in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. 3 Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God which *was* in Jerusalem; and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. 4 They drank the wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.

This wicked king threw a huge banquet for a thousand of his nobles. Alcohol flowed freely. Seductively dressed women must have danced to the delight of all. Rich, lavish food was served. Oh, yes there was a festive atmosphere in the banquet hall that night.

Archeologists report that the banquet hall was 60' wide and 172' long. Statues dedicated to the gods of Babylon lined the great banquet hall. In the midst of this sensual feast, Belshazzar ordered the holy vessels from the Jewish temple to be brought out. Wine was poured and they began to drink

⁴ Stephen R. Miller, [Daniel](#), vol. 18, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 150.

out of vessels dedicated to Yahweh and they praised the powerless idols fashioned by human hands.

2. THE TERRIFYING APPEARANCE

Daniel 5:5–6... Suddenly the fingers of a man's hand emerged and began writing opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, and the king saw the back of the hand that did the writing. 6 Then the king's face grew pale and his thoughts alarmed him, and his hip joints went slack and his knees began knocking together.

At last the fateful moment had struck; and at the very time that Belshazzar stood before his lords with one of the cups from Jerusalem's destroyed temple in his hand, praising his own vile demon gods, there came forth, in the full sight of all that multitude, the fingers of a man's hand, which wrote a strange, indistinguishable message on the plaster wall.⁵

I love the way Dr. John Phillips described this scene—**"Out of the dark sleeve of the night appeared a mysterious moving hand."** Can't you just picture it in your mind? Lit up by a candle, a man's hand began to write a message on the plaster wall. What did it say? What could it possibly mean? One thing is for sure; this party was over!

Belshazzar's face grew pale. His knees began to knock. Surely, he had never known fear like this. All over the room silence ruled. The women stopped dancing. The musicians put their instruments down. The great God of heaven intervened and put a stop to the Babylonian's blasphemy!

3. THE FRANTIC SEARCH

Daniel 5:7–12... The king called aloud to bring in the conjurers, the Chaldeans and the diviners. The king spoke and said to the wise men of Babylon, "Any man who can read this inscription and explain its

⁵ Henry Allan Ironside, [*Lectures on Daniel the Prophet*](#), 2d ed. (New York: Loizeaux Bros., 1953), 84.

interpretation to me shall be clothed with purple and *have* a necklace of gold around his neck, and have authority as third *ruler* in the kingdom.” 8 Then all the king’s wise men came in, but they could not read the inscription or make known its interpretation to the king. 9 Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, his face grew *even* paler, and his nobles were perplexed. 10 The queen entered the banquet hall because of the words of the king and his nobles; the queen spoke and said, “O king, live forever! Do not let your thoughts alarm you or your face be pale. 11 “There is a man in your kingdom in whom is a spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of your father, illumination, insight and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods were found in him. And King Nebuchadnezzar, your father, your father the king, appointed him chief of the magicians, conjurers, Chaldeans *and* diviners. 12 “*This was* because an extraordinary spirit, knowledge and insight, interpretation of dreams, explanation of enigmas and solving of difficult problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar. Let Daniel now be summoned and he will declare the interpretation.”

The king put out an order—“*Bring in the conjurers, the Chaldeans and the diviners.*” This was the same old crew who for the last 70 years has provided no answers whatsoever. He promised riches and royalty to any who could interpret the message on the wall. They couldn’t read it. Surprise, surprise!

Now Belshazzar was deeply troubled. The Queen, Belshazzar’s mother entered the great banquet hall. She reminded him of the great Hebrew prophet who had been so helpful to King Nebuchadnezzar. So Daniel was brought in (vs. 13).

This Queen was not Belshazzar’s wife. The text explicitly states that the wives of the king were already present. She must have been a highly prestigious lady since she entered the banquet hall uninvited, and when she arrived, she seemed to take charge. Most commentators since the time of Josephus have identified her as the

queen-mother, either the wife of Nebuchadnezzar or the wife of Nabonidus.⁶

4. THE JEWISH PROPHET

Daniel 5:13–16... Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king spoke and said to Daniel, "Are you that Daniel who is one of the exiles from Judah, whom my father the king brought from Judah? **14** "Now I have heard about you that a spirit of the gods is in you, and that illumination, insight and extraordinary wisdom have been found in you. **15** "Just now the wise men *and* the conjurers were brought in before me that they might read this inscription and make its interpretation known to me, but they could not declare the interpretation of the message. **16** "But I personally have heard about you, that you are able to give interpretations and solve difficult problems. Now if you are able to read the inscription and make its interpretation known to me, you will be clothed with purple and *wear* a necklace of gold around your neck, and you will have authority as the third *ruler* in the kingdom."

Daniel, the man of God, is brought before the king. There may be a subtle insult directed at the old man, now likely in his eighties, as he is referred to as "one of the Judean exiles" (v. 13). Interestingly, the king calls him by his Jewish name.

Belshazzar repeats the queen mother's praise of Daniel, revealing that his reputation precedes him (v. 14). The king recounts the failure of his impotent soothsayers (v. 15) and reaffirms his promise of purple, gold, and promotion to third ruler in the kingdom if Daniel can interpret the handwriting on the wall (v. 16).⁷

⁶ Stephen R. Miller, [Daniel](#), vol. 18, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 159.

⁷ Daniel L. Akin, [Exalting Jesus in Daniel](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), 62.

5. THE PIERCING MESSAGE

Daniel knew all about Nebuchadnezzar's dream and the interpretation. He recorded it in detail in Daniel 2. He knew about the succession of world empires. Therefore, he didn't want the gold, the robes, or a position in the kingdom!

He taught Belshazzar.

Daniel 5:17–21... Then Daniel answered and said before the king, "Keep your gifts for yourself or give your rewards to someone else; however, I will read the inscription to the king and make the interpretation known to him. **18** "O king, the Most High God granted sovereignty, grandeur, glory and majesty to Nebuchadnezzar your father. **19** "Because of the grandeur which He bestowed on him, all the peoples, nations and *men of every* language feared and trembled before him; whomever he wished he killed and whomever he wished he spared alive; and whomever he wished he elevated and whomever he wished he humbled. **20** "But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit became so proud that he behaved arrogantly, he was deposed from his royal throne and *his* glory was taken away from him. **21** "He was also driven away from mankind, and his heart was made like *that of* beasts, and his dwelling place *was* with the wild donkeys. He was given grass to eat like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until he recognized that the Most High God is ruler over the realm of mankind and *that* He sets over it whomever He wishes.

This young king needed to know that God is sovereign. He has the power to put rulers in office, and He has the power to take them out. He is the great and awesome God!

He rebuked Belshazzar.

Daniel 5:22–23... "Yet you, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this, **23** but you have exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines have

been drinking wine from them; and you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which do not see, hear or understand. But the God in whose hand are your life-breath and all your ways, you have not glorified."

You should know better. You are even more responsible than your grandfather! You have blasphemed and mocked God with your revelry and idolatry. Indeed, He had sinned willfully and defiantly. (Hebrews 10:30-31).

He revealed the message.

Daniel 5:24–28... "Then the hand was sent from Him and this inscription was written out. 25 "Now this is the inscription that was written out: 'MENĒ, MENĒ, TEKĒL, UPHARSIN.' 26 "This is the interpretation of the message: 'MENĒ'—God has numbered your kingdom and put an end to it. 27 " 'TEKĒL'—you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient. 28 " 'PERĒS'—your kingdom has been divided and given over to the Medes and Persians."

This is the shortest prophecy in the Bible according to Dr. Phillips. There were just four words... **NUMBERED NUMBERED WEIGHED DIVIDED**

6. THE DIVINE PENALTY

Daniel 5:30–31... **That same night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain. 31 So Darius the Mede received the kingdom at about the age of sixty-two.**

Read it slowly—"**That same night.**" This hard-hearted sinner was not given another chance. His judgment was swift and sure. Even as the party was going full bore, the army of the Medes and Persians were diverting the Euphrates River, and they walked into the city on the riverbed itself. Babylon the great had fallen. Belshazzar lay in a pool of his own blood, but his soul will live in torment forever and forever. Listen, God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows that he will also reap!

Concerning the historicity of this feast, both the Greek historians, Herodotus and Xenophon,²¹ testified that a banquet was in progress on the night Babylon fell (see later discussion). The date would have been October 12, 539 BC, about thirty years after the events of chap. 4.⁸

CONCLUSION

What does this mean for you and me? I think there is a...

1. Personal Application

You and I are accountable to God. How we live matters to Him. Have you repented of your sin and placed your faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? If Belshazzar sinned against the light God provided through his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar, how much more do you have the opportunity of sinning against even greater light?

Are you a believer? You are accountable to God for how you live as a believer. God will discipline you in an effort to make you holy. If you don't choose to obey God, the discipline will get more severe and more severe. Live for Jesus and obey Him!

2. National Application

America is under the watchful eye of Almighty God. Don't dare think that we can continue to sin with a heavy hand against the holy God and get off scott free. God plants nations and uproots nations. The nations are just a drop in the bucket to God. We must repent and call on the

⁸ Stephen R. Miller, [Daniel](#), vol. 18, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 150–151.

God of heaven or we will be placed on the scrap heap of nations!

3. Corporate Application

This church belongs to Christ. We are lukewarm and I tell you it makes God sick. The days of playing at church are over. We need an old-fashioned revival. These words seem most fitting for our study tonight...

There's a time, I know not when

A place, I know not where

That seals the destiny of men

To heaven or despair.

There's a line by us not seen

That crosses every path

A hidden boundary

Between God's patience and God's wrath