

WRITING ON THE WALL

Daniel 5

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

Introduction

Daniel 4 reveals how Nebuchadnezzar lifted himself up in pride, but after he was judged by God with sickness for seven years, he submitted himself to the power and control of God. In this chapter Belshazzar also lifted himself up in pride even after he knew how God had judged Nebuchadnezzar. In fact, he blatantly scorned God's power. Therefore, he immediately received the judgment of God without any more mercy.

Aim of the Lesson

We must not lift up ourselves in pride and walk contrary to God's authority or He will judge us.

God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God (Jam 4:6-7).

A HAND WRITING ON THE WALL

Outline of the Lesson (Use the Study Notes to add to this lesson plan as the Spirit leads you.)

I. Revelry of Belshazzar (5:1-4)

Belshazzar was more proud than Nebuchadnezzar, even though he had less ability than his grandfather. Although Nebuchadnezzar's attitude was inexcusable, he was teachable. Belshazzar's pride, however, was defiant, willful and unteachable. Although he knew of God's past dealings with Nebuchadnezzar (5:22), he hosted a drunken feast in defiance of God. In this feast he desecrated the holy vessels of God by using them to drink his wine in praise to the impotent gods of Babylon, which he worshipped.

God is very patient, but if we lift up ourselves in pride and willfully choose to defy God's will, His judgment will strike us in holy wrath.

II. Revelation of God (5:5-9)

God did not destroy Belshazzar without first exposing his sin. God could have allowed Cyrus' troops to come in and slay Belshazzar without the handwriting on the wall, but God wanted the king and all of his lords to know that their affairs were under His control. Furthermore, God wanted the king to know that his doom was coming as a result of his pride. Not only that, but Belshazzar's defiance had been public (5:1); therefore, God wanted to announce in public His holy judgment of the king. To do this, God chose to use a hand that wrote His message on the wall of the banquet hall to Belshazzar and to his leaders. Belshazzar was visibly shaken by the supernatural writing on the wall, but he could not understand what was written. Neither could any of the counselors in his kingdom understand what was written.

We have no excuse for pride. All that we are and all that we have is from God. We must give Him our praise and thanks for all of His blessings. God has revealed Himself to us through creation, through our conscience, and through His Word, the Bible (Rom 1: 19, 20; 2 Pet 1:19). He shows us His basis and justice for our condemnation. He also proves to us that He deals seriously with pride. We never need to ask God why He judges pride, because He has adequately revealed to us His eternal power and Godhead; we have no excuse (Rom 1:20b).

III. Recommendation of the Queen (5:10-12)

God would not allow His important message on the wall to remain a mystery to the king, but He would not allow the king's unholy wise men to read His holy message. God would use Daniel, a holy man to read His message. Daniel's testimony had been very consistent for God in Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom. But Daniel no longer held an important position in Belshazzar's government. Belshazzar despised God, so he did not want Daniel to represent God in his presence. So how would God arrange to have Daniel read His message on the wall? God used Belshazzar's mother, Nitocris, to remind him of Daniel's ability to interpret the mysteries of God for Nebuchadnezzar (5:11, 12). In this way God arranged for Daniel to interpret the writing on the wall, to deliver His message of judgment to Belshazzar and to quench his pride.

We can never completely block out God's message from our minds. He may send some godly person our way, use a tract, the radio or television, or even give us a dream to call our attention to His message. Somehow we will be brought face-to-face with His judgment for our sin. We cannot hide from God.

IV. Reception of Daniel (5:13-16)

Belshazzar's reception of Daniel was far more open than he would have been under other circumstances, but Belshazzar was desperate (5:14, 15). Belshazzar wanted not only to know the meaning of the words, but he probably was angling for a favorable interpretation! Perhaps he thought mercy could be attained by flattery or by reward. But if so, he was in for a shocking surprise. A true interpreter cannot change God's message.

We cannot use flattery or gifts to soften the judgment of God toward our sin. The only recourse we have for the mercy of God is to repent. Any person who changes the judgment of God by our flattery or by our gifts is a fool. If we believe such a person, we are as foolish as he is.

V. Rebuke of Belshazzar (5:17-24)

Daniel was unaffected by the enticements of the king (5:17). To prepare Belshazzar for God's judgment, He reminded Belshazzar in detail of God's judgment on Nebuchadnezzar for his pride (5:18-21). Then Daniel uncompromisingly delivered the message of God's message of judgment to Belshazzar. He told him that he had far surpassed Nebuchadnezzar's sin of pride by knowingly defying the God of heaven Who was his source of life and "success" (5:22, 23).

We need to listen to the faithful messenger that God sends to us. If he is true to God's Word, he cares not about earthly fame and gifts, but only about his faithfulness to God's message. We must not turn away from his message for it is our only hope for God's mercy.

VI. Rendering of the Handwriting (5:25-29)

Belshazzar was weighed in the balances of God to determine if he should continue to rule Babylon. His works as a king were balanced against the standards of God for this lofty position. When the results were determined, God would not allow him to remain any longer as king. His proud defiance of God rendered him absolutely useless to God. He utterly failed to realize that he was allowed to be king of Babylon by God so that he might be a minister of God (cf. Rom 13:1-4). Nebuchadnezzar finally realized this truth (4:3, 34-37), but Belshazzar refused to believe this truth. Thus, God was finished with him (5:26) and his kingdom would be given to another king who ruled the Medes and Persians (5:28).

We also are given a job by God by which we are to bring glory to Him. If we cease to be useful to God and use the talents and gifts He has given to us to benefit ourselves, He has every right to take that job away from us and give it to someone else.

VII. Reality of the Prophecy (5:30-31)

The judgment of God was swiftly carried out. That night Belshazzar lost his life and his kingdom; these are the two things that he treasured most. He lost them because of his refusal to submit himself to God (cf. Mt 16:25-27). He defied the God of heaven and thus received his punishment.

If we submit to God and live for Him, we will receive His blessing, but if we defy God and live for our own desires, we will receive His judgment. The results are certain; the choice is ours.

PRAISE PLEASES THE LORD, BUT PRIDE PUTS US IN PERIL

A Suggestion for Teaching the Lesson

Ask your students questions from the Student's Lesson and appoint different ones to read the Scriptures where the answers can be found. After a right answer is found, share other truths you have gleaned from your study of the Bible, from the Study Notes and from the Teacher's Plan. Make applications to the students' lives where they fit (some are found in the Teacher's Plan). This approach will keep the interest of your students.

A Suggestion for Concluding Your Lesson

You may wish to conclude your lesson with a summary of some principles taken from Daniel 5 on the subject of God's judgment.

I. God's Judgment is Preceded by Warnings.

A. Historical Warnings – Belshazzar was warned by history. He knew of God's judgment of Nebuchadnezzar for his pride. He who will not learn from history, will be destroyed by history.

B. Personal Warnings – Belshazzar was warned by the handwriting on the wall.

II. God's Judgment is Given to Individuals.

A. Accused Individually – Belshazzar was told to his face that he was guilty of a defiant pride toward God even though 1000 other leaders were present.

B. Sentenced Individually – Belshazzar was told that his kingdom was finished and would be given to the Medes and Persians.

III. God's Judgment is Determined by a Standard.

A. Holy Standard – God gave Belshazzar the throne of Babylon to bring glory to Him, not to himself. He is the minister of God.

B. Inflexible Standard – God's standard does not bend to flattery or gifts or power.

IV. God's Judgment is Executed with Precise Timing.

A. Different Timing – Belshazzar's was sudden, but Nebuchadnezzar's was slow.

B. Certain Timing – Belshazzar lost his kingdom that night.