**DANIEL CHAPTER 5**

I gotta tell you – it is sooo gooood to be back with you again. Last week Cindy taught on Daniel 4. I wasn’t here, so, tell me what happened. [Chapter 4 slide] What do you remember from Chapter 4? [Neb’s dream, Daniel interprets it, calls for king to change his sinful ways, a year later king goes insane, cow eating grass, after 7 years king’s sanity is restored, Neb humbles himself and praises God]

So as we pick up the action in Ch 5, 25 years has passed. Neb died after ruling in Babylon for 40 years. After that the Babylonian Empire began to decline. Three rulers followed Neb. The last of these is his son Nabonidus. Nab cared little for Babylon, its people or its traditions. He even cancelled Babylon’s chief holiday. This was a very unpopular decision. For eight years of his 16-year reign, Nab set up his palace in faraway Arabia. While he was away he left his oldest son in charge of ruling Babylon.

[Question 1] Who is now serving as king of Babylon?

Eventually Nabonidus returns to Babylon, but he remains uninterested in being king. He’s more interested in archaeology and historical research. So he sets his son Belshazzar as co-regent and imposes even more policies that are unpopular with the people of Babylon. Nabonidus is hated and resented so much that in 539 B.C. (our lesson today), when the Medo-Persian army takes over Babylon, they are hailed as liberators, as heroes. Ch 5 recalls the last day in the life and reign of King Belshazzar. With that background let’s look at the biblical account, Daniel Chapter 5.

READ Daniel 5:1-4. This banquet hall is so large that it can seat 10,000 people at one time! So a tremendous crowd of people is present. I want you to picture the scene. The king, his officials, his wives and concubines are all there. The banquet hall is filled with people dressed extravagantly, wearing gold, jewels and fine robes. Music plays and there is dancing and drinking and all kinds of debauchery taking place. As Belshazzar becomes more inebriated, he orders that the sacred vessels from the temple of God in Jerusalem be brought in so that they can use them for his own selfish purpose. By doing this, what sin is Belshazzar committing? We will actually answer this question later in Q5. These vessels were set apart by a holy God for His holy purpose. They were to be used in the temple worship. So Belshazzar is defying God by misusing the holy things of God. We will talk more about this later.

[Question 2] Belshazzar, unlike his grandfather, has no interest in the God of the Israelites, the God of heaven. He is completely selfish and self-absorbed. Well, everyone who is partying with Belshazzar is having a great old time, mocking the one true God while at the same time praising their own idolatrous images. And that’s when something very strange takes place…

READ Daniel 5:5-6.

[Question 3] “limbs gave way” – could barely stand up!

Everyone in the banquet hall sees this mysterious handwriting. The king immediately seeks answers. Like Neb before him and like the world today, Belshazzar looks for those answers in the conventional wisdom of his day.

READ Daniel 5:7. That phrase, “Have authority as third ruler in the kingdom” means that whoever can tell the king the meaning will be placed as third in charge of the Babylonian Empire behind only his father and him, who rule Babylon as co-regents.

READ Daniel 5:8-9. Again the so-called “wise men” of the kingdom are unable to provide the king with the answer to the mysterious handwriting on the wall. They can’t even read it because it is in a different language. Just when all seems hopeless, somebody remembers a certain man by the name of Daniel.

READ Daniel 5:10-12.

[Question 4] Some commentaries believe that the queen spoken about here is very likely the king’s grandmother, Nebuchadnezzar’s widow. That makes sense because she would have been aware of Daniel’s encounters with Nebuchadnezzar 20-plus years before. By this time Daniel is an old man, probably semi-retired from public life. But notice his reputation in v 11 – “in whom is a spirit of the holy gods.” Through all his years in captivity Daniel remains faithful to his God. The pagan Babylonian world, of course, doesn’t fully understand Daniel. But they know that there is something special, different about him. The queen is certain that this man Daniel will be able to reveal the meaning of the handwriting on the wall. Well, Belshazzar listens to the queen and summons Daniel.

READ Daniel 5:13. When Daniel arrives on the scene it becomes obvious that he and the king have never met before. That’s not too surprising given that Belshazzar and Daniel are at opposite ends of the spiritual spectrum. They literally have nothing in common. Neb for all his faults at least had been a searcher of God at some point in his life. So he had crossed paths with Daniel during his search. He had conversed with Daniel about spiritual matters. Belshazzar, on the other hand, is a man who has nothing to do with God. He is completely worldly. Daniel’s obvious separation from Belshazzar’s drunken lifestyle is a lesson to all of us who belong to God. We are in the world but not of the world. We are to be separate from the world. [James 4:4, Romans 12:2, 1 John 2:15, 1 Peter 2:9, 2 Corinthians 6:14]

Belshazzar continues his discussion with Daniel…

READ Daniel 5:14-15. The king tells Daniel what he had heard about him (from the queen). He directs Daniel’s attention to the strange writing on the wall and informs Daniel that none of the wise men had been able to interpret its meaning for him.

READ Daniel 5:16. The king restates his promise of a reward of power and wealth if Daniel can interpret the meaning of the words written on the wall.

READ Daniel 5:17. Basically Daniel’s response is: "Keep your gifts for yourself or give your rewards to someone else.” Daniel is not the least bit interested in personal reward. But being a prophet of God, he will make known the meaning of the handwriting. As we will see, this is God’s direct message to Belshazzar. Daniel announces God’s message to King Belshazzar, giving him one last chance to humble himself and turn to God. He begins with a brief history lesson… A good preacher or teacher always provides context for their message.

READ Daniel 5:18-22. Daniel recounts how Belshazzar’s grandfather Neb had come to the realization that the true God was the God of heaven and that this same God rules over the affairs of men. With that Daniel turns and looks directly at Belshazzar. He gives him a personal message. Daniel says, “You failed your history test.” You failed to respond as Neb responded. You failed to humble yourself, “even though you knew all this.” (v 22)

Instead of humbling himself, look at the charges levied against King Belshazzar by God (through Daniel)…

READ Daniel 5:23.

[Question 5] Belshazzar is guilty of 4 things: (1) PRIDE in placing himself above God;

OK for this second one I threw you a major league curve ball. I wanted to get you to really think. I will help you out. When you take something that God considers to be holy and use it for an unholy purpose this is what? Desecration, defiling, befoul, dishonor, contaminate. Think about it this way: if I use a curse word, say taking God’s name in vain we call that kind of language what? Profanity. So that’s the word I wanted you to learn – it’s used a whole bunch in Leviticus and Ezekiel.

(2) Mocking or insulting God by PROFANING the holy vessels taken from God’s house; (3) PRAISING the false gods of the Babylonians; and (4) not honoring GOD (the one who gave him the breath of life).

What does this teach us about God’s priorities? First, we must see ourselves as God sees us. We have intrinsic value. But we are NOT more important than God. Our personal agendas must fall within the parameters of His perfect will for us. Our plans and goals must be compatible with His plans. Second, we must never misuse God’s house or the things in it (or anything He has designated for His holy purposes). Third, we must never worship anyone or anything other than the one true God. Finally we much recognize that God is the giver of life and of all the blessings we enjoy. He must receive all the glory for that. We must never fail to praise God and give Him all the credit that He deserves. [example praises on prayer sheet]

READ Daniel 5:24. The handwriting on the banquet hall is God’s divine judgment on Belshazzar and upon all of Babylon. Daniel reads aloud the words penned by God Himself, words that may be recognizable but whose meaning cannot be deciphered. Daniel empowered by the Spirit of God is going to decipher them.

READ Daniel 5:25. Three words were written, one of them appears twice. Each word has something to do with a unit of measure. These words were inscribed in Hebrew and Chaldee – not the language of the Babylonians, which was Aramaic. Daniel proceeds to tell the king their meaning.

READ Daniel 5:26-28. Here’s the message to King Belshazzar – “it’s over!” MENE means, “numbered.” Do you realize that God numbers your days on this earth? Well, you could say that Belshazzar’s number is up! The fact that the word is repeated twice underscores its certainty. It WILL happen.

TEKEL means, “weighed.” When we are all weighed in the scales at the end of our life God will not weigh all the good stuff on one side and the bad stuff on the other and send you to heaven or hell depending on which way the scale tips. No. All of us, when weighed on God’s scale, are found wanting just like Belshazzar. The only thing that can tip the scale in our favor is the blood of Jesus applied to our life. In Belshazzar’s case, he had rejected God (the revelation he had been given) and was found wanting.

PARSIN means, “divided.” PERES (v 28) is simply the singular form of the word PARSIN (v 25).

[Question 6] The Babylonian kingdom will be divided into two parts between the Medes and Persians. The nations of Media and Persia joined together and became known as the Medo-Persian Empire. They are talked about later on in Daniel’s prophecies.

Well, unbeknownst to the people in the king’s banquet hall that night, this judgment that Daniel has just spoken about is already underway!

[Next slide] Even as this banquet is going on, Cyrus the Persian is infiltrating Babylon. History tells us that the walls of Babylon were breached when the Persians secretly diverted the flow of the mighty Euphrates River upstream of the city. As the river subsided, the great moats and canals dried up. While the drunken festival is going on inside the walls of the city, the Medes and Persians sneak into Babylon along the riverbed without a fight. Perhaps the guards at the gates were so drunk they did not know what was happening. Most historians believe that by the time Daniel was speaking to Belshazzar, the Persians had already taken Belshazzar’s father Nabonidus prisoner. So, the siege of Babylon is well underway and the king isn’t even aware of it!

READ Daniel 5:29. Daniel finishes and the king rewards Daniel as he had promised. But Belshazzar seems to be totally oblivious to the words that Daniel has just spoken. He issues a proclamation that isn’t worth the paper it is printed on. Why not? Because by the next morning there is going to be a whole new government ruling Babylon.

Well, God may be slow to anger, but when His judgment finally does come, it is swift!

READ Daniel 5:30-31.

[Question 7] In a matter of moments enemy troops are inside the banquet room where Belshazzar is located. That very night Belshazzar loses his kingdom, he loses his life and he forfeits his soul for eternity. When the judgment of God had been pronounced by Daniel, the king had paid no heed to it.

Two chapters feature two different kings, Kings Neb and Belshazzar. Both were told that they had misplaced hearts of arrogance and pride. And the result was that God judged both of them. Neb was humbled about as low as you can get until he recognized that the Most High God rules over all. Belshazzar, on the other hand, was slain.

[Question 8]

God’s judgment is certain. It is talked about in both the O.T. and N.T. So where is your heart? Are you in the place God wants you to be – physically, spiritually or emotionally. If not, why not?