

Daniel 5

Where Does God Draw The Line? (version 2.0)

OR

What Happens When Your Number Is Up

I. Review/Introduction

A. Why has God left us the Book of Daniel

1. Jews are in exile, may feel abandoned, may believe God is not faithful
2. God provides events in time and prophecy to show He is not done, they are not abandoned
3. Does this by firmly establishing his sovereignty in world events
4. Theme: ^{Daniel 4:25b; 5:21b} “...*the Most High God is ruler over the realm of mankind and that He sets over it whomever He wishes.*”
5. Allows the Jews, (and us) hope that in his sovereignty he is firmly in control of world events past and future. World leaders could see if paying attention
6. That he is unchanging, faithful and will fulfill the plan he established in eternity past to accomplish his purposes

B. To that end Daniel is laid out ½ history and ½ prophecy, each half chronologically

C. Chapter 1-4 introduced to Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel M, H, A

1. Chapter 1 - 605 BC
2. Jews are be exiled to Babylon
 - a. sins of Manasseh 2Kings 21:10-16 and 2Chronicles 33:1-20
 - b. failed to give the sabbath rest to the land 2Chron 36 and Jer 25 for 490 yrs
 - c. Failed to follow the commands of God as given to Moses and are reaping the curses of Lev 26:27-35 and Deut 28:15-68
3. This Judgment is carried out by Nebuchadnezzar/Babylonians
 - a. God’s servant Jer 27:6-7 established as the ruler of the world
 - b. He is intelligent, proud and ruthless
4. Daniel M, H and A
 - a. Young men who draw the line and will not defile themselves
 - b. Who respond with respect to authority

- c. God gifted/established them to bring about his purposes in Nebuchadnezzar and world events.
5. Chapter 2 – 602 BC
6. Nebuchadnezzar
 - a. God reveals the vision of a statue to Nebuchadnezzar...privilege
 - b. Shows the futility of the wisdom of the world
 - c. Confronted with God's sovereignty over his own
7. Daniel M, H, A
 - a. Turn to God first in their hour of need
 - b. Wisdom and Tact
 - c. Established in the kingdom
8. Chapter 3 – between 2 and 4 (circa 590)
9. Nebuchadnezzar
 - a. Establishing his supremacy
 - b. calling for loyalty with the image...influenced by the dream?
 - c. Once again confronted by God's sovereignty over the physical world
10. M, H, A
 - a. Falsely accused by their peers
 - b. True to character...they take a stand...confront Nebuchadnezzar with God's sovereignty and willingness to serve Him no matter what
Daniel 3:18-19 "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."
 - c. Get themselves in the fire...then rescued
11. Chapter 4 – circa 550 BC
12. God's view of pride
 - a. It's us taking His glory for ourselves – Isaiah 2:17; 42:8
 - b. Is a sin – Proverbs 21:4
 - c. He hates it – Proverbs 6:16; 16:5

- d. He is opposed to it – James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5
- e. He will address it – Proverbs 16:5
- 13. God doesn't act immediately in regard to pride or sin because he is patient
 - a. He wants people to repent – Romans 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9
 - b. He wants us to know the riches of his glory and mercy – Romans 9:22-24
 - c. Eventhough He is patient He doesn't take kindly to being poked in the eye and will respond...at times immediately
- 14. We have seen God interact with Nebuchadnezzar in Chapters 1-4 and ultimately exercise his grace and mercy by calling and humbling him
- 15. We have seen Daniel maintain his character, walk blamelessly while communicating God's will and plan...in all circumstances
- D. This week we are going to see God's final interaction with the Babylonian kingdom...the first of the Gentile kingdoms as prophesied by Daniel
 - 1. We will see a different response from God in regard to pride
 - 2. Kind of the antitheses of his dealings with Nebuchadnezzar
 - 3. Although He is patient, compassionate and merciful
 - 4. He is also righteous and does judge in righteousness...sometimes in time
- E. In the midst of all this we will once again see a persistent life of character demonstrated

II. The Main Character – Belshazzar (vs 1a)

- A. Nebuchadnezzar is dead...died in October of 562 BC after reigning 43 years
- B. This account takes place 23 years after his October 11/12, 539 BC
- C. There have been a run of kings since Nebuchadnezzar's death
 - 1. Nebuchadnezzar's son Evil-Merodach/Amel-Marduk (2 Kings 25-27) rules for 2 years (562-560 BC) then is assassinated by his brother-in-law Nergal-sharezer
 - 2. Neriglissar/Nergal-sharezer had been an official under Nebuchadnezzar (Jeremiah 39) and rules for 4 years (560-556 BC) then is succeeded by his son
 - 3. Labisi-Marduk who rules for 2 to 9 months before being assassinated by a group who choses Nabonidas as king
 - 4. Nabonidas rules from 556 – 539 BC

- a. Apparently Nabonidas chooses not to live in Babylon but at Tema in Arabia because he worships a god other than Marduk and is away for long periods on campaign
 - b. History indicates he is away from the city for over 10 years and after that only visits infrequently
 - c. Nabonidas sets up his son Belshazzar as king (co-regent) in Babylon while he is away
5. Belshazzar rules as a coregent in Babylon from 556-539 BC
- D. Belshazzar is either the son or grandson of Nebuchadnezzar
1. The term father 5:11, 18 can mean literal father or ancestor
 2. The term son in 5:22 can mean literal son or descendant
 3. Nabonidas either married a widow of Nebuchadnezzar or his daughter and then had a son by her
 4. I am of the opinion that Belshazzar is Nebuchadnezzar's grandson as Jeremiah says in regard to Nebuchadnezzar:
Jeremiah 27:7 "All the nations shall serve him and his son and his grandson until the time of his own land comes; then many nations and great kings will make him their servant."

III. The Party Scene (vs 1-4)

- A. Belshazzar is throwing a party for 1000 of his nobles plus wives and concubines
- B. He is sitting in front of his subjects in a raised platform toasting and drinking
- C. His actions as he "tasted the wine" indicate that he was drunk
 1. He decides to bring out the vessels taken from the Jewish temple in chapter 1:2
 2. They use them to liven the party and praise the gods of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood and stone
 3. Typically it was not the custom for a king of this time openly insult other peoples gods
 4. They would show that these gods were subordinate by placing objects representing them in the temple of their god
 5. But being pan-theistic they would hedge and not openly insult them

6. They were really drunk
- D. It is a good bet there was also debauchery going on as well
 1. Parties of the day were known for their sexual content
 2. This is a drunken orgy
 3. Think it is bad today...There is nothing new under the sun
- E. In midst of all this drunkenness and debauchery Belshazzar blasphemes the God of Heaven
- F. Nothing like poking God

IV. The Scene Outside

- A. Babylon is under siege
- B. Belshazzar's father Nabonidas has been defeated in battle by the Medes and the Persians a few days before this event and is on the run...eventually he will be captured in Babylon and imprisoned
- C. The Medes and the Persians have been taking over more and more territory and have now surrounded Babylon
- D. Yet Belshazzar parties on

V. The Thinking That Leads to the Scene

- A. Belshazzar has known this is coming
- B. They have laid up stores for themselves that will last years
- C. They have plenty of water as the Euphrates runs right through the center of the city
- D. They have enclosed themselves in Babylon to wait out the opposition
 1. Was a formidable city
 2. Was double walled and daunting
 3. Herodotus tells us it was 15 miles on a side and that the walls were 350 feet high and 87 feet thick...maybe a bit of an exaggeration
 4. Archeology seems to indicate the outer walls were 17 miles in circumference, about 40 feet high and 27 feet thick with towers up to 100 feet high at regular intervals
- E. So why the party?

1. A morale booster
2. Thumbing his nose at the enemy
3. I am also of the opinion that Belshazzar is so arrogant to believe he is better than Nebuchadnezzar
4. In his uninhibited state he is demonstrating that he is more bold than Nebuchadnezzar by taunting God even when Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged the God of S, M, and A was not to be trifled with (3:29)

VI. The Scene Interrupted (vs 5-6)

- A. As all of this is going on a hand appears and writes on the wall
- B. The throne room was large 170' x 56' with the king in a niche in the center of the long wall
- C. The walls of the room were covered in white gypsum plaster to lighten up the windowless room
- D. The lampstand would have been set up to illuminate the king
- E. On the wall across from the lampstand, potentially behind the king (he sees the palm) a hand appears and begins to write
- F. Nothing ruins a party like an uninvited guest

VII. The Response to the New Scene (vs 6-9)

- A. Belshazzar is terrorized by the sight
 1. He goes pale
 2. His knees knock together
- B. Note he has the same response as in Chapter 2 and 4
 1. Called the usual suspects to interpret for him – Conjurers, Chaldeans and Diviners
 2. He offers a purple robe, a gold chain and a position of authority
 - a. The accessories are ones only allowed to be worn if given by the king
 - b. They were a sign of the king's favor
 - c. The third ruler would mean the interpreter would be elevated to right behind Nabonidas and Belshazzar in the line of authority
 3. Even though they are incentivized the wise men can't read or interpret the writing

4. We aren't sure why...the words appear to be Aramaic
5. Aramaic uses no vowel and is read right to left so may have looked
N S R H P L K T N M N M
OR by Jewish tradition they may have been written vertically
P T M M
R K N N
S L ' '
N
 - a. Maybe they can't figure out what words these actually should be
 - b. Maybe they could read the words but couldn't decipher the meaning
 - c. Maybe God just clouded their thinking
6. But in any event as in all the previous cases the "wise men" are unable to let the king know what God is saying...leaving the King even more worried

VIII. The Scene is Calmed (vs 10-12)

- A. In comes the Queen
 1. Apparently this is not the wife of Belshazzar
 2. Note the wives are already at the party
 3. She comes in uninvited
 4. She has knowledge of things that have happen in the past as if she has seen them
 5. Most likely this is Belshazzar's mother
- B. She advises Belshazzar that he has not called upon all of his resources...There is a Man
 1. Spirit of the holy gods
 2. Illumination/Knowledge
 3. Insight (2x)
 4. Wisdom
 5. Chief of the wise men
 6. An extraordinary spirit
 7. Interpretation of dreams
 8. Explains difficult sayings
 9. Can solve the knottiest problems

C. She recommends Daniel by name...his Hebrew name

IX. Daniel On the Scene (vs 13-16)

- A. He is once again not where the action is...He is close at hand but separated from the drunkenness and debauchery
- B. Daniel's impact has gone beyond just the people he interacted with directly
 - 1. This is quite a glowing recommendation from the Queen
 - 2. At this time Daniel is in his early to mid eighties
 - a. Still in the service of the king (8:1, 27)
 - b. Apparently no longer the chief of the wise men
 - c. The king is not intimately familiar with him
 - d. Yet his character still precedes him

X. The Scene Interpreted (vs 17-29)

- A. Daniel comes on boldly...not rude...but to the point
- B. He does this in front of all
- C. Provides a history lesson/gives a sermon
 - 1. God set up Nebuchadnezzar gave him glory and sovereignty
 - 2. But when he became proud God took that away from him
 - 3. He did however acknowledge that God rules over the realm of mankind and He puts over it whomever He will
- D. Cuts it straight with Belshazzar
 - 1. You knew this...That God is in control of all things
 - 2. But you have chosen to exalt yourself...once again pride strikes
 - 3. So much so that you have set yourself against God
 - 4. And praised everything but He who holds your life in His hand
 - 5. So He has given you the writing on wall
 - 6. Pretty bold statements by Daniel
 - 7. Note that Chapters 7 and 8 come prior to this event so Daniel may understand even before hand what is taking place here.
- E. He reveals the interpretation

1. In short the message is Numbered, Numbered, Wanting and Divisions
 2. Mene = Numbered...Your days Belshazzar are number...just so you are clear, they are numbered
 3. Tekel = Weighed...Weighed but the term implies that the weight is short...you Belshazzar have come up short
 4. Uparsin/Peres = And Divisions...Your kingdom will be taken from you and be given to the Medes and the Persians (the second empire of which God spoke)
 5. Daniel once again is faithful to God and is unafraid to hold forth the truth
- F. A bit to his credit Belshazzar is good to his word and provides the reward to Daniel

XI. The Scene's Finale (vs 29-31)

- A. Belshazzar is finished
1. God's patience with him and the kingdom is at an end
 2. In this instance He exercises judgment, in time, in front of all
 3. Throughout time we see God use evil people to bring about judgment on his own people as well as others
- B. Belshazzar's arrogance is his undoing
- C. While the party has been going on the Medes and Persians have been busy
1. They have dammed up and diverted the Euphrates
 2. The water has fallen to such a level that they are able to walk under the walls directly into Babylon
 3. History records that they take the city without "firing a shot"
 4. And Belshazzar's judgment is carried out...he is executed
 5. Once again Daniel is elevated (6:1-3)
- D. We know from historical documents that God is done with Belshazzar and the Babylonians on the 16th day of Tishri...October 12, 539 BC

XII. In Summary

- A. It is a foolish thing to rely on our own or the worlds strength
- B. God will not tolerate pride and draws the line there
- C. He is patient in His dealings with us in order to bring about his glory
- D. Sometimes His glory is best promoted through judgment rather than grace and mercy

- E. I pray that we will act in faithfulness and humility as Daniel did
1. That our excellent character would precede us
 2. That all would know that we will be faithful to our God even when the outcome to us could be dire
 3. That we would be bold and hold Him forth even in the face of the sin of the world
 4. That this would be the pattern throughout our whole lives without interruption
- F. The following is a poem by Kipling written for Queen Victoria's Jubilee that I thought was a good reminder for us.

Recessional
by Rudyard Kipling

London Times, 17 July 1897, [Issue 1](#) of Critic leaflet

*God of our fathers, known of old,
Lord of our far-flung battle-line,
Beneath whose awful Hand we hold
Dominion over palm and pine
Lord God of Hosts be with us yet,
Lest we forget – lest we forget!
The tumult and the shouting dies;
The Captains and the Kings depart:
Still stands Thine ancient sacrifice,
An humble and a contrite heart.
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget – lest we forget!
Far-called, our navies melt away;
On dune and headland sinks the fire:
Lo, all our pomp of yesterday
Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!
Judge of the Nations, spare us yet,
Lest we forget – lest we forget!
If, drunk with sight of power, we loose
Wild tongues that have not Thee in awe,
Such boastings as the Gentiles use,
Or lesser breeds without the Law
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget – lest we forget!
For heathen heart that puts her trust
In reeking tube and iron shard,
All valiant dust that builds on dust,
And guarding, calls not Thee to guard,
For frantic boast and foolish word
Thy mercy on Thy People, Lord!*