

The Book of Daniel

Week 4: Chapters 5 & 6

Chapter 5

Verses 1-12:

After the passing of King Nebuchadnezzar, his son Belshazzar took over as regent-king and threw a banquet attended by a thousand people. What mistake did Belshazzar make that his father never did? How do we know?

Belshazzar used the plundered vessels from the temple in Jerusalem as common banquet utensils. Daniel 1:2 tells us that his father kept them in the treasury instead.

How did Belshazzar double down on his mistake?

While drinking from the cups, him and his guests praised false gods.

Why did the king become so frightened and call for enchanters and wise men to come to his aid?

He could not read what was being written. It was clearly a message, but the fact that it was in an unknown dialect made him terrified. Something supernatural is happening here. At least if it was written in plain Aramaic Belshazzar might know how to respond.

When the wise men were unable to help Belshazzar understand the dream, he only became more alarmed. Thankfully his mother, the queen, was there to comfort him. What did she tell Belshazzar to ease his fears? How does the queen treat Daniel in how she talks about him?

Verses 13-31:

How does Belshazzar first address Daniel in verse 13? What does this reveal about Belshazzar's opinion of him?

He calls him "THAT Daniel" as if he's heard the stories about what Daniel did for his father. Belshazzar seems fairly confident that Daniel will live up to the hype.

In responding to Belshazzar, how does Daniel once again show his humility? Instead of himself, who is Daniel trying to glorify here? How?

Daniel immediately rejects the rewards and gifts the king offers for his help. Instead he points Belshazzar to God, specifically the God that blessed his father, Nebuchadnezzar. He points Belshazzar to the power and might that his father had ruling the kingdom, and then puts that in perspective to the power of God.

What are the three sins Daniel convicts Belshazzar of?

1. Drinking from the sacred vessels.

2. Worshipping false idols.

3. Not humbling his heart before God. (This one led to the other two)

What Pharisaical inadequacy only made the problem worse? (What fact did Daniel remind Belshazzar of?)

Belshazzar should have known better. He knew the stories of his father and God. He knew the punishment for pride. Daniel reminds him of that.

Notice the difference in Daniel's demeanor compared to chapter 2. Before interpreting King Nebuchadnezzar's dream Daniel desperately prayed to God with his companions. Here Daniel, with a lifetime of experience being God's prophet, seems to be perfectly in tune with how he is to act and how he knows God will use him.

Daniel claims the writing was indeed from God and brings three messages. What were those messages?

MENE –

TEKEL –

PARSIN –

Here's where it gets interesting: Historical scholars have agreed that the three words interpreted by Daniel are all forms of currency, which were valued by weights. The order of the three words (mene, tekem, peres/parsin) are mina, shekel, half-mina.

The reason the wise men couldn't interpret the words were three fold. First, it's likely the letters were written without vowels and could be multiple messages based on where you inserted the vowels. Second, even if they realized the letters were talking about currency they were not in an easily discernible order. If by weight (and worth), you would expect mina, half-mina, shekel. But for some reason the coin worth much less is in the middle. Third, even if they knew for a fact it was about currency and they had the right order, what could it possibly mean?

The interpretation comes from taking the root of the words (which are nouns) and turning them into verbs. MENE becomes "mena", which means "to count". TEKE becomes "tekiltah", which means "to be weighed". PERES/PARSIN becomes "perisat", which means "to be broken in two".

When you put the right vowels at the right places, separate the right letters into words, understand the meaning and order of the words, and use the roots of those words to create verbs, you finally get the message God was sending. **Money is counted, weighed, and divided, and Babylon will be too.**

King Nebuchadnezzar responded positively to Daniel when his dream was interpreted, despite foretelling his kingdom's demise. Perhaps the relief from sleepless nights changed what would normally be anger to joy. However, in Belshazzar's case why would he be happy with Daniel's interpretation of the writing when it was a much harsher message?

Belshazzar didn't have to lose many nights of sleep over the writing, though it did scare him, but perhaps he was motivated by fear instead. Daniel proclaimed that Belshazzar knew everything that

happened to his father and should have known better. If this is true, the fear of knowing what Daniel's God is really capable of might have overwhelmed any anger he had because of the writing.

The interaction between Belshazzar and Daniel ends by Belshazzar giving Daniel the gifts and rewards Daniel rejected in the first place. Why didn't Daniel need to reject it in the end?

It would be worthless the next day. The reward would reject itself as soon as Darius took over and invalidated all of Belshazzar's choices.

Chapter 6

Verses 1-9:

The chapter begins by Darius taking over ruling the Babylonian empire (himself being a Mede, which together with the Persians made up the next empire) and the first thing he does is select officials to help rule the lands. He selects 120 satraps that oversee different regions and report to three high officials who take matters to the king. One of those three officials was Daniel.

Why would Darius have kept Daniel as a high official when he didn't know Daniel or when Daniel hadn't yet done anything for him?

Daniel must have been held in high regard by not just the king, but also the other officials and the people. A new king wouldn't want someone that worked for the old king working for them unless it was clear the allegiance wasn't to the king, but to the kingdom.

Like we saw with the Chaldeans in chapter 3, Darius's royal officials are also upset that people like Daniel are getting better treatment than they are. This led them to make a plan to overthrow Daniel and his new position. However, their first attempts at doing so failed. Why?

Daniel was faithful. He did no wrong (according to Persian or Median law) that the officials could levy charges against.

When the first plan failed, the officials created a plan they knew could not fail. What was that plan? (very generally, not specific)

To pit the laws of the Persians and Medes against Daniel's religious laws.

The officials then created a document crafted to undermine Daniel's faith. They played on the pride of King Darius and created an edict that no one but the king should be worshiped for 30 days. If someone worships someone else, they shall be thrown into the lions den and devoured. Why would the king sign such a document?

1. Who doesn't want to be worshiped?
2. He had not yet encountered Daniel's God.

Darius had no problem signing an ordinance that boosted his ego because his ego had not yet been checked the same way his predecessors' egos had been. But he was about to get a swift lesson in the downfalls of haste and pride...

Verses 10-18:

What does Daniel do after finding out about the new law?

He continues right on praying as if nothing had changed.

Fun fact: Daniel opens his windows and prays toward Jerusalem not because of tradition but because King Solomon prayed to God (at the dedication of the temple) and asked Him to always hear prayers directed toward it (1 Kings 8:30). God then answers Solomon and promises to be attentive to prayers lifted up at/toward the temple (1 Kings 9:3).

What was the king's response to learning Daniel had broken the new law? Why did he react the way he did?

The king was distressed when he learned. He didn't want Daniel to die. He searched for loopholes so that Daniel wouldn't have to be cast into the lions' den. He did this because Daniel was faithful to him. He might not have known much about Daniel's God, but he knew Daniel and that was enough.

After doing what he could to find a loophole, Darius concedes that according to Persian and Median law, Daniel must, indeed, be thrown into the lions' den. What does Darius do that shows a deep level of respect for Daniel after throwing him in?

He makes an appeal to Daniel's God. Again, he doesn't necessarily know or care for Daniel's God, but he is so worried for Daniel that he willingly attempts to bless Daniel using the name of his God.

What does the sealing of the stone represent? How does Daniel's fate prepare us for the story of Jesus?

The sealing of a stone represents death. It wasn't supposed to be removed until whatever was behind it was dead for good. Daniel's position is mirrored in Matthew 27 when Jesus is also sealed, but this time in a tomb. And if that's the case, what happens to Daniel should prepare the reader for what would happen to Jesus.

Notice the symmetry of Daniel's interactions with kings. The first problem he deals with is also the last problem he solves: the king's insomnia.

Verses 19-28:

The next morning Darius rushes to the lions' den with hope that Daniel was somehow alive. When he calls out to Daniel, what reasoning does he give for why Daniel's God might have saved him?

He acknowledges Daniel's faithfulness, and if Daniel's God was going to save anyone, it should be for that continuous service.

Daniel responds to Darius letting him know that his God had sent an angel and protected him from the lions all night. What else does Daniel do in his response that wasn't necessary but shows his wisdom?

He honors the king. Despite confessing that it was God and God alone that saved him, he takes time to make sure his relationship with the king is still good, because he knows that's how God has called him to serve. So essentially he's being faithful in two ways: to the miracle and to his calling.

Oddly enough, despite Darius knowing that Daniel trusted his God (and even praying to that God once himself) it's clear that Darius didn't fully trust God until after this event. How do we know that? (hint: vs. 24)

Darius didn't punish the people who maliciously undermined himself and Daniel until after the lions' den problem was resolved. If Daniel had been killed, he might not have been as harsh. But it wasn't until he saw the power of God that he actually punished those who went against that God and his servants.

Daniel ends chapter 6 by reciting Darius's decree that Daniel's God is the true and eternal God. What does this decree remind you of?

1. Nebuchadnezzar's dream, specifically the stone mountain.
2. Nebuchadnezzar's praise to God before and after his pride in chapter 4.

Because of this, Daniel prospered in the kingdom of the Persians as well. And when Daniel prospers, the Israelites in the Persian empire would prosper as well. We know this is true because what story happened after Daniel died?

Esther.