

DANIEL 5

AIM OF STUDY:

- Recognise God's sovereign power over the nations of this world as well as his faithfulness to his covenant promises expressed in Daniel's faithful witness.
- Explore some of the historical links between Daniel and other ancient historians' accounts of the events described in Daniel 5.

MAIN TEACHING POINT:

God humbles the proud and gives grace to those who humble themselves.

SHARE WITH YOUR GROUP

1. Who has any family heirlooms that have been passed down to you? Describe them to the others in your group.
2. To what extent have these become mixed up with or kept apart from the other stuff in your home? Why is this? If they are normally kept apart on what occasions do they get brought out?

PRIDE.....

Read Daniel 5:1-4

Given that the events described here could well be taking place 70 years into the exile, it seems clear that the objects plundered from the temple in Jerusalem (see Daniel 1:2) up until this moment in time had been scrupulously kept apart.

3. Why the change now? To what extent is Belshazzar's command in verse 2 well thought through? How are we as readers meant to understand what is going on?
4. How do you explain king Belshazzar's strong reaction to the hand writing on the wall in verses 6 and 8-9?

..... BEFORE A FALL

The writer obviously wants us to read Daniel 5 in the light of Daniel 4. In 5:18-23, Daniel recounts to king Belshazzar the events described in chapter 4 and contrasts the behaviour and attitude of the two kings.

5. In what ways are the two men different? In verse 22 Daniel reproaches king Belshazzar for not humbling his heart, "*....though you knew all this.*" What is that Belshazzar knows?
6. Why does this make him particularly culpable before God?
7. Read Acts 17:22-31 in which the apostle Paul is responding to the idolatry that he sees in the city of Athens (see 17:16). What parallels do you find between what Paul says here and what is happening in Daniel's day?
8. Now read Romans 1:18-23. What parallels do you find here?
9. In what way do we see God's judgement fall at the end of Daniel 5?

In Daniel 4, proud king Nebuchadnezzar is humbled and brought low by God, the king of heaven. He then repents of his ways (4:34,37). In Daniel 5, proud king Belshazzar refuses to humble himself even though he lives with the knowledge of God's ways. Perhaps this explains his great fear when he sees the hand of God writing on the wall. He knows that he has not lived according to God's ways. Pray together that the Lord would keep us from pride and that our hearts would be humble before Him.

FOR FURTHER READING (IF YOU HAVE TIME)

Babylonian and other ancient historical sources give us a number of detailed accounts of the events described in this chapter. Here are just some of them:

- Belshazzar's name was for long time unknown to historians other than being found in the book of Daniel. An 1853-4 archaeological discovery of cuneiform writing cylinders speak of Nabonidus as king of Babylon 556-539BC. He was fourth in line to the throne after Nebuchadnezzar. We learn however that Belshazzar was Nabonidus' son and that he was given charge over Babylon while his father was away at a distant place for up to 10 years. Belshazzar may not have been Nebuchadnezzar's direct son but he is a son in that he stands in Nebuchadnezzar's lineage as king. This would mean that Daniel was an elderly man by the time he stood before the king.
- That night, Babylon fell and the text of Daniel tells us that Darius the Mede came to power aged 62. Historians are quite familiar with the name Darius but documents from the time indicate that he ruled about 20 years after the events described by Daniel. Cyrus is the name of the Persian ruler who gave the order for the Jews to return home after the exile. It is just possible that Daniel is referring to another Darius who also goes by the name of Cyrus. We know that Cyrus headed up the Medo-Persian empire when he conquered Babylon in 539BC. Historical records speak about Darius the Persian who could have been named thus to distinguish him from Darius the Mede, a different person.
- Herodotus in his Histories, 1.191 writes of the victory won by Cyrus (perhaps Darius the Mede) that very night. By draining off the river Euphrates upstream of where the river passed through the besieged city of Babylon he allowed his men to enter the city by wading through the river hitherto only navigable by boat. Thus the Persians took the Babylonians unawares, and because of the great size of the city (those who dwell there say) those in the outer parts of it were overcome, but *the inhabitants of the middle part know nothing of it; all this time they were dancing and celebrating a holiday which happened to fall then, until they learned the truth only too well.*
- Isaiah 21:1-10 and Jeremiah 51:1-58 predict the fall of Babylon in graphic terms.