

GOD'S JUDGMENT OF THE PRIDEFUL

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

God stands against the proud and will humble them.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Daniel 5

+ **SETTING:**

Previously, we looked at Daniel 1, where we saw young Daniel and his three friends resolve to be faithful to God. In this session, we jump ahead a few decades to Daniel as an older man. Because of his resolve to remain faithful to the Lord, God blessed him and his time in exile. Here we will see God once again use Daniel as the conduit of His revelation as he pronounces judgment on King Belshazzar for his stubborn and foolish pride.

DAY 1

READ:

Daniel 5:1-12

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Daniel 5:10-12

NOTES

Have you ever adjusted to a new boss or been made to report to someone different than you were used to? What about being stuck in a position where you were required to give respect to someone who didn't give it back? The book of Daniel describes a period when the Israelites were exiled and a new kingdom was in control: the Babylonian Empire.

In Daniel 5, God's people are well into their exile from Judah, and here we find them under the rule of yet another Babylonian king. In the first twelve verses, we get a really good picture of what being under his rule was like. Belshazzar was a foolishly prideful man who thought of himself as bigger than the God of Israel. So God made Himself known in a way that terrified Belshazzar and all of his house guests.

Although this is a theme throughout the book of Daniel, if we look broader, all of history is filled with new kings and kingdoms coming and going, rising and falling. Remember studying these kings and kingdoms in history class growing up? We can remember learning of the first empires with the Egyptians, the Romans, and the modern-day mega-power governments. New rulers will always have a beginning and an ending. The book of Daniel, though, reminds us that there is a kingdom that has no end. That is the kingdom of God, from which the true king, Jesus, comes to deliver His kingdom to us all. Jesus came the first time not to condemn but to comfort, not to destroy and divide but to reveal true love and new life. His kingdom is not about political power but something greater.

Although God's kingdom is what we believe in, other kingdoms often intrude in our daily lives. Earthly kingdoms may challenge us politically, spiritually, mentally, or emotionally, monopolizing our money, our time, and our energy. But only one kingdom is eternal.

Examine your life and answer this question: What kingdom are you serving, and who sits on the throne over your life?

DAY 2

READ:

Daniel 5:13-31

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Daniel 5:17-24

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"The arrogance of Belshazzar led to his blasphemous display before the noblemen of Babylon, and his unwillingness to learn from the example of his proud predecessor resulted in a death sentence with no chance for change. His example to us is a sobering reminder of how to treat God, his sacred belongings, and his instructive work in the lives of others. The one who wrote on the ancient wall rules the world—then, now, and forever."¹

—Wendy Widder

When you are baking, the small details can be very important. For instance, when you make bread, you need to activate the yeast. The way you do that is by using warm water, and then the yeast will feed off the other ingredients involved. If you don't activate the yeast, however, the recipe will never turn out the way it's supposed to. Just as it is important to make the right decisions in the small things with baking, the same is also important in the way you build your character. Good character is something that is built over time, and so is bad character.

Belshazzar had every opportunity to see God and His sovereign rule over all the earth through what God was doing in his own life as well as what God was doing in Nebuchadnezzar's life (see Dan. 4). He was aware of these circumstances but he refused to see what God had made so plain. Not only did he refuse to see it, he also lived contrary to it. He lived as if he were in control of his own life, doing as he pleased, believing there were no consequences for himself. But God sent Daniel to make it clear that he wasn't in control and that consequences were coming.

God shows us the importance of being faithful and ethical in our small decisions in the book of Luke. He makes it clear in Luke 16:10 that those who are faithful in very little are also faithful in much, and those who are dishonest in very little are also dishonest in much. Making the right small decisions can build your character, and wrong small decisions can very easily destroy your character.

Make sure your character is rooted in the truth of God's Word. Your relationship with Jesus should be the foundation of everything you do so that you will be found faithful, resulting in positive consequences, not negative ones.

What would you say your character is rooted in? What small steps will you take to build godly character?

DAY 3

READ:

Romans 14:1-12

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Romans 14:12

NOTES

In this week's narrative, we see God confronting Belshazzar not only through Daniel, but through a finger writing on the wall.

Can you imagine the day God will confront us? When we see God face to face? The moment we are standing before the King of kings and Lord of lords? The One who was and is and is to come? The One who is the ruler over all of creation? One day we get to stand in front of Him. Every single one of us will experience this moment. In Romans, Paul referenced the words written in Isaiah 45:23, where it says that every knee will bow before the Lord and every tongue will swear allegiance to Him. All of us, then, will be kneeling before our heavenly Father. We all will be placed before God, and He alone will be the One who judges each of us.

If this is the case—and it is—how important is it to remember that we will all stand before God? Why is it we spend so much time judging and comparing ourselves to others? What good is it that we despise our brothers and sisters?

Today, it is important to remember the example that Jesus set. Jesus came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10), and He did that by putting others above Himself while asking for nothing in return. Jesus didn't despise people for their sin but desired that they come to repentance. He met them where they were and loved them into the kingdom of God. Romans 14:12 tells us that each of us will have to give an account to God. Even if you've surrendered your life to God, you will have to give an account to God on how you used the freedom He won for you in Christ.

How does knowing that Jesus doesn't despise you for your sin, but desires that you come to repentance, change the way you see other people's sin?

DAY 4

READ:

Psalm 9

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Psalm 9:7-8

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #12: GOD IS HOLY

God's holiness refers to His uniqueness in being separate from all He has created. The Hebrew word for "holy" means "separate" or "set apart." God's holiness also refers to His absolute purity. God is unstained by the evil of the world. His goodness is perfect, and the moral code we find in the Scriptures is a reflection of His holy nature. As people made in God's image, we are called to holiness.

Heads or tails? Perhaps when posed with that question, you tend to choose the same option, though there should be a 50-50 chance for either side to come up. It is conceivable that we look at God similarly. It's always easier to study and talk about the mercy and unrelenting grace God has for us. We like that "side" of God. But we find it much harder to come to terms with the "other side"—He is equally just and righteous. The truth with God, however, is not "two sides of the same coin" but God is the same God yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8)—He is always gracious and just.

We can praise God for being just and righteous because we know and believe evil should be punished. In the story of Belshazzar, the king was evil and disregarded God and His holiness, so he was judged. God is holy and just and cannot let sin go unpunished. So when we are able to recognize God's righteous rule over all of us, we are able to see a fuller picture of who He is and how much He loves each of us in sending His Son to sacrifice Himself for us.

The Lord truly has an undeniable love for us that no matter what we might do on this earth, no matter how far we might wander from Him, He still welcomes us back into His open arms. He will forever be ready to accept us exactly as we are. We see this depicted beautifully in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). This attribute of God might bring us feelings of joy and peace, but this is only true if we have received and accepted the justifying work of Christ on the cross for our sins.

The Lord judges sinners like us with His perfect righteousness (Ps. 9:8), and this should result in fear and trembling. But He also judges in Christ the sins of those who come to Jesus in faith, so we should worship and praise Him from a posture of servanthood and dependence.

How should knowing that God declares you as righteous because of Jesus affect the way you come to Him, even when you sin?

DAY 5

READ:

John 3

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 3:16-21

NOTES

Some of us might be able to read the Scripture reference for John 3:16 and immediately quote the verse. It is described as one of the most popular verses in the entire Bible. John 3:16 is a full picture of the good news of the gospel. It is easy to focus on that verse, but it is important to realize that God's gift of Jesus was not because we deserved it.

John 3:18 reminds us that we all start from a position of condemnation and judgment, but Jesus's payment on the cross covered the price of our sin. It is as if you started to receive a paycheck with your name on it from some random company you never worked for. You come to find out that someone with your exact same name was not getting paid and you were getting the paycheck. Yet instead of the other person asking for the money, he or she just allowed you to have the money even though you did nothing to deserve it. The difference is that Jesus isn't continually working; He already has paid the price in full.

Knowing and believing that what Jesus did on the cross counted for you means there is no condemnation (Romans 8:1). But Jesus didn't die for just you; He died for those around you as well. Judgment is not a question of "if," it is a question of "when." Understanding the significance of John 3:16 will help you embrace the good news yourself and help you know how to present the good news of Jesus to others.

When God allowed His people to be exiled, He not only was disciplining them, He was making Himself known in other nations. In so doing, His plan to see all people join His family and have eternal life continued through foreign nations.

How can you use these verses today to share the love of Jesus with someone who has yet to receive Him by faith?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

“There is no human wall so high, no human accomplishment so great, that it is secure against the judgment of God. God will bring every deed into judgment. No matter how great the man, how hidden the means, or how long the practice has continued, God ultimately will prevail. His Word is true, and his justice is sure.”²

—Bryan Chapell

POINT 1: The Lord confronts those who profane that which is holy (Dan. 5:1-8).

King Belshazzar’s _____ and foolishness led him to dismiss and disdain the one and only _____ God.

? What are some ways you see an attitude of pride in our world today?

God’s _____ was coming for Belshazzar because of his _____, idolatry, and lack of reverence for God and His holiness.

POINT 2: The Lord rebukes those who exalt themselves instead of Him (Dan. 5:22-24).

Daniel _____ Belshazzar for his arrogance and sinfulness in _____ himself above God, the Creator and Sustainer of all life.

? How can all sin be connected to the idea that we exalt ourselves above God?

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #12: GOD IS HOLY

God’s holiness refers to His uniqueness in being _____ from all He has created. The Hebrew word for “holy” means “separate” or “set _____.” God’s holiness also refers to His absolute _____. God is unstained by the evil of the world. His goodness is perfect, and the moral code we find in the Scriptures is a reflection of His holy nature. As people made in God’s image, we are called to holiness.

? What are some ways we can grow in our efforts to reflect God’s holiness?

POINT 3: The Lord judges those who are found to be deficient (Dan. 5:25-30).

Belshazzar's days were numbered because he didn't _____ up to God's standard of holiness, as none of us do apart from the _____ work of Christ.



How should our own deficiency apart from Christ affect the way we see the sin of the people around us?

God desires that all people and _____ come to Him in faith before it's too late. In that respect, we, Jesus's _____, have much work to do.

MY RESPONSE

Because Jesus humbled Himself to be judged in our place, we seek to cast aside all pride, exalting Jesus as the Savior of the world every opportunity we get.

- **HEAD:** How does today's story inform the way you see God and His response to sin and foolish pride?
- **HEART:** We deserve death and eternal judgment, but Jesus took it for us. How does that realization give you a deeper appreciation for Jesus and His love for you?
- **HANDS:** How will you graciously confront the pride of others this week with the gospel of Jesus Christ?

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"As sin originated in the pride of Lucifer, so our redemption originated in the self-humbling of Jesus. We have as much of the mind of Christ as we have of His humility. This is the infallible gauge of spiritual growth."³

—Zac Poonen