

Daniel 5 and Accountability

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Seventy years had passed since Daniel was taken as a captive to Babylon. Now an old man, he has been forgotten by the rulers of the land. One fateful night the King of Babylon, a descendant of Nebuchadnezzar named Belshazzar, holds a feast with his nobles. In the midst of the drunken debauchery he orders the holy serving utensils from the Temple brought in to his feast, where he desecrates them with common unholy use. Suddenly, a hand appears and writes a message on the wall. Filled with terror, Belshazzar calls for help, but none can tell him the meaning of the message.

The Queen mother comes to the feast, and tells the king of a man from the time of Nebuchadnezzar who had the power of God; his name was Daniel, and he was summoned at once. Daniel arrives and proclaims that the king had failed to learn humility from his ancestor Nebuchadnezzar, and that his kingdom would now be taken from him. That night the Persians broke into the city and the king was slain.

What is the lesson we need to take away from this event? We are ALL accountable to God; whether a king or a slave, a wise man or a fool, a rich man or poor. Everyone will be held accountable before God for the life that they have lived. This is the message of many passages in the New Testament (Romans 2:1-11, Matthew 16:27, 2 Corinthians 5:10, Revelation 2:23). King Belshazzar is an example to all that the lives we lead are being judged by God, and that there is an ultimate accounting for them.

There is a second lesson we might consider in addition to this main point. Belshazzar's offense to God was complete when he brought out the vessels that were sanctified for the service of God. Today the temple of God is the church that Jesus built (1 Corinthians 3:16, 1 Peter 2:5), and we who are in Christ are the holy vessels of service (1 Thessalonians 4:4, 2 Corinthians 4:7). But we can offend God greatly when we turn our vessels to serving carnal desires. Using our holy vessels for unholy things is condemned repeatedly by God (2 Corinthians 6:14-17, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20) much in the same way God condemned Belshazzar.

Daniel 5 presents some important ideas to us. *Each one of us shall give account of himself to God (Romans 14:12). Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from dishonor, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work (2 Timothy 2:21).*