**The Sobering Situation of a Drunken King**

**Daniel 5:1-16**

**Introduction**

Have you ever been defiant or dealt with someone who was defiant? A defiant person is one who is deliberately and openly disobedient. King Belshazzar was a drunken, defiant despot who thought he was invincible. It appears his attitude was, “I can do what I want because I am the king of Babylon.” Although he knew that his kingdom was under siege, he didn’t seem to care! We will see that this was his last party. We need to understand the dangers of defying the living God.

1. **Babylon has a history of rulers who were defiant against God.** 
   1. Chapter 4 closed with the account of King Nebuchadnezzar’s tough path to humility before God. He tried to pass on to subsequent generations that it was best to submit to God. Belshazzar should have listened!
   2. Nearly 30 years have passed since that time. Nebuchadnezzar died in 562 B.C.
   3. The Bible records that his son Evil-Merodach succeeded him. (2 Kings 25:27) He was assassinated after two years by his brother-in-law, Nergalsherezer (Jeremiah 39:3).
   4. Nergalsherezer ruled for four years and appointed his son, Labashi Marduk, whose reign did not last a full year. History points to Belshazzar as the leader of the assassination plot against him. It is also recorded that he recommended his aging father, Nabonidus, to serve as King of Babylon in 556 B.C.
   5. Belshazzar was appointed as his co-regent by 553 B.C. Since Hebrew and Aramaic does not have a term for grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar was most likely his grandfather.
2. **The immediate situation demonstrated continued defiance against God.** 
   1. Medo-Persia was the rising power of the day. We know from Daniel 5:30-31 that this chapter records the fall of Babylon. Historians agree that the fall of Babylon happened on what we know as October 12, 539 B.C. The banquet described in Daniel 5 took place on the night before, October 11, 539 B.C.
   2. Having just defeated Nabonidus at Sippar on October 10, the Medes and the Persians now surrounded the city of Babylon.
   3. It was at this time that Belshazzar threw a big party for 1,000 leaders of his administration. (v. 1) Why would he throw a party at such a time as this? Herodotus, a Greek historian of the fifth century, recorded that it was the time of a Babylonian festival. Another Greek historian, Xenophon, said that the Medo-Persian Empire strategically chose to attack at this time because it was a festival time.
   4. Why would Belshazzar choose to continue with the festivities with the army around their walls? He still felt very much in control. He trusted the massive walls of Babylon to protect him! Although surrounded, they had the Euphrates River running through the center of the city; they had all the water they needed. They had stockpiled a huge quantity of food—some have estimated that they had enough surplus food to last 20 years! He did not feel threatened by the army.
   5. It appears the party was thrown to try to convince his leaders of the same. He wanted the people of his city to rest in his protection. He wanted to provide them a sense of normalcy, despite the alarm of yesterday’s headlines and their current situation. The people would not feel threatened since their king was enjoying the festivities of the season.
   6. The king normally ate in private with a select few, but on this occasion, he ate in the open with his delegates. He was situated at the head table that was elevated above the others. A thousand delegates and their wives and concubines were invited to the party. They were going to have a good time, even though the kingdom was in danger.
   7. He spared no expense for his lavish party. Belshazzar did not hesitate to spend the people’s money on himself! Belshazzar was drinking his problems away.
   8. Things went from bad to worse at Belshazzar’s drunken party. (v. 2-3) To add to their festivities, the king commanded that they bring in the vessels of gold and silver that had been taken from Jerusalem. These vessels belonged to the worship of Jehovah. He knew that. They had been showcased in the temple of Marduk since Nebuchadnezzar’s capture of Jerusalem. (1:2) No one had touched them or wrongfully used them. There was a general superstition that prohibited the tampering with the instruments of worship of other gods. There was the fear that the god of that people might retaliate.
   9. In this situation, Belshazzar is showing just how confident he is as the King of Babylon. Drinking had clouded his better judgment. He is not the only one who has done things that they later regretted under the influence of alcohol.
   10. In defiance, he proposed a toast to the gods of gold, silver, brass, iron, wood, and stone. (v. 4) He lifted himself above the God of Israel. Others joined in his ridicule. Later, Daniel made it clear that his actions were conducted in defiance to the God of heaven. (v. 23).
   11. The room that had been filled with the laughter of a wild party suddenly went completely silent as a hand began writing on the wall! (v. 5) It wrote on part of the wall that was illuminated by a candle. It was in clear view for all to see. There has never been a more effective PowerPoint presentation!
   12. The defiant king was scared to death! (v. 6) The brightness of his countenance was changed as the color left his face. He was looking rather pale. The joints of his loins were loosed as his hips and legs gave way. His knees started knocking against each other uncontrollably!
   13. The king was so shaken by the experience that he screamed for the men to bring in the leading wise men that they might decipher the message for him. (v. 7) He promised to make whoever was able to interpret the message wealthy and the third co-regent.
   14. The wise men came, but they were unable to give the meaning. (v. 8-9)
   15. The queen heard of Belshazzar’s dilemma and told him of Daniel. (v. 10-12) This may have been his mother or one of his wives who was not present (v. 2). She had been around long enough to know of Daniel. Evidently, Daniel was no longer serving in the administration. After all this time, Daniel still had a godly testimony. He had not given in to the influences of the wicked culture surrounding him.
   16. Daniel was ushered into the king. (v. 13-16) We will consider his message to the king in the next lesson. For now, let’s consider what happens when we defy the living God.
3. **Central Idea: King Belshazzar’s defiance of the living God brought sobering results.**
4. **Application: Those who defy God face sobering results.** 
   1. The Bible provides numerous examples of those who have defied God only to face sobering results.
5. Those of Noah’s day ridiculed him for his faith and obedience until the door of the Ark was shut.
6. The engineers of the Tower of Babel thought they could defy God until He confounded their languages.
7. Pharaoh demanded, “Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go.” (Exodus 5:2) Eventually, he let them go.
8. Saul of Tarsus “kicked against the pricks,” defying the early stages of biblical Christianity until he met the resurrected Savior on the road to Damascus. (Acts 9:5)
   1. There are those who defy the living God today.
9. Many defy God by denying His existence.
10. They reject the Bible’s account of creation.
11. They attempt to explain away the resurrection of our Lord.
12. They think they can live however they want without consequence.
13. All defiance of God is exalting self above God.
    1. Defying the living God can take subtle forms in our lives.
14. “I think I can miss church and it won’t affect my spiritual life.”
15. “I think I can let my Bible reading go for awhile.”
16. “I know what the Bible says, but times have changed. I’ll show them.”
    1. Over and over the results will prove to be sobering.
17. God’s judgment may be slow, but it is sure. He will not be mocked. (Galatians 6:7)
18. The consequences of defying God will become evident. Days spent defying God are numbered. Belshazzar and all who defy God should take heed to Nebuchadnezzar’s warning (Daniel 4:37).