

Death Of The Party

Daniel 5 July 27, 2025

Have you ever been invited to a party you didn't want to go to? Have you ever *gone* to a party you weren't invited to? Uninvited guests can make things real awkward, real fast.

There's a wild party in Daniel 5. Two surprise guests show up and at the end of the night, not only is the party over, but the king's *life* is over *and* his *empire* is over. Talk about closing the place down!

The two main character share almost the same name: Belshazzar and Belteshazzar. We know that second guy by his Hebrew name, Daniel. Their Chaldean names are their only similarity. Otherwise, they are presented in striking contrast. Today we can choose which party-goer we want to be like. We can accept the invitation to follow God, receive His power, and be used for His purposes, or we can choose to go the way of the world, ignoring God's warning, and face certain death on our own.

Daniel 5:1-4 - ¹King Belshazzar held a great feast for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine in their presence. ²Under the influence of the wine, Belshazzar gave orders to bring in the gold and silver vessels that his predecessor Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, wives, and concubines could drink from them. ³So they brought in the gold vessels that had been taken from the temple, the house of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, wives, and concubines drank from them. ⁴They drank the wine and praised their gods made of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

Belshazzar's mother was Nebuchadnezzar's daughter. He wasn't actually the king over the empire - his father was. His father stayed in far off places, leaving Belshazzar to oversee things in Babylon.¹

On the night of this party, Belshazzar didn't have a care in the world. As far as he was concerned, life was a big party and he had nothing better to do than to have a good time.

But understand that the danger was right there for Belshazzar to see. The Persian army was *literally* camped outside the walls of the city, laying siege. And several nearby Babylonian cities had already been swallowed up by the Medes and Persians.² Why wasn't the king preparing for battle?

Well, the Babylonians had *twenty years* worth of supplies stored up within their city walls. They were absolutely convinced that no outside army could overcome their defenses. And, it's true, a conventional attack wouldn't topple Babylon. The city was strong, well-positioned, fortified. But a conventional attack wasn't coming that night.³

¹ Frank Gaebelien, et al. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Daniel and the Minor Prophets. Vol. 7*

² Victor Matthews, Mark Chavalas, and John Walton *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*

³ *ibid.*

This is the first important warning for anyone who might be on the Belshazzar side of this example. You may have a great deal of success. You may be very distracted with exciting experiences and achievements. You may be convinced you have many decades of life left. But the truth is: You have no idea when your life is going to end. And one of the most important principles this text teaches us is that life is more than partying. Life is more than power. Life is more than pleasure. There is a spiritual and eternal aspect to your life because *you* are a spiritual being. You need eternal salvation *much* more than you need satiation of your physical appetites.

These first four verses go out of their way to highlight how drunk Belshazzar is. The writer vividly shows us the gold and silver vessels in the hands of these revelers.

In vivid contrast, Daniel will say that God holds Belshazzar's life in *His* hands. Your life was created on purpose, *for* a purpose: To glorify God and receive His love and be part of His work. These gold and silver vessels that were taken from the temple in Jerusalem are a picture of what God wants to do in a greater, spiritual sense. God wants to *set apart* your life for particular, eternal purposes.

2 Timothy 2:21 - ²¹ So if anyone purifies himself from anything dishonorable, he will be a special instrument, set apart, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.

What has God set *your* life apart for? He wants to reveal the answer to you as you walk with Him. And though I cannot tell you the specific plan He has for your life, I *can* say with all the authority of Holy Scripture that it is not to waste your life the way Belshazzar was wasting his.

Daniel 5:5-6 - ⁵ At that moment the fingers of a man's hand appeared and began writing on the plaster of the king's palace wall next to the lampstand. As the king watched the hand that was writing, ⁶ his face turned pale, and his thoughts so terrified him that he soiled himself and his knees knocked together.

The great hall of Babylon has been discovered and excavated, by the way. And archaeologists have verified that the walls were, indeed, made of plaster.⁴

God wanted everyone there to know what He was doing. He wrote right next to the lampstand, for all to see. Now, they did not yet know what the message meant, but God reveals Himself and He would send a servant to explain things. He has given advance warning that judgment is coming.

For anyone who is here who may not be a Christian, you need to know that God has sent you a warning. The Bible explains there is none righteous, no not one, that *all* of us are sinners because we rebel against God and His moral law. And God says very plainly that the wages of that sin is death. Death is what we have earned for all the wrongs things we have done.

The Bible goes on to explain that there is a day coming for each and every person where they must stand before God and be judged. *You* have an appointment with death, and after death comes

⁴ <https://www.express.co.uk/news/weird/1365018/archaeology-news-ancient-artefacts-bible-king-belshazzar-babylon-evg>

judgment. This is *exactly* what God is going to tell Belshazzar. And, *like* Belshazzar, if you're not a Christian, the news of this judgment should cause you great distress and fear because you cannot buy your way out of your guilt, you can't talk your way out of it, you can't work your way out of it.

That's why Belshazzar was so terrified. He knew, deep in his heart, that despite his power and his wealth and his success and his worldly security, he knew that none of those things could save him from death. He wasn't nearly as all-powerful as he liked to tell himself and his friends.

Daniel 5:7-9 - ⁷ The king shouted to bring in the mediums, Chaldeans, and diviners. He said to these wise men of Babylon, "Whoever reads this inscription and gives me its interpretation will be clothed in purple, have a gold chain around his neck, and have the third highest position in the kingdom." ⁸ So all the king's wise men came in, but none could read the inscription or make its interpretation known to him. ⁹ Then King Belshazzar became even more terrified, his face turned pale, and his nobles were bewildered.

We laugh at the stereotype of weathermen not accurately predicting the weather. Not a big deal. But these guys - these mediums and Chaldeans and diviners - this is *literally* their job! At least that's what they got paid for! To supposedly know about these sort of mystical, spiritual things. But when they were truly put to the test, they come up empty.

It's because their philosophies and methodologies were based on lies. Theories. Myths. When it comes to *your* life and the *big* questions like what is the meaning of life and what happens after we die, what is *your* worldview based on? Is it theoretical or actual?

Daniel 5:10-12 - ¹⁰ Because of the outcry of the king and his nobles, the queen came to the banquet hall. "May the king live forever," she said. "Don't let your thoughts terrify you or your face be pale. ¹¹ There is a man in your kingdom who has a spirit of the holy gods in him. In the days of your predecessor he was found to have insight, intelligence, and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods. Your predecessor, King Nebuchadnezzar, appointed him chief of the magicians, mediums, Chaldeans, and diviners. Your own predecessor, the king, ¹² did this because Daniel, the one the king named Belteshazzar, was found to have an extraordinary spirit, knowledge and intelligence, and the ability to interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve problems. Therefore, summon Daniel, and he will give the interpretation."

We often think of Daniel as a young man because he was probably a teenager in chapter 1, but there's a gap of about 30 years between chapter 4 and chapter 5.⁵ By now he's in his 80s.

What was he known for? What was his reputation? He was a man full of the spirit of God. Though he was often in tense and dangerous situations *because* of his faith, we see he wasn't someone who *created* problems, he *solved* them. And he solved them spiritually, faithfully, graciously.

⁵ Stephen Miller *The New American Commentary, Volume 18: Daniel*

Now, for the Christians listening today, one of the things Daniel teaches us is that we are often put where we are *for* the crisis. Maybe we won't be the key player in a national situation like this one, but the crisis in your extended family, the crisis at work, the situations of life, you are put there for those moments because your job is to shine the light of God's truth into the dark. You are the lampstand put in place to show the world what God wants to say and to do. The job is not to just be a worldly "expert" *like* the Chaldeans, but to bring real answers, real solves to those in need.

"Summon Daniel!" He wasn't invited to this party originally, but now he was needed much more than the caterer, more than the DJ, more than the bouncer, because *this* man is full of the Spirit.

Daniel 5:13-16 - ¹³ Then Daniel was brought before the king. The king said to him, "Are you Daniel, one of the Judean exiles that my predecessor the king brought from Judah? ¹⁴ I've heard that you have a spirit of the gods in you, and that insight, intelligence, and extraordinary wisdom are found in you. ¹⁵ Now the wise men and mediums were brought before me to read this inscription and make its interpretation known to me, but they could not give its interpretation. ¹⁶ However, I have heard about you that you can give interpretations and solve problems. Therefore, if you can read this inscription and give me its interpretation, you will be clothed in purple, have a gold chain around your neck, and have the third highest position in the kingdom."

Twice Belshazzar says, "I've heard about you." What have *your* neighbors heard about *you*? You have opinions about the neighbors on your block, right? About your different coworkers? About that guy in your class that sits 2 rows away from you? What has a watching world heard about *you*?

Now, we can't always control what's said about us. Sometimes people *do* have wrong opinions. But as people who profess to follow a Savior Who is true and Who is able and Who is kind and Who is gracious and Who gives strength and peace and joy, would our reputations match as being people who *really* believe that? Is our faith *actual* or is it *theoretical*? Would the people around us say "Your faith has legs" the way Belshazzar says it of Daniel here? Not just philosophy but *power* for living?

Daniel 5:17 - ¹⁷ Then Daniel answered the king, "You may keep your gifts and give your rewards to someone else; however, I will read the inscription for the king and make the interpretation known to him."

Daniel demonstrates the kind of humility and contentment that a believer should have. He didn't throw a tantrum and say, "Don't you *KNOW* who I *AM*?!?" And he wasn't desperate to get invited to this party - to be brought into the "elite" circle of the who's-who of Babylon. He says, "I'm happy to help, but keep all your stuff."

He is merciful and generous to Belshazzar. He didn't respect Belshazzar. He didn't have a relationship with him the way he did with Nebuchadnezzar. But he's willing to give his time and come to tell him God's truth. And he didn't keep the truth behind a paywall. Be careful out there of Christians or ministries who keep everything behind a paywall.

Believers shouldn't be desperate to gain position in the kingdoms of *this* world. We should be focused on our position in the *Lord's* Kingdom.

In the next set of verses, Daniel gives Belshazzar a history lesson to contextualize what God had done and how God does things and why He does them. We should do the same when we talk about God. It's doesn't work when people say, "Well I just care about the Sermon on the Mount," or to say, "I'm a red-letter Christian." We need the *entire* context of Scripture. All 66 books.

After the backstory, Daniel gets to the issue at hand.

Daniel 5:22-24 - ²² "But you his successor, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this. ²³ Instead, you have exalted yourself against the Lord of the heavens. The vessels from his house were brought to you, and as you and your nobles, wives, and concubines drank wine from them, you praised the gods made of silver and gold, bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see or hear or understand. But you have not glorified the God who holds your life-breath in his hand and who controls the whole course of your life. ²⁴ Therefore, he sent the hand, and this writing was inscribed.

Belshazzar might have said, "I wasn't 'exalting myself against the Lord of the heavens.' I was just having a good time. Why don't you loosen up, Daniel?" But this is what we need to understand: Our sin against God and His commands are not silly little things that don't matter. They are *rebellion* against the King of kings. It is treason against the One Whose puts breath in our lungs.

Now, Belshazzar *knew* that God had shown mercy to Nebuchadnezzar. He knew these stories. But he ignored the God of Israel all the same. And so now, here's the Lord's final message to him.

Daniel 5:25-26 - ²⁵ "This is the writing that was inscribed: Mene, Mene, Tekel, and Parsin. ²⁶ This is the interpretation of the message: 'Mene' means that God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end.

For the non-Christians here today, you need to know your days are numbered. What are you going to do about the problem of death? There's a lot of things we can overcome in life. We overcome diseases and viruses and things we're born with and things that hold us back. But you can't overcome death. That is a foe that only One Person has defeated, and that's Jesus Christ.

For the Christians here today, remember that *your* days are also numbered. But we're not worried about tomorrow. Instead, we focus on today because *today* is the day that the Lord has made. And He has put us in this day for His purposes with His power. Walk in it.

Daniel 5:27 - ²⁷ 'Tekel' means that you have been weighed on the balance and found deficient.

Belshazzar's life was found to be worthless. He may have had money and fame and prominence, but he had no moral value. In ancient times, payments would often have to be rendered by weight. This many pounds of gold or silver. The kind of payments that Belshazzar, no doubt, received as ransom and tribute from many nations across his empire. But when the time came to pay his Creator, he was more than short, he had nothing with which to ransom his life.

At the end of human history, all those who don't have saving faith in Christ will stand before God's Great White Throne. Books will be opened, lives will be measured, and each one will be found insufficient. And, like Belshazzar, you will be judged personally, so if you want to be saved, you must be *saved* personally. You can't be saved corporately or culturally. You must have a *personal* relationship with the Savior, Christ Jesus.

In the mean time, as believers we're told the Christian life works in us an "eternal weight of glory." That when we stand before the Bema of Christ, our lives will be heavy with the greatness of Christ working in and through us.

Without Christ, life is wasted. The most powerful man in all the world is shown to be like weightless chaff in the light of eternity. And by *this* night, it was too late for him to do anything about it.

Daniel 5:28 - ²⁸ 'Peres', means that your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and Persians."

There does come a time when it's too late to stop God's judgment. Now, God is long-suffering, gracious, and compassionate. He is *slow* to anger and rich in love. But if you continue to reject Him, a day will come when it is too late. When the last drop of iniquity spills into the cup of God's wrath, causing it to overflow. Don't wait until that day. Fall on His mercy now.

Daniel 5:29 - ²⁹ Then Belshazzar gave an order, and they clothed Daniel in purple, placed a gold chain around his neck, and issued a proclamation concerning him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

After all he had seen and heard, Belshazzar still didn't believe. He laughed and made his proclamations. He decided *his* strength was enough to protect him. It was one last, terrible mistake.

Daniel 5:30-31 - ³⁰ That very night Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans was killed, ³¹ and Darius the Mede received the kingdom at the age of sixty-two.

History records that the Medo-Persian army diverted the river so they could enter the city *underneath* the walls. God's word is always true and accurate.

So here's Belshazzar. One of the most enviable people on the planet from the human perspective. But we can see that his was a wasted life. A life dedicated to the wrong purposes. Toasting gods

who could not save him from death and destruction. Though warned about it, he laughed and acted like nothing bad would ever happen.

In 2013, a California hiker went missing after wandering off a trail. She was soon out of water and food. She started hallucinating. In an interview afterward, she said, "I didn't even know I was missing, I didn't know I was gone...I just thought I was in a big dream."⁶

Her story has a happy ending. What about you? If you're not a Christian, you're Belshazzar. You're the lost hiker. You're headed for death unless a Savior rescues you. He's *willing* to do so, but not if *you're* unwilling to be rescued.

On the other side we have BelTEshazzar - Daniel - who shows us the power of God in a simple life. Power and purpose despite all that had been stacked against him for decades. A life that was used for wonderful, heavenly accomplishment from youth through old age. It was possible because he was a man *dedicated* to the Lord his God. A man *full* of God's Spirit. A man *not* enamored with the trappings of this world, but focused on the coming Kingdom full of God's glory.

In the end, Daniel was the *life* of this party. A party he wasn't invited to. But one God sent him to in the moment of crisis so that God's word could be revealed and the power of His Spirit could be put on display. Choose today which life *you'd* like to have.

⁶ <https://www.foxnews.com/us/california-hiker-missing-4-days-says-she-hallucinated-wildly-tried-to-eat-rocks-and-dirt>