

Daniel 5 - John Karmelich

Let me open and get right to the key point of this chapter: The fact that we are all accountable to God, which for better or worse is the main topic of this week's lesson. In effect that's God's reminder that He holds us accountable for what we know about Him and how we react to that information.

For those who are unsaved, this chapter's a reminder that every time they ignore information which can lead one to a saving faith in God, it hurts them as again He holds people accountable for what we know or could have known about Him. For those of us who have committed our lives to Jesus in effect it's no easier. Since we know about Him, God holds us accountable for what we do with the information that we have about Him. Yes that makes me nervous! I'm well aware I'm saved by grace alone, but I'm sure heavenly rewards exist given what I did with the information I have about Him. Hopefully that makes all of us a bit nervous to think about our lives.

Now that I've scared everyone half to death, here's the good news: If we believe Jesus is God and He's in charge of our life there's no fear of losing our salvation. As a mentor taught me, if it's possible that I can blow my salvation, I would have done it a long time ago. Still I don't want to spend eternity in the lowest aspect of heaven. I'm sure some people will enjoy their eternal much life more than others. Do I understand how? Of course not. I just know that we were created to honor Him as God and if that's the purpose of life, we must accept it and live it to the best of our ability.

Which surprisingly leads me back to Chapter 5 here in Daniel. As I stated in my first lesson on Daniel, Chapters 1-6 are different "snippets" of Daniel's long life in the City of Babylon (in what's Iraq today). At that time, Babylon was the most important city in the world and was the head city of a large empire. Daniel spent much of that life as the #2 man under the king. In Chapter 5, it's now late in Daniel's life. In this chapter, the king Daniel served most of his life is now dead. After a series of "gang of thrones" situations where various people ruled there for a short time, the grandson of the king from the last few chapters is now ruling. At this moment, he co-ruled with his father who's not around and apparently is off fighting a battle at the time of this chapter. This chapter marks the end of the Babylonian kingdom as it literally fell on the specific date this chapter occurred.

To set up the scene, a little background about the city of Babylon would be helpful. As the capital of a major empire, it was a large city. It was estimated to be 13 miles in circumference. A big river did run through it. The walls were so high and so thick that chariots could race along the tops. The city had a series of moats and iron gates around it. It was considered impregnable. For Chapter 5, as a matter of background information, a foreign army surrounded the city trying to "siege" it. Again a river did flow through it, plus all the land inside of the walls, and given the wall height, there wasn't much fear at that moment. In the opening scene of this chapter, the young king was having a party, with everyone on the government payroll (my way of describing all the city leaders) were drinking away without any fear!

While that king was drinking wine with all the leaders and their wives and girlfriends, again there was an army surrounding that city and the king had a "drunk fest" then. To make it worse, the king had the stupid idea to bring out "stuff" the Babylonians took from God's temple to use for their drinking party. No idea if they raided other captured stuff as well. The text focuses on God's temple in Jerusalem that the Babylonians destroyed. It may help to realize this chapter and the next few were written in Aramaic a Gentile (non-Jewish) language. Because these chapters aren't written in Hebrew, they're thought of as messages to the world that the Jewish God is well, God!

Every now and then most of us hear stories about those who "poke their finger in God's eyes", to ask in effect if God's real? Most people don't get an answer even if asked sarcastically. Jesus was once asked if people would be impressed if someone came back from the dead. He said in effect, "If people won't believe the bible is God's Word, they won't be impressed if someone came back to life from the dead!" (See Luke 16:31). In Daniel 5, we're reading of one of those dangers of "messing with God".

Here in Chapter 5, right after the king said to get stuff from God's temple, a few fingers (with no hand attached) wrote four words on the plaster of the wall. By the way, that room was found and is restored! The king had no idea what it said and it scared the pants off of him so to speak. He called for "experts" to interpret the writing on the wall and all could do was "shrugged their shoulders" and say no idea!

That's when the king's mom shows up (who was the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar) and said in effect, I recall when dad ruled, there was a guy who knew how to interpret this stuff and he's still alive. So they found Daniel and dragged him to the party! The king who I suspect was drunk, told Daniel he'd be the "#3 man" after the king and his father. Daniel looked at the king and said in effect, "I don't care for all of that stuff but I will tell you what the fingers wrote!" Daniel "grandstanded it" to insult the king and say how much better his grandfather was. (In Aramaic, there's no word for grandfather so "father" was used in the text. Daniel tells the king in effect "I'm not impressed with you, how you live, the fact you insulted God by using His things for this party or the fact you knew God humbled your grandfather by the whole "7 year cow thing") (see the last chapter) and said in effect "Your highness, you're not much of a king!" "Despite that, I will explain what those four words mean that were written on the wall.

Realize like Hebrew, Aramaic language varies based on vowel points. I'd speculate others could guess the four words correctly, but not the meaning, so Daniel explained it: The first word is stated twice for emphasis. The word means "numbered" as in, "Your number is up!" The second word means weighed as if God said in effect, "I've weighed your life and how you've ignored the evidence of My existence, and well again your number is up!" The final word means "divided". It also can be translated Persians, as in the Persian army. Remember it was an army of two groups, the Medes and the Persians who were surrounding that city at that time!). The point being that the four words mean that king's time is up and the army surrounding that city were taking over!

Then comes one of the great moments in Middle East history: That army surrounding Babylon already conquered areas near that city and diverted the river that ran through Babylon. This part isn't in the text but is a famous moment in history. Some Persian soldiers got under the city gates when it was dark. By the way, Isaiah states all of this in Chapters 44-45, which was written about 150 years earlier, and even named the Persian leader by name there! The bible describes the end of the Babylon Empire both in the book of Daniel and in Isaiah. If you struggle with the bible as the Word of God, that's a neat little proof right there!

Anyway, that foreign army snuck into that city without a battle. Many in Babylon didn't even realize it was conquered for up to 3 days! As to Daniel, I picture him walking down the hallway after his speech to the king. I picture Daniel seeing the Persian soldiers coming and saying, "Go down the hallway take the first door on the left, can't miss him". (Again, that's not in the text. It's how I picture Daniel telling the army where the king was. That was the end of the Babylonian Empire right then!

The last verse of the chapter named the leader who came charging in. What's important that God holds us accountable for what we do know or even could have known about Him. It is what we do with that information that determines our future. If you've read this far, odds are good that's a non-issue as you

already believe Jesus is God. The big question all of us must wrestle is, what is it we have done with that information? Our eternal destiny depends upon that!

If interested, the other two links on this section of the book are a more detailed lesson that I did write about twenty years ago. You're welcome to read that if you'd like. Either way, I'm grateful that you did read this! If you're new here, realize you're always welcome to e-mail me. Thanks again, John