

Text: Daniel 5

Discussion Questions:

I'm guessing that every single one of us have had the experience of a parent or loved one holding us accountable for something we've done wrong. We often call it "getting busted"—or "getting in trouble."

- Go around the group, and share a brief story of a time when this happened to you. Describe a situation when you did something wrong back in your childhood or teen years—got caught by your parents—and they held you accountable. [keep it short—stories like this can often take a lot of time to tell!]

Let's take a few minutes to think a little bit deeper about whatever situation you just shared.

- Was it a good thing that you got caught? Did your getting caught possibly keep you from going further and further down the wrong path—which could have had far worse consequences in your life?
- Did you wish at the time that your parents (or whoever was holding you accountable) would have just let it go, and not punished you?
- Was it good thing that they DID hold you accountable? Why?
- What happens when parents FAIL to hold their children accountable for misbehavior? Why is a lack of accountability a BAD thing?

On a far deeper level—the notion of justice comes into play when we talk about wrongdoing and accountability. Whenever we misbehave, our actions always have a negative impact on both ourselves and other people—we hurt ourselves, and we hurt others. When others get hurt by our inappropriate actions, it begs the question of fairness. C.S. Lewis talks a great deal about fairness in his book *Mere Christianity*. He makes the point that we live in a world that has a basic understanding of fairness. Of right and wrong. In fact, he says that this unshakable existence of a basic moral code is what led him to believe in the existence of God. At a very fundamental level, we all EXPECT God (just like we expect our parents—and our society) to hold us accountable for the wrong and hurtful things that we do.

In other words—God will judge each person according to what they have done. There are consequences for our behavior, whether good or bad.

- Do you believe this?
- Do you believe God has a RIGHT to do this?
- Do you believe that justice DEMANDS that God holds us accountable for misdeeds?
- And now for the \$10,000 question: Does knowing this change our behavior? Do the warnings of God have any impact on the choices you make?
- Proverbs 9:10 states that *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."* What do you think this means? How does "fearing God" put us on the path to wisdom?

## Examination:

- Read **Daniel 5:1-14**

Thirty years have passed since the end of Daniel chapter 4. History tells us that King Neb lived another seven years after humbling himself. In the twenty-three years that ensued, things got really crazy in the Babylonian Empire! Neb's son, Evil-Merodach (how's that for a name!) took the throne, but was killed two years later by his brother-in-law Neriglissar. Neriglissar died four years later, and was succeeded by his son Labashi-Marduk. A month or so later, this poor guy was killed in a conspiracy led by Nabonidus and his son Belshazzar. Seven years after taking the throne, Nabonidus moved out of Babylon (yet remaining the king), leaving his son Belshazzar (not the actual king—but functioning as one) in charge of things for the next ten years. That's the situation at the beginning of Daniel 5. We actually know the exact date: October 12, 539BC. Darius, the commander of the Persian army, has secretly surrounded Babylon. Belshazzar (perhaps in "one last fling") is hosting an enormous drunken party for a thousand people.

- What grave mistake does Belshazzar make during this banquet?

- Read **Daniel 5:5-9**

- In the minutes (and years) BEFORE the hand appeared and wrote on the wall, how would you describe Belshazzar's attitude and mindset? In the moments AFTER the hand appeared—and even WHILE the words were being written—how would you describe Bel's attitude and mindset?
- How are verses 7-9 "Déjà vu all over again"?

- Read **Daniel 5:10-28**

- Don't get too thrown by the use of the terms "father" and "son"—apparently there is no term for grandfather in Hebrew or Chaldean, so "father" was used for any ancestor or predecessor. Most scholars agree that this "queen" was the Queen Mother, Neb's wife. What words does she use to describe Daniel?
- We got the definite sense in Daniel 4 that Daniel really cared for King Neb. Do you get that same sense in Daniel 5? How does Bel treat Daniel (who is now around 80-years-old)? How does Daniel respond to Bel?
- How does Daniel rebuke Bel? Look closely at the last five words of verse 22: "*...though you knew all this.*" Make a case for these being the five most important words in the entire chapter. What did Bel know? Was God justified in bringing immediate judgment upon him?
- Discuss the four words that appeared in the wall. What do they mean? What was the meaning BEHIND the actual words?

- Read **Daniel 5:29-31**

- Why do you think Bel honored Daniel—even though Daniel didn't want it?
- Why do you think God gave Neb seven years—and Bel was judged right away?

## Application:

This chapter ought to make all of us think about our lives and our choices. God has been abundantly clear in His Word what He requires of all of us. We are all "without excuse." Humble yourself before God, and ask God for His mighty strength to help you keep His commands and live a life that honors Him. Take time this Lenten season to seek God's mercy and indwelling power.