



God Judges Belshazzar for His Pride

Daniel 5



LESSON GOAL

Students will respond to God's warning before they are judged.

BIBLE TRUTHS

- Belshazzar was the proud king of Babylon.
- Belshazzar mocked God by using the vessels from the Lord's temple.
- A hand wrote on a wall, saying that God had judged the king.

KEY VERSE

"But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this...and the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified!" (Daniel 5:22a, 23b).

APPLICATION

- Repent of your own sin when you see God punishing others.
- Glorify God, who gives each breath.
- Witness to your lost friends.

NEXT WEEK

God Delivers Daniel from the Lions' Den
Read Daniel 6.

Symbol Key



Craft



Finger Play



Memory Verse



Object Lesson



Game



Visual Aid



Center



Activity



Q & A



Age Group

4

Teacher Planning Sheet

PREPARE

Objectives/Truths to cover this week

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Personal Application

As a result of my study in this passage, God wants me to

- _____
- _____
- _____

Three ways students need to apply this passage are

- _____
- _____
- _____

Materials Needed

POINT

Choose from various ideas to point students to the coming Bible lesson.

- _____
- _____

PROCLAIM

Choose from various ideas to proclaim the Bible lesson.

Presentation Ideas

- _____
- _____

Praise/Music Ideas

- _____
- _____
- _____

PRACTICE

Choose ideas to help review and apply today's lesson.

- _____
- _____

PREPARE WITH THE TRUTH

“Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul....You shall teach them to your children” (Deuteronomy 11:18–19).

Please take time to prepare your mind and heart to accurately handle the truths of God’s Word (2 Tim. 2:15). Read through the Bible background and study the truths contained in this lesson. Crucial background information is included here to aid you in understanding the Scripture.

Bible Background

Although Nebuchadnezzar ended his letter by warning that God could humble the proud (Dan. 4), future Babylonian kings failed to heed his warning. Nebuchadnezzar’s successor, King Belshazzar, should have been calling out to God to rescue Babylon, but he spent the night mocking God instead. That very night, Belshazzar received judgment for a life spent refusing to humble his heart and glorify the Lord.

Belshazzar’s Sin (Daniel 5:1–4)

Belshazzar co-reigned over Babylon with his father, Nabonidus. Because Nabonidus spent the majority of his reign 500 miles south of Babylon, Belshazzar controlled much of the Babylonian empire. Although it is unknown whether he ever was formally crowned, he actively reigned in his father’s absence. (Belshazzar may have promised that whoever interpreted the writing would become the “third ruler in the kingdom” because he and his father were first and second; Dan. 5:7.) The text states that Nebuchadnezzar was the father of Belshazzar (5:2) and Belshazzar was the son of Nebuchadnezzar (5:22). It is possible that this relationship referred to their relationship as grandfather and grandson, or it could signify that Nebuchadnezzar was Belshazzar’s predecessor.

Belshazzar hosted a feast for a thousand of his lords. Just days before the feast, Nabonidus suffered a crushing defeat by the Persians. The Persian army then turned their attention to Babylon itself and besieged the city. With the Persians outside his city and his father in flight, Belshazzar hosted the feast on October 12, 539 B.C. Perhaps he did so to show his confidence that the city would not fall and to boost the morale of the nobles. Even though the city was besieged, few Babylonians would have feared the Persian army. Two sets of double walls surrounded the city. The first set had one wall 21 feet thick and one wall 11 feet thick, and the second set had one wall 25 feet thick and one wall 23 feet thick. The massive walls would keep invaders out while the river Euphrates flowed through the city and brought life in. Babylon’s fresh-water supply and their stockpiles of food would allow the city to survive for years. Some ancient historians believed that the feast was an annual religious festival. Regardless of the occasion of the feast, it was held while Babylon was besieged by the Persian army. In the midst of the feast, Belshazzar mocked the God of Israel. Instead of heeding Nebuchadnezzar’s warning to humble himself before God, Belshazzar sought to shame God publicly. He specifically asked that the gold and silver vessels that had been used in God’s temple at Jerusalem be brought to the feast (Dan. 5:2–3). Not only did he, his lords, his wives, and his concubines drink from the vessels, but while doing so, they also “praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone” (5:4). Belshazzar intentionally ridiculed the God of Israel and embraced the Babylonian idols. Although he knew that God had humbled

Nebuchadnezzar (5:22), he boldly challenged God to do the same to him. He was confident that city walls and the Babylonian gods would protect him.

Belshazzar's Sign (Daniel 5:5–12)

Within an hour, the Lord pronounced judgment on Belshazzar. The king saw a disembodied hand write on the palace walls (Dan. 5:5). Although he did not understand what the hand had written, Belshazzar's face went pale and his knees knocked together (5:6). He was terrified by what he saw. No doubt he was already connecting the writing on the wall with his wicked use of the vessels from God's temple. Belshazzar screamed for the magicians to come and interpret the writing on the wall (5:7). Even though he promised a high position (with clothes and jewelry) as a reward, the wise men were unable to interpret the sign (5:7–8).

Belshazzar's terror increased until the queen came with a suggestion. Having heard about the writing on the wall, she (most likely Nebuchadnezzar's wife or daughter) told Belshazzar about a man who had "the Spirit of the Holy God" and whom Nebuchadnezzar had made chief of the magicians (5:10–11). (Apparently Daniel was removed from the position when Nebuchadnezzar died.) The queen praised Daniel for his ability to interpret dreams and was convinced that he would be able to interpret the writing (5:12).

Belshazzar Sentenced (Daniel 5:13–29)

Although Daniel had been in Babylon for 65 years (and was now about 80 years old), Belshazzar apparently had not met him (Dan. 5:13). After Belshazzar explained to Daniel why he had been summoned (5:13–16), Daniel promised that he would interpret the writing, although he had no desire for the king's rewards (5:17). But before doing what the king asked, Daniel boldly proclaimed God's sovereignty to Belshazzar. He praised the Most High God for having given Nebuchadnezzar "a kingdom and majesty, glory and honor" (5:18). While it was true that Nebuchadnezzar had been powerful, all his power had been given to him by God (5:19). Having honestly evaluated the source of Nebuchadnezzar's power, Daniel then honestly exposed Nebuchadnezzar's sin of pride (5:20) and described how God had punished Nebuchadnezzar until he repented (5:21). With unapologetic honesty, Daniel proclaimed the truth of God, man, sin, judgment, and repentance to Belshazzar.

Daniel was not content, however, to tell about Nebuchadnezzar and let Belshazzar go unchallenged. Daniel opposed the world's most powerful ruler and rebuked him for not humbling his heart (5:22), for lifting himself up against God (5:23), and for not glorifying God and choosing instead to worship idols (5:23). Belshazzar had foolishly dishonored the God who grants breath and who kept him alive. Having shown the greatness of God and the foolishness of Belshazzar's sin, Daniel said the words Belshazzar must have been dreading: "The fingers of the hand were sent from Him" (5:24).

Finally, the narrator reveals what had been written on the wall: "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN" (Dan. 5:25). The Aramaic word mene means "counted" or "appointed"; tekem means "weighed"; and pharsin means "divided." (The u preceding pharsin is a conjunction like "and.") Daniel explained the significance of each word to Belshazzar. "Mene" signified "God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it" (5:26). God had ordained how many days of Belshazzar's life and reign, and both had come to an end. "Tekel" signified that Belshazzar had "been weighed in the balances and found wanting" (5:27). When judged according to God's holy standard, Belshazzar had fallen short of God's glory. His heart and actions condemned him before God. "Pharsin" signified that Belshazzar's

“kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and Persians” (5:28). Belshazzar was not able to hold together his kingdom, which was on the verge of falling apart and being destroyed.

Belshazzar obviously appreciated the validity of Daniel’s interpretation since he kept his word and rewarded Daniel (5:29). But there is no indication that he humbled himself before God, repented, or even feared impending judgment. The proud Belshazzar was about to be put down.

Belshazzar Slain (Daniel 5:30–31)

That very night, Belshazzar was killed, and the Medes and Persians conquered the Babylonians. Ancient history tells how the Medo-Persian army got into the city. In a brilliant maneuver, the army diverted the Euphrates River. Although the river still flowed through the city, it was low enough that the soldiers could wade into the city and not even worry about getting through the four massive walls. Some unknown Medo-Persian general no doubt was rewarded for the victory, but Belshazzar’s defeat ultimately came from God, who had numbered his days, found him lacking on His scales, and determined to dissipate his kingdom.

Conclusion

A life spent enjoying God’s goodness but neglecting His commands is on a horrible path, one leading to destruction. Belshazzar refused to be humbled and even mocked God’s ability to punish him. Although the Lord’s mercy had lasted throughout Belshazzar’s entire life, it would not last forever. Belshazzar’s days were up, and he had no hope but to repent and turn to God. Having failed to do so, Belshazzar went to the destruction prepared for him because he was too proud to submit to God. Every man who fails to humble himself before God is on the same road. Much like Daniel, believers must confront the lost with their sin and beg them to humble themselves before God.

POINT TO THE TRUTH

“Give ear, O my people, to my law; incline your ears to the words of my mouth” (Psalm 78:1).

This section includes questions to review last week’s lesson and ideas to prepare students for this week’s lesson. Choose from the following ideas to point to the truths of this lesson.



Review Questions

What did King Nebuchadnezzar ask Daniel to do?

The king had another dream and wanted Daniel to tell him what the dream meant.

What was the dream about?

King Nebuchadnezzar saw a huge tree that provided food and protection for all the birds and beasts. An angel came and said that it was to be chopped down and stripped of its branches. That would force all the animals to scatter. But the tree would not die.

How did this dream represent what would happen to Nebuchadnezzar?

Nebuchadnezzar would live like an animal for seven years.

Did he stay that way?

Just as God had promised, after seven years, the king lifted his eyes humbly toward heaven. His senses came back to him, and he praised God.



A China Teacup

Show the students a china teacup, and let a few of them carefully hold it. Ask them whether their parents have nice dishes like this at home. When do they use them? Ask the students to name some things that a nice teacup never would be used for—working in the garden, feeding the dog, storing paper clips, etc. Tell them that in today's lesson, Belshazzar decides to take dishes from God's temple and use them in a wrong ways.



Write on the Wall

Hang a large piece of butcher paper on the wall, and write MENE MENE TEKEL UPHARSIN in large bubble letters on it. When the students enter the classroom, they can color in or finger-paint the letters. For a "wall" look, sketch in bricks or rocks around the words. During the lesson, act out the writing on the wall as a visual aid.



Writing on the Wall

Materials: clay, wooden craft sticks or toothpicks

Directions: Give each student some clay. Instruct the students to flatten the clay and then use a craft stick or toothpick to write on it MENE MENE TEKEL UPHARSIN. Discuss what these words mean. Ask the students how they would have felt if they were at a big party and suddenly a hand appeared and began to write on the wall.



Heed the Warning

This game is played much like "Red Light, Green Light." The difference is that before the teacher turns around, he makes a sound. This means that the students will have a warning before they are caught off guard and lose the game. Discuss with the students the fact that warnings are important. They help us to know when we will be disciplined if we continue the pattern that we are in. In today's lesson, King Belshazzar is given a warning but doesn't listen.

PROCLAIM THE TRUTH

“Telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done” (Psalm 78:4).

This section includes the Bible lesson, lesson questions, and praise and worship ideas. Song suggestions are included that you can use to proclaim your worship to God. Use the lesson questions to check the students’ understanding. This section also includes various presentation ideas to use during the teaching time. Read the Bible passage several times before you read these pages. All teaching should be done directly from the Bible.

Bible Lesson

God remained faithful to His people, even while they were dispersed from the Promised Land, living in foreign countries. One of the greatest examples of God’s faithfulness is His hand in Daniel’s life. As a young man, Daniel had been captured and taken to live under the rule of the Babylonians. Even though the Babylonians worshiped manmade gods, Daniel continued to worship and obey the one true God. God used Daniel to change the heart of King Nebuchadnezzar. The king was prideful and wanted all the glory of the kingdom for himself. Through Daniel, God humbled King Nebuchadnezzar, and the king ultimately worshiped the one true God.

God still had more work to do in the land of Babylon, and He continued to use Daniel. King Nebuchadnezzar had died over 20 years before. Daniel was an old man and no longer had the position of chief of the wise men. King Belshazzar was the new king of Babylon. He did not worship God as Nebuchadnezzar had learned to do, and he had not learned from Nebuchadnezzar that God will humble the proud. King Belshazzar was full of pride and believed that the city walls and his manmade gods would protect him from invaders. He did not believe that any nation or any god could take away his kingdom.

Even when the areas around Babylon were being attacked and overtaken by his enemies, King Belshazzar showed no concern for his kingdom. He threw a huge party and invited over a thousand people. He prepared a large feast and served a lot of wine. In the midst of the party, he commanded that the silver and gold cups that had been stolen from the temple in Jerusalem be brought to the party so they could drink from them. King Belshazzar knew that it would dishonor God to do this. That is why he had them brought. While they were drinking from the cups, they blasphemed God by praising their manmade gods and idols.

Then King Belshazzar saw something that disturbed him greatly. On one of the palace walls, a hand appeared. This hand began writing something on the wall! Belshazzar was nearly scared to death and almost fainted. The writing was in a language that the king and his subjects did not understand.

Immediately, Belshazzar called for all his wise men to come and interpret the writing. Whoever interpreted the message would be given a great reward of expensive clothes, fine jewelry, and a very high position of authority in his kingdom. All the wise men came, but none of them could read the writing. The king was greatly distressed! Then the queen came into the banquet hall. She had been told what had happened, and she came to offer a solution to the king. “O king, live forever!” she said. “Do not let your thoughts trouble you...There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God...King Nebuchadnezzar, your father...made him the chief of your [wise men]...Now let

Daniel be called, and he will give the interpretation” (Dan. 5:10–12).

Daniel was brought before the king. The king confirmed that Daniel had indeed done great things for King Nebuchadnezzar. Though Daniel said he did not want it, Belshazzar offered him the same great reward that he had offered the wise men if he was able to tell him what the writing on the wall said.

Daniel knew what the writing said, but before he told the king what it meant, he reminded him of the lesson that God had taught Nebuchadnezzar—a lesson that King Belshazzar apparently had not learned himself. Daniel told the story of when God humbled King Nebuchadnezzar. “O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father a kingdom and majesty, glory and honor. And because of the majesty that He gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whomever he wished, he executed; whomever he wished, he kept alive; whomever he wished, he set up; whomever he wished, he put down. But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened in pride, he was [removed] from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him. Then he was driven from the sons of men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, until he knew that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses. But you, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart” (Dan. 5:18–22) Daniel continued by pointing out that Belshazzar had blasphemed God by bringing in the gold and silver cups from the temple and using them at his party while praising idols. Daniel then told the king what the writing on the wall meant. It was God’s judgment on Belshazzar, and it said that God had numbered the days of his kingdom, and that those days were now over. Belshazzar had been found unworthy of the kingdom, and he would be overtaken by the Medes and Persians. The king rewarded Daniel with expensive clothes and a gold necklace, and he gave him a very powerful position in his kingdom. His kingdom did not last the night, though; he was killed within a few hours, when the city came under the attack of the Medes and Persians.



Lesson Questions

Did Belshazzar listen to Nebuchadnezzar’s warning to be humble?

No. Belshazzar did not listen but was proud.

Why was Belshazzar so proud?

He trusted in his own strength rather than the strength of God, and instead of praising God, he praised gods of gold, silver, and wood.

What did the king see during his meal?

The king saw a hand writing a message on a wall.

What did the message say?

The message said “counted, counted, weighed, divided.”

What did the king do when he could not read the message?

He called for the wise men to try and interpret the message.

What did Daniel say that this message meant?

Daniel explained that God had numbered Belshazzar’s kingdom and ordained how many more days the king would live. He also had weighed the king and found him wanting.

What happened that night to the king?
That night, Belshazzar was killed when the Medes and Persians conquered Babylon.

Presentation Ideas



A Beka Book Flash-A-Cards

Use appropriate A Beka Book Flash-A-Cards with the lesson.



Betty Lukens Flannelgraph

Use appropriate flannelgraph pieces with the lesson.



Pull-Off Calendar

To illustrate that our days are numbered and what God meant in His warning in Daniel 5:26, bring in a daily pull-off calendar. (You also could make your own by gluing papers together at the top edge, or you could use a large flip-chart numbered from 10 down to 0.) Throughout the lesson, or after you explain this concept, pull (or flip) the pages until they all are gone. Talk about what it means when we have no days of our lives left.



Handwriting on the Wall

Materials: latex glove, cotton stuffing, hot glue gun and glue sticks, dry-erase marker, dowel

Directions: Lightly stuff a latex glove (or a thin winter glove) with cotton. Use hot glue to attach a dry-erase marker to the index finger, gluing it on the underside so that the marker does not show. Shape and glue the other fingers so that it looks as though the “hand” is writing. Insert a dowel inside the glove, and staple it in place on the palm side. You could even attach a sleeve for added effect. Draw the students’ attention to the whiteboard as you recount what was happening at Belshazzar’s feast when suddenly a hand appeared. Use the hand to begin slowly writing cryptic-looking symbols on the board. Ask the students to tell how they think the people at the feast would have felt—terrified, unable to move, speechless, etc.

Praise and Worship

Glorify Thy Name

He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands

In My Life, Lord, Be Glorified

My God Is So Great



Writing on the Wall

The prideful king who mocked the Lord
(Lift head proudly; shake fist at ceiling.)

Soon trembled in great fright
(Tremble all over.)

When out of nowhere, on the wall
(Pretend to run hand down wall.)

A hand began to write!
(Pretend to write on a wall.)

Then Daniel spoke to Belshazzar
(Cup hands around mouth; hold hands at head to indicate crown.)

And said, "These words, O king,
(Pretend to point at the words.)

Were written by the hand of God
(Write in air; point up.)

I'll tell you what they mean:
(Nod head.)

Mene, mene—Your days are counted, and
(Count on fingers.)

Your kingdom soon will fail.
(Hold hands at head to indicate crown; quickly drop hands down by side.)

Tekel—God has weighed you
(Hold hands out, palms up; raise and lower hands slightly, like a balance.)

And you're lacking on His scale.
(Dip one hand drastically lower than the other.)

Upharsin—Soon the Medes will come;
(March in place.)

Your kingdom will divide.
(Hold hands together; then break them apart.)

These are the things that God will do
(Point up; nod.)

Because you've walked in pride."
(Walk in place, head raised proudly.)

PRACTICE THE TRUTH

"That they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments" (Psalm 78:7).

Choose ideas from this section to review and apply the truths of the Bible lesson.



"Handwriting on the Wall"

Materials: copies of the "Handwriting on the Wall" craft pages (page 5.13 printed on brown paper and page 5.15 printed on white cardstock), sheets of colored paper large enough to trace a child's hand on, scissors, glue, crayons or paint

Directions: Give each student a copy of the craft pages. Instruct the students to cut out the brown “bricks” and place them in the correct places (according to their numbers) on the cardstock page. They will see the message that Belshazzar saw. The students can trace the letters with crayons or paint. Then trace each child’s hand on a sheet of colored paper. The students can cut out their hands, glue the last three fingers down (so the hand looks appears to be pointing), and glue the hand to the wall (so it appears to be pointing to the words)



“Number Our Days”

Materials: copies of the “Number Our Days” craft page, scissors, glue, crayons

Directions: Give each student a copy of the craft page. Instruct the students to cut out the craft pieces along the solid line. They should also cut the slits where indicated. Then they should fold the edges along the dotted line to form a box. They can thread the number strip through both sets of slits and then glue the ends together. Next, they should glue the box together. The numbers should slide through both sides for a countdown. If time permits, they can decorate their boxes with crayons or other decorations.



In the Balances

Materials: white cardstock, yellow circles (four inches in diameter), 7x1/2-inch black strips, 3x4x4-inch gray triangles, verse cards with Daniel 5:27 written on them, 2x4-inch pieces of yarn (colors suggested below)

Directions: Give each student the materials to create a balance. First, instruct the students to hold the cardstock sheet horizontally and glue the verse card to the bottom. Next, they should center and glue the black strip about one inch from the top of the page. They should fold the string in half and glue the center to the ends of the black strip. They can cut the circle in half to create the two cups for the scale. The flat side of the half circles should face up. Then the students should take the two ends of the string and glue them to each side of the half circle. Finally, they can glue the triangle with the smaller end downward and the top point touching the bottom of the black strip. It should be centered in the middle of the black strip. When complete, this should resemble an old-fashioned balance.

Coloring Pages

Give each student a copy of the coloring pages at the back of the lesson. students can color the pages in class or at home.



MEMORY VERSE

“Whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe” (Proverbs 29:25b).

Handwriting on the Wall

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Handwriting on the Wall

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YOUR DAYS

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NUMBERED

Number Our Days

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“So teach us to number our
_____ days, that we may gain a heart
_____ of wisdom” (Psalm 90:12).

This is the interpretation of the word

_____ MENE

“God has numbered your kingdom and
finished it” (Daniel 5:26).

WENT



“In the same hour the fingers of a man’s hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king’s palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote” (Daniel 5:5).

MENE MENE TEKEL UPHARSIN



Daniel interpreted the writing on the wall, saying, "This is the interpretation of each word. Mene: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it; Tekel: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; Peres: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians" (Daniel 5:26–28).

