

Handwriting on the Wall

(Daniel 5)

Introduction

[Teacher, on one side of a card write the words “MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN,” and on the reverse side write, “SECRET MESSAGE.”] Have you ever heard someone brag about getting away with doing wrong? Perhaps you have done wrong and thought you got away with it.

The king in our Bible lesson today deliberately did wrong and thought he could get away with it, until God sent him a secret message! [Show “SECRET MESSAGE” side only.]

Opening Prayer

Father, we come before You with humble hearts and pray that we can learn how important it is to You that we keep our hearts and our minds pure. We want to honor You in everything that we think, and say, and do. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

*Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.
(James 4:17 NLT)*

Lesson

The last few weeks we have learned about the prophet Daniel. What can you tell me about him? He was a man who obeyed God in difficult situations, didn’t he?

Daniel served King Nebuchadnezzar for many years. When Nebuchadnezzar died, his grandson, Belshazzar, became king of Babylon. Belshazzar did not believe in the true God, but instead he worshiped many idols. And instead of seeking God for wisdom, Belshazzar asked his magicians and astrologers for wisdom on what to do.

One night King Belshazzar invited 1,000 people to a banquet. Music and laughter filled the palace. There was much merry-making that night in Belshazzar’s banquet hall. The guests ate and drank.

Daniel 5:1

Many years later King Belshazzar gave a great feast for 1,000 of his nobles, and he drank wine with them.

In the middle of the banquet the king did something which displeased God very much.

Daniel 5:2

While Belshazzar was drinking the wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver cups that his predecessor, Nebuchadnezzar, had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem. He wanted to drink from them with his nobles, his wives, and his concubines.

These goblets were big fancy cups which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem. They were holy to the children of Israel. They were to be used to worship the only true God. But Belshazzar used them to worship his false gods.

Daniel 5:4

While they drank from them they praised their idols made of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

King Belshazzar purposely made fun of the true God by using the special cups that were designed only for worship of Him. The king didn’t care that he was rebelling against God. He didn’t expect to be punished for his sin. But God always punishes sin. Sometimes even Christians think that they can sin and not be punished, but that is not true. God will not let you get away with sin.

When you became God’s child, He expects you to live your life in a way that pleases God. God promises to honor those who honor Him.

When you dishonor God by sinning against Him, He will discipline you. It is for your good—to help you to learn how to live a life that pleases Him and that will bring you blessing and joy. (Hebrews 12:5-11).

Sometimes God will discipline you immediately. Other times, He may wait awhile. But sooner or later you will be disciplined. It is very foolish

to think that you can sneak your sin past an all-knowing God. The Bible says, “Be sure your sin will find you out.” (Numbers 32:23b). Foolish King Belshazzar thought he could do as he pleased and nothing would happen to him.

As the king and his men partied and drank from the Temple vessels, suddenly, every voice was hushed and every hand that held a goblet of wine shook with fear. All eyes slowly turned toward a large wall where a hand was writing a message!

Daniel 5:5-6

Suddenly, they saw the fingers of a human hand writing on the plaster wall of the king’s palace, near the lampstand. The king himself saw the hand as it wrote, and his face turned pale with fright. His knees knocked together in fear and his legs gave way beneath him.

King Belshazzar stood up looking pale and frightened. He was so scared his knees were shaking! What could this writing mean? Where did the hand come from? What do the words mean?

King Belshazzar called for his wisemen! He offered them a reward if they could tell the meaning of this strange message.

Daniel 5:8

But when all the king’s wise men had come in, none of them could read the writing or tell him what it meant.

The king’s wise men were brought in, but they were baffled. Not one of them could read the message. Belshazzar was terrified.

Daniel 5:9

So the king grew even more alarmed, and his face turned pale. His nobles, too, were shaken.

Soon the queen mother heard about the strange message on the wall and rushed into the king’s banquet hall. She had an idea...

Daniel 5:10-11

But when the queen mother heard what was happening, she hurried to the banquet hall. She said to Belshazzar, “Long live the king! Don’t be so pale and frightened. (11) There is a man in your kingdom who has

within him the spirit of the holy gods. During Nebuchadnezzar’s reign, this man was found to have insight, understanding, and wisdom like that of the gods. Your predecessor, the king—your predecessor King Nebuchadnezzar—made him chief over all the magicians, enchanters, astrologers, and fortune-tellers of Babylon.

The queen mother (the king’s grandmother) remembered Daniel. She knew that he had great wisdom and the ability to interpret dreams and solve difficult problems.

Daniel 5:12

This man Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar, has exceptional ability and is filled with divine knowledge and understanding. He can interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means.”

So, Daniel was brought in before the king. And the king asked him to tell him what the words meant.

Daniel, now an old man; he was over 80 years old. He realized the message on the wall was a message from God that could make the king very angry. But Daniel was not afraid to tell the king what it said. He knew that God was with him.

Daniel confronted the king about the seriousness of his sin. He reminded the king of how God had dealt with his grandfather’s sinful pride. (Refer to Daniel 4.)

Years earlier, when Nebuchadnezzar’s heart was full of pride, God removed him from his royal throne and struck him with a terrible madness. For seven years he roamed the fields, living like the animals until at last he knew that the Most High God rules the kingdoms of men. Then God restored Nebuchadnezzar to his throne, where he worshipped the one true God ever after.

Belshazzar heard the stories of what happened to his grandfather. He knew of God’s power and hatred of sin, and he should have known better than to defy God.

King Belshazzar was not a child of God, but he knew God is holy. He should have known better than to sin against the God of heaven.

He had taken the goblets and used them to drink wine in honor of his idols. He praised false gods of wood, silver and gold, but not the Lord God who gave him his kingdom and power—the God who gives both life and breath.

Daniel tells the king the meaning of the handwriting on the wall.
[Teacher, show the reverse side of the card used in the Pre-Session Warm Up.]

These are the words and their meanings (see verse 25-28):

“MENE” means *“numbered.”* Your days are numbered; you will soon die.

“TEKEL” means *“weighted.”* God has measured your life and you do not meet His standards.

“PARSIN” means *“divided.”* Your kingdom will be taken away from you and given to someone else.

Daniel 5:30

That very night Belshazzar, the Babylonian king, was killed.

That very night enemy soldiers came into the city. Belshazzar was killed and, as Daniel had said would happen, his kingdom was taken over by the Medes and the Persians.

[Note: Historical sources say that the Medes and Persians redirected the course of the river that ran through the city and entered under the city walls on the dry riverbed.]

Because Belshazzar purposely defied God, he lost his kingdom and his life.

If you are God’s child, you know that God is holy and must punish sin. So, you can be sure that God will not let you get away with sin.

Don’t be fooled into thinking that God won’t care if you sin “just a little,” or that, since He’s promised you everlasting life in heaven, you can live any way you want to. God is not mocked! (Gal 6:7) You will not get away with sin.

It is a serious thing to sin against God, thinking He will ignore your sin. As God’s child you need to be careful how you live (Hebrews 12:5-11). God will not let you get away with sin.

Sin brings all of us down. None of us have measured up to God’s standards. *“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”* (Rom 3:23) If we continue to sin against God, we too face His punishment which is death. The bible says, *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* (Romans 6:23)

This week when you are tempted to sin, read God’s Word, and ask Him to help you see what He wants you to do or not to do. Remember, when God shows you what is right to do, He expects you to do it. If you do get involved in sin, confess it to God right away, thank Him for His forgiveness and ask Him to help you to do what is right.

Closing Prayer

Father, forgive us our sins and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. Set Your angels around us; guard us from the attacks of our enemy, Satan. Give us a desire in our hearts to honor You with everything that we think, everything that we say and everything that we do. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

Sand Sayings

Materials: sand, several plastic containers, food coloring, newspapers, white construction paper, pencils, glue.

Preparation: Pour sand into several containers. Add food coloring to each container, a teaspoon full at a time, and mix. (Note: A large amount of food coloring will be needed to make bright colors.) Cover work area with newsprint.

Procedure:

1. Give each student a sheet of construction paper.
2. Each student writes the Memory Verse and draws designs for decoration with a pencil.
3. Student squeezes glue over letters and designs and then sprinkles colored sand over the glue.
4. Shake off excess sand.

Note: supply handy wipes for easy clean-up of student's hands.

Secret Messages

Have the children write or draw a "secret" message using white crayon on white construction paper. Then when they paint over it with a very diluted water color, their secret message will be revealed!

Or, use a Q-Tip to "write" a message on paper with whole milk. After it is dry it should be invisible. Using your iron and ironing board, iron the paper. As the dried milk heats, it will turn brown and the message will appear. Be sure and practice this.

Game Center**Go Fish**

Materials: Marker, paper, photocopier, scissors.

Preparation: Print the Memory verse on cards, a word or phrase per card. Photo copy a set for each student, plus several extra sets for the "draw" pile. Divide the children up into groups of four. Before play begins, review the Memory Verse and write it on the board.

Procedure:

1. Using a set of cards per child in the group, shuffle all cards together to mix them up.
2. Place cards in a stack face down in the middle.
3. Each student takes five cards.

4. Students look at their cards to see what words they need to complete the verse. First player asks any student for a card he or she needs. If student has the card, he or she gives the card to the player. If student does not have the card, student says, "Go Fish" and the first player chooses a card from the pile.
5. Play continues until one student has all the words of the verse and places the cards in order face up on the table or floor.

Or, as an alternative to playing the card game, you can throw all sets of the cards in the air and see who can find the full verse first.

Or, use the following review questions in a game of your choice:

1. What did King Belshazzar do that displeased God? (He used the sacred Temple vessels at his party.)
2. Where did Belshazzar get the sacred Temple vessels? (His grandfather, King Nebuchadnezzar, had taken them when the Babylonians invaded Judah.)
3. If you sin, how does God sometimes discipline you? What are some ways God punishes his people? (He might allow trouble to come into your life like an illness.)
4. What happened during the party that scared everyone? (They saw a hand writing a secret message on the wall.)
5. What happened to King Belshazzar when he saw the handwriting on the wall? (He went pale and his knees got weak and shaky.)
6. Who did King Belshazzar call first to tell him the meaning of the secret message? (His wise men.)
7. Who remembered that Daniel had the special spiritual gift of wisdom and understanding? (The Queen remembered Daniel.)
8. Why might Daniel have been afraid to tell the king the meaning of the message? (He realized the message on the wall was a message from God that could make the king very angry.)

9. Why is it that God must punish sin? (Because He is a holy God and cannot tolerate anything that is not holy in His presence.)
10. What can you do to avoid God's discipline in your life? (Stay away from sinful things, read your Bible, hang out with people that don't want to do naughty things.)
11. What can you do if you do sin? (Confess or agree with God about your sin and ask Him to help you do right.)
12. What was the meaning of the handwriting on the wall? (Your days are numbered; you have fallen short of God's standard and your kingdom will be taken away from you and given to the Medes and the Persians.)
13. Why did King Belshazzar lose his kingdom and his life? (Because he defied God.)

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