Writing on the Wall



Scripture Reference: Daniel 5

Suggested Theme: God is holy and mighty. We should show God respect.

Memory Verse: “Happy are those who respect the Lord and obey him.” Psalm 128:1, ICB

Story Overview:

Belshazzar held a drunken banquet for royal guests. To add excitement to the party, he called for the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple in Jerusalem many years before. The revellers praised their false gods and used the holy temple objects to drink wine from. In the midst of this disrespect, a human hand mysteriously appeared from nowhere and wrote on the wall. The king’s court could not interpret the writing, so Daniel was brought to the feast. Daniel interpreted the writing to mean that Belshazzar and the kingdom would fall. That night, Belshazzar was killed, and Darius, king of the Medes, took over Babylon.

Background Study:

The people of God had been in Babylonian captivity for almost 70 years, and more than twenty years had passed since King Nebuchadnezzar died. Daniel seemed to become less active in government business after Nebuchadnezzar’s death.

The new leader of the Babylonian empire was Nabonidus, probably a son-in-law of Nebuchadnezzar. He was often away from Babylon, and his son Belshazzar was in charge and acted as king. Big military problems were happening, but Belshazzar seemed to devote more time to parties than military strategy. This was unfortunate for him because, while he was having this feast, his enemies (the Medes and Persians) were gathering outside the city, preparing to attack.

Wine and drinking are mentioned a lot, and it seems the king and his guests became drunk. Losing his good judgment, Belshazzar decided to show off the gold and silver cups and bowls Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem nearly seventy years before. Items from the temple had been dedicated to God. It was insulting to God to have these used in a drunken feast.

The mysterious fingers boldly wrote a message on the plastered wall where everyone could see. As he read the message, the king stopped laughing.

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“King Belshazzar was very frightened. His face turned white, and his knees knocked together. He could not stand up because his legs were too weak.” Daniel 5:6, ICB

He sent for the best astrologers and diviners to interpret the writing. They could not. The queen then suggested that they send for Daniel.

Daniel had a history of interpreting dreams. Years before, he had interpreted several dreams for King Nebuchadnezzar. The dream of the statue is found in Daniel chapter 2. The dream of the tree is found in Daniel chapter 4.

When Daniel arrived, he told Belshazzar that the king was arrogant and had insulted God. That is why God sent the dramatic message. Mene, “numbered or counted,” meant that the days of Belshazzar’s rule now had been all counted out. Tekel, “weighed,” explained why this king’s rule was ended. In God’s scales, he was not man enough to be king. Peres means “division,” and parsin is the plural of this word. The Medes and Persians in the east had formed an alliance to fight against Babylon, and their armies were already just outside the city.

The Medes and Persians managed to slip into the city secretly while all the Babylonians feasted. In the morning, they killed Belshazzar and took over his kingdom.

Daniel had a reputation among the Babylonian courts. Knowing Daniel was a wise elder statesman, the new leaders gave him a prestigious place in their government (Daniel 6:1-2).

Way to Introduce the Story:

Collect some items that appear to be very “precious.” Usually, glitzy or sparkly things seem very expensive to young children. You may even wish to bring an item special to you. Tell the children that this item is very special. You want them to treat it in a very special way. Show them how you hold it carefully, and let them touch, hold, and pass it around. “In today’s story, we are going to learn about some cups that were very special cups. They were special because they had been used in the temple of the Lord. They were made from pure gold and silver. God wanted the cups always to be handled very carefully.”

The Story:

Daniel had lived in Babylon for many years and became an old man there. All of his life, Daniel tried to do what God said. King Nebuchadnezzar liked Daniel and considered him one of his best servants.

One time, King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that upset him. He stayed up at night worrying about the dream. The king called all of the magicians in his court to come and tell him what the dream meant. “Tell us the dream,” the magicians said, “and we will tell you what it means.”

But the king would not tell anyone what he dreamed. He wanted to see if the magicians could tell him what the dream was. If they could, their power would be proved real. When the king saw that none of the magicians could tell him about his dream, he ordered that all of the wise men in Babylon be put to death.

Daniel was one of the king’s wise men! He told the king he could tell him the dream. He would not tell it through magic; he would tell it through God’s power.

Daniel told the king that the dream was about a statue. The statue’s head was of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, and its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. While you were watching, a huge stone rolled down and crushed the feet, and the statue crumbled and fell. “Yes, that’s it exactly!” said the king. Daniel told the king what the dream meant. The parts of the statue’s body represent the kingdom of Babylon and the Kingdoms that will come after it. Someday, another kingdom (the Kingdom of God) will be stronger than all others. The kingdoms of this earth will end,

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but the Kingdom of God will last forever. The king knew that what Daniel said was true.

Another time, King Nebuchadnezzar dreamed about a tree as tall as the sky. It was so big it could be seen from every place on the earth. All kinds of animals lived under it. In the dream, he was told to cut it down. Daniel told the meaning of that dream. The tree represented King Nebuchadnezzar. King Nebuchadnezzar would be cut down like a tree and be made humble. He would eat grass in the fields like animals “until seven times passed over him” (probably meaning ‘for seven years’) until he admitted that the Lord was the only God. The dream came true, and after seven years, King Nebuchadnezzar admitted that the Lord was the only God.

Many years passed. King Nebuchadnezzar died, and now there was a new king. Belshazzar was the one who was acting as King of Babylon.

King Belshazzar gave a big banquet for a thousand of his nobles. Everyone at the banquet drank a lot of alcohol and got drunk. King Belshazzar wanted to impress all of his guests. He knew that some gold and silver cups were in storage. They were the cups stolen from the now-destroyed temple of God in Jerusalem. Belshazzar did not care that these were special cups only to be used in God’s temple. He ordered the servants to bring the cups so his guests could use them to drink more alcohol.

A giant hand appeared out of nowhere when everyone began drinking out of God’s special cups. The giant hand wrote words on the wall of the room. The words were “Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin.” None of the king’s wise men knew what the words meant.

The king was very frightened. He wanted to know what the words meant. Finally, the queen said that they should ask Daniel what it meant. Daniel was an old man now, but he used to interpret dreams for King Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel was brought before the king. Daniel probably saw God’s special cups being used to drink from. These people did not even love God, and they certainly did not respect God.

The king offered him a lot, but Daniel said he did not want any money. He told the king what the writing meant. “Mene means that your days are numbered. You will not be king long. Tekel means that you have been weighed on God’s scales and you are not good enough. Peres means that your kingdom is divided and another country will take away your kingdom.”

The king knew that what Daniel said was true. That night, an army came and took over the kingdom of Babylon. Now, the Medes and Persians were rulers of the land.

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using various methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible, but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Click here for visual aids and more storytelling methods.

View this slideshow and download it from the original source:
http://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/daniel-feast/

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Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story. Reflection questions encourage them to internalise the meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child's spiritual development and help them connect to God. Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.

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Review:

- Name two dreams that Daniel interpreted for King Nebuchadnezzar. (The dream about the crumbling statue and the dream about the huge tree)
- What special things did King Belshazzar use in his banquet? (Gold and silver cups that were stolen from the temple of God)
- What does it mean to respect someone?
- Was the king respectful or disrespectful of God when He used the Temple's objects? (Disrespectful)
- What wrote the words on the wall? (A giant hand)
- Who did the King ask to interpret the writing on the wall? (Daniel)
- What did the words on the wall mean? (King Belshazzar had been examined by God, and he was not a good enough king. He would die, and his kingdom would be taken over by another kingdom)
- What happened later on the night of King Belshazzar's banquet? (The Medes and Persians took over the kingdom of Babylon)
- What do you think the king and the people at the Banquet learned from this?
- What did this story teach you about who God is?

Reflection:

- What is something you wonder about in this story?
- What do you think the handwriting on the wall looked like?
- How do you think the people at the king's banquet felt when they saw the large hand appear and start writing?
- If you saw a hand appear and start writing on the wall right now, how would you feel? What would you think?
- Why do you think God chose to have a large hand appear and write on the wall?
- Why do you think God sent a message that had to be interpreted? Why not just write a message the king could understand?
- How do you think Daniel felt when he had to tell the king what the message on the wall meant?
- How do you think the king felt when Daniel told him he would die, and his kingdom would be taken over?
- The king did not respect God because of how he used the Temple's objects. Why was this disrespectful to God?
- How can we show God respect?

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Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a life-long friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. A variety of prayer methods are found here.

Song Suggestions:

- Our God is an Awesome God Song
- Rejoice in the Lord Always Song
- My God is So Big Song
- Refer to the Song Page on this website for more song options.

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Activities and Crafts:

- How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.
- Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.

Activities:

- Help the children look up “respect” in a dictionary and Thesaurus.
- You can find good maps (in the back of many Bibles) showing how the Medeo-Persian Empire took over Babylon.
- Discuss how treating the temple items with respect showed respect to God. Why was God upset that the Babylonians were using them in the feast? How do we show respect to God today?
- Use bible encyclopaedias to find illustrations of temple utensils.
- Use a hand puppet to tell or review the story from a different point of view. Try telling it from the point of view of Daniel, Belshazzar or even – with great imagination – one of the cups.
- Click here for more ideas for Teaching About Respect

Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable “God’s Story” printable reflection page. Free printables for this story.

Crafts:

- Write the words on the wall using the crayon resist method. When children apply paint, the words will “appear” on the paper. The words from Daniel 5:25, ICB, were “*Mene, mene, tekel, parsin.*“
- Another method for “invisible ink” is to use lemon juice. Dip a paintbrush in lemon juice and write the words on a paper. After the juice is dry, it should be invisible. Hold a candle in your hand and hold it over the message. As the dried lemon juice heats, it will turn brown, and the message will appear. Be sure to practice this because some papers work better than others.

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Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. Free printables for this story.

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Other Online Resources:

- Colouring page and puzzle worksheets (Calvary Curriculum)
- Art Activity: Use invisible ink to make “Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin” appear on a paper. (Instructions for invisible ink Wiki How)

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Date
2026/11/20

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