Handwriting on the Wall  
(Daniel 5)

Pre-Session Warm Up

[Teacher, on one side of a card write the words “MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN,” 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

If we do not do the good we know we should do, we are guilty of sin.  
(James 4:17)

Lesson

Daniel served King Nebuchadnezzar for many years. When Nebuchadnezzar died, Belshazzar became king of Babylon. Belshazzar did not believe in the true God but instead worshiped many idols. Belshazzar also depended on magicians and astrologers who studied the stars to tell him 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

Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in the presence of the thousand.

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

Daniel 5:2

While he tasted the wine, Belshazzar gave the command to bring the gold and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple which had been in Jerusalem, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them.

These goblets were big fancy cups which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem. They were sacred 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

They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and 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 defying 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 took away the punishment of your sin of unbelief. You are no longer separated from Him. Now He wants you to obey Him willingly. When you choose to disobey, God will correct you as a loving Father who wants what’s best for you.

When God disciplines you as His child, 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 disciplines by allowing trouble to come into your life like illness, failures, or difficult circumstances. Often He disciplines
you by causing you to feel unhappy, restless, or guilty inside because of your sin.

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, all the talking and laughing and singing and drinking stopped and all eyes slowly turned toward a large wall where a hand was writing a message!

Daniel 5:5

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.

King Belshazzar stood up looking pale and frightened.

Daniel 5:6

Then the king’s countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other.

Belshazzar 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 wise men! He offered them a reward if they could tell the meaning of this strange message.

Daniel 5:8

Now all the king’s wise men came, but they could not read the writing, or make known to the king its interpretation. Not one of them could read the message. Belshazzar was terrified.

Daniel 5:9

Then King Belshazzar was greatly troubled, his countenance was changed, and his lords were astonished.

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

Daniel 5:10-11

The queen, because of the words of the king and his lords, came to the banquet hall. And the queen spoke, saying, “O king, live forever! Do not let your thoughts trouble you, nor let your countenance change. There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God. And in the days of your father, light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, were found in him; and King Nebuchadnezzar your father—your father the king—made him chief of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers.

The queen remembered Daniel.

Daniel 5:5

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 5:12

Inasmuch as an excellent spirit, knowledge, understanding, interpreting dreams, solving riddles, and explaining enigmas were found in this Daniel, whom the king names Belteshazzar, now let Daniel be called, and he will give the interpretation.

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 of 85 years or more, 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 Nebuchadnezzar’s sinful pride. Even though Belshazzar was an unbeliever, he knew of God’s
power and hatred of sin, and he should have known better than to defy God.

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. Those are lies that your enemy Satan wants you to believe. God will not take away your salvation when you sin, since the Lord Jesus Christ settled that on the cross with His own blood. But God does hold you responsible for the way you choose to live as a Christian. He will discipline you on earth, and He may withhold rewards from you in heaven.

What can you do to avoid God’s discipline in your life?

1. Stay away from things you know are sin. Reading your Bible will help you to know what God wants you to do and what He expects you to avoid.

2. If you do sin, 1 John 1:9 says that you should confess (agree with God about) your sin. He promises to forgive your sin when you honestly, from your heart, admit to Him that you’ve done wrong. Ask Him to help you to do right.

When you discipline yourself by confessing to God and turning from sin, God won’t have to discipline you Himself. God says in James 4:17, “if we do not do the good we know we should do, we are guilty of sin.”

King Belshazzar was not a child of God, but he knew God is holy. He should have known better than to defy Him.

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:

“Mene” means “numbered.” Your days are numbered.

“Tekel” means “weighted.” You have fallen short of God’s standard.

“Upharsin” means “divided.” Your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and the Persians.

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. 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.

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.

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. Perhaps even now you are thinking of a sin in your life that you have been trying to hide from God. Why don’t you talk to Him about it right now?

Closing Prayer

Father, forgive us our sins and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. Father, set you angels around us; guard us from the
attacks of our enemy, Satan. Give us a desire in our hearts to honor you with every thing 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 constructions 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 while crayon on white construction paper. Then when they paint over it with a very diluted water color, their secret message will be revealed!

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

What did King Belshazzar do that displeased God? (He used the sacred temple vessels at his party.)

Where did Belshazzar get the sacred temple vessels? (His father, King Nebuchadnezzar had taken them when the Babylonians invaded Judah.)
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.)

What happened during the party that scared everyone? (They saw a hand writing a secret message on the wall.)

What happened to King Belshazzar when he saw the handwriting on the wall? (He went pale and his knees got weak and shaky.)

Who did King Belshazzar call first to tell him the meaning of the secret message? (His wisemen.)

Who remembered that Daniel had the special spiritual gift of wisdom and understanding? (The Queen remembered Daniel.)

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.)

Why is it that God must punish sin? (Because He is a holy God and can not tolerate anything that is not holy in His presence.)

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.)

What can you do if you do sin? (Confess or agree with God about your sin and ask Him to help you do right.)

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.)

Why did King Belshazzar lose his kingdom and his life? (Because he defied God.)