

MENT



LESSON 36

God judges Belshazzar for his pride

DANIEL 5:1-31



God judges those who challenge His authority.



“You have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven.... The God in whose hand is your breath, and whose are all your ways, you have not honored” (Dan 5:23).

Supporting Truths

1. Mocking God is sin.
2. God opposes the proud.
3. God gives grace to the humble.
4. God provides an opportunity to repent.
5. Despising God is pointless.

Objectives

1. Describe what Belshazzar did to challenge God's authority.
2. Explain how God opposed Belshazzar.
3. List what Belshazzar should have learned from Nebuchadnezzar's example.
4. Identify how long Belshazzar continued in his rebellion against God.
5. Describe how God responds to those who challenge His authority.

STUDY THE BIBLE LESSON

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Lesson Summary

Belshazzar intentionally mocked the God of Israel and tried to show the superiority of Babylon's gods. Although he knew that God had humbled Nebuchadnezzar, he boldly challenged God's authority. He foolishly ignored Nebuchadnezzar's warning to humble himself before the God of heaven. As a result, he lost both his kingdom and his life. With his hands he had challenged God's authority, and with a hand God quickly answered, proving His authority over all the kings and kingdoms of the earth.

Spotlight on the Gospel

Sin is by its very nature a challenge to God's authority. Since the Garden of Eden, all mankind has been in rebellion against God. While God is patient with sinners, His patience will not last forever. All those who reject God's authority will be rejected by Him. We must, while time remains, submit to Jesus as Lord and Savior, humbly declaring our allegiance to Him. For Christians, this means living each day in light of God's authority over us.

LAST WEEK



**God humbles
Nebuchadnezzar**
Daniel 4:1–37

THIS WEEK



**God judges Belshazzar
for his pride**
Daniel 5:1–31

NEXT WEEK



**God delivers Daniel
from the lions' den**
Daniel 6:1–30

EXILE

Lesson Commentary

God judges those who challenge His authority.

The book of Daniel is about God's **sovereign** power. This gave hope to the Jews in exile. It helped them remember that even though Gentile kings ruled over them, God was the one who was really in charge, and one day His glorious kingdom would come. Even great King Nebuchadnezzar eventually learned to submit to God's rule, and he ended his letter by warning that God humbles the proud (Dan 4:34–37). But future Babylonian kings failed to heed his warning. In 539 BC, over two decades after Nebuchadnezzar's death, the Babylonian Empire was on the verge of collapse. The Medes and Persians had surrounded Babylon and besieged the city. But instead of acknowledging God's sovereign authority, Nebuchadnezzar's successor, Belshazzar, despised God. He would learn the lesson too late that the sovereign God severely judges those who challenge His authority.

Belshazzar challenged God's authority (5:1–4)

While the armies of the Medo-Persians lurked just beyond the city's walls, Belshazzar hosted a feast for a thousand of his lords (5:1). The feast was likely a display of confidence in the city's defenses to boost the morale of his nobles. The city's walls were impressive: two sets of double walls encircled the city, each one from 11 to 25 feet thick. The massive walls kept invaders out while the waterway under the wall allowed the life sustaining waters of the Euphrates River in. With its fresh water supply and stockpiles of food, Babylon could survive for years—even decades—under siege.

Confident in his man-made security, Belshazzar called for the cups from God's temple (5:2). It was a heinous offense—their lips touched vessels holy to the living God as their tongues praised lifeless idols (5:4). Belshazzar intentionally mocked the God of Israel as if He were powerless before Babylon's empty-headed gods. Like all mockers, he enjoyed despising God. This is how rebellion often looks—it drowns out the truth with laughter, unwilling even to give the truth a chance to be heard. But mockers should be warned, and believers should be encouraged, "for God is not

mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap" (Gal 6:7).

Like many before him, Belshazzar was **proud**, puffed up, honoring himself, trusting his own strength and abilities, not God. His defiance was like Cain's, who ignored God's warning and ended up cursed (Gen 4); or the people in Noah's time, who ridiculed God's messenger and perished in the flood (Gen 6–7); or Pharaoh, who foolishly trusted in the idols of Egypt and lost his kingdom, his family, and his own life (Exod 5–13). Those who challenge God's authority, foolishly ignoring His warning about the danger and destruction of pride, will be humbled (Prov 29:23).

God condemned Belshazzar's pride (5:5–28)

God quickly answered Belshazzar (Dan 5:5). God's judgment, delivered by a human hand, was itself a fitting rebuke to the Babylonian hands that had stolen God's vessels and defiantly lifted them up during the feast. Belshazzar was so afraid that he could not even control his own body, especially when none of his wise men could interpret the message (5:6–9; cf. Dan 2, 4). Where now was his unholy laughter? Thus God belittles those who belittle Him.

The queen, mother of Belshazzar and daughter of Nebuchadnezzar, still remembered Daniel. How could she forget this prophet and the way God used him to humble her father? This man of God, now about 80 years old, had faithfully served God in the land of Babylon for 65 years. So they summoned Daniel, and he succeeded where the wise men failed (5:10–13, 24–28). However, before revealing the interpretation, Daniel boldly proclaimed God's authority over Belshazzar and rebuked him for ignoring what he clearly knew. He knew that Nebuchadnezzar's authority came from the Most High God (5:18–19). He knew that God humbles the proud as He humbled Nebuchadnezzar (5:20). He knew that even Nebuchadnezzar had submitted to God's authority (5:21).

THINK ABOUT IT
God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble (Jas 4:6).



STUDY THE BIBLE LESSON

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So Belshazzar was especially guilty. He knowingly refused to humble his heart (5:22). And he took it a step further by intentionally exalting himself against God, refusing to submit to God or give God glory (5:23). How foolish! He chose to praise powerless lumps of metal, wood, and stone instead of the God who has power over life. Didn't he realize that he was using his breath to mock the One who could at any moment take His **breath** away? He was trying to turn his way against the One who held all his ways in His hand. Who could be so arrogant, so foolish, as to declare war against the One who has authority over his very life? Yet everyone who spends his life for himself does the same thing. Everyone who lives as if he is in control resists God.



THINK ABOUT IT

How will you spend each breath God has given: on self or service to God?

In the more than two decades of time that had passed since Nebuchadnezzar's death, Belshazzar had persisted in his rebellion against God. He underestimated the value of

God's kindness, forbearance, and patience in withholding the punishment his sinful rebellion deserved (Rom 2:4). Rather than punishing every person the moment he sins, God often delays judgment. This delay, God's patience, is meant to lead us to **repentance**, the act of turning from sin to Christ for forgiveness and salvation. But Belshazzar despised God's patience and mocked God's authority.

Daniel then explained each word to Belshazzar (Dan 5:24–28). God had ordained the very days of Belshazzar's life and reign, and both had come to an end (5:26). Belshazzar's life had been evaluated by God, and it was found to be deficient (5:27; 1 Sam 2:3; Ps 62:9). When judged according to the holiness of God, Belshazzar had fallen hopelessly short of God's standard of perfection (Lev 19:2). As a result, his kingdom would be divided and given to others (Dan 5:28). Belshazzar had challenged the God who controls all men, and His answer was clear: God

alone has authority over kings because He is the King of kings.

God judged Belshazzar (5:29–31)

Belshazzar elevated Daniel to third in the kingdom (5:29). But there is no indication that he humbled himself under God's authority, repented, or even despaired over God's impending judgment. That very night Belshazzar was killed, and the Medes and Persians conquered the Babylonians (5:30–31). History records that the Medo-Persian army diverted the Euphrates River and entered Babylon under the city's massive walls, through the gap the river used to fill. The city that was to resist for years fell in one night. Trusting in his own might did not work out so well for Belshazzar. It never does (Jer 17:5–6).

After Belshazzar was killed, Darius the Mede received the kingdom (5:31). Darius is most likely a title for the Medo-Persian kings, indicating that Cyrus the Great and Darius the Mede were one and the same person. By using Cyrus' Median name, Daniel may have intended to remind his readers of God's sovereign authority, as God had promised to raise up the Medes to destroy the Babylonians because of their destruction of His temple (Jer 51:11; cf. Isa 13:17; Jer 51:28).

It is pointless to rebel against God. Any rebellion against the God of Heaven is doomed to be unsuccessful, because all of man's planning and conspiring against God comes to nothing (Ps 2:1). God looks down upon man's rebellion from heaven and laughs (2:4). All rebellion against God is empty, and less than empty, for God will punish His enemies with a rod of iron, crushing all those who set themselves against Him (2:9). But God's punishment is not immediate. He mercifully provides His enemies an opportunity to repent (2:10–12). All those who lay aside their rebellion and humbly declare their allegiance to the King of kings will find refuge from God's righteous anger (2:12).

THINK ABOUT IT
Those who scoff at God will perish (Ps 1:1, 6).



Lesson Outline

God judges those who challenge His authority.

AGES 3–5 LESSON OUTLINE



1. Belshazzar made fun of God (5:1–4).
2. Belshazzar was very afraid because of a hand writing on the wall (5:5–9).
3. God said Belshazzar would die because he was proud (5:10–28).
4. God killed Belshazzar (5:29–31).

AGES 6–11 LESSON OUTLINE



1. **Belshazzar challenged God's authority (5:1–4).**
 - Belshazzar held a great feast for the Babylonian nobles (5:1).
 - Belshazzar used cups that were holy to God (5:2–3).
 - The Babylonians used God's cups to praise idols (5:4).
2. **God condemned Belshazzar's pride (5:5–28).**
 - Immediately, fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the wall (5:5).
 - Belshazzar was terrified and confused (5:6–9).
 - Daniel rebuked Belshazzar for not submitting to God (5:10–23).
 - Daniel said Belshazzar and his kingdom would perish (5:24–28).
3. **God destroyed Belshazzar (5:29–31).**
 - Belshazzar acted like his kingdom would not perish (5:29).
 - Belshazzar was killed that night (5:30).
 - The Medo-Persian Empire defeated the Babylonian Empire (5:31).



TEACH THE BIBLE LESSON

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Lesson Questions

Use these questions to teach or to review this week's lesson.



Ages 3–5 Lesson Questions

1. **Did Belshazzar listen to Nebuchadnezzar's warning to be humble?**
No. Belshazzar was proud.
2. **What did the king see during his meal?**
The king saw a hand writing a message on a wall.
3. **What did Daniel say that this message meant?**
Daniel explained that God had judged Belshazzar and Babylon. Both the king and his kingdom would be given over to the Medes and Persians.
4. **What happened that night to the king?**
He was killed when the Medes and Persians invaded Babylon.



Ages 6–11 Lesson Questions

1. **Why was Belshazzar without excuse concerning his pride?**
Nebuchadnezzar had warned that God is able to humble the proud.
2. **How did Belshazzar show his pride?**
He trusted himself and his idols instead of God. He made fun of God by drinking out of the cups from God's holy temple.
3. **How did God reveal his judgment to Belshazzar?**
God caused a human hand to write His judgment on a wall as the king watched in terror.
4. **Who failed to interpret the message, and who succeeded?**
The wise men failed, but Daniel succeeded.
5. **According to Daniel, why was Belshazzar so foolish for mocking God?**
The breath Belshazzar was using to mock God was a gift God could take away at any moment.
6. **What was God's message to Belshazzar?**
That God had numbered the days of Belshazzar's kingdom and brought it to an end. God had weighed Belshazzar in the balances and he had been found wanting. Belshazzar's kingdom would be divided and given to others.
7. **When was God's message fulfilled?**
That very night. Belshazzar was killed when the Medes and Persians invaded Babylon.
8. **How did Babylon's fall demonstrate God's authority?**
It fulfilled prophecy. God had promised to raise up the Medes to destroy the Babylonians.

Lesson Activities

Choose from the following ideas to introduce, illustrate, and apply this week's lesson.

AGES 3–5



A CHINA TEACUP

Show the children 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 children 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 the wrong way.

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 children will have a warning before they are caught off guard and lose the game. Discuss with the children 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.



SHADOW HAND

Using a projector (or other light source), cast your hand's shadow on the wall to illustrate the hand God sent to deliver His message to Belshazzar. Pretend to write a message on the wall. Ask the children to tell how they think the people at the feast would have felt when they saw the hand writing on the wall. If a projector cannot be located, a laser pointer could be used to illustrate a hand moving independently on the wall.

COUNT DOWN PAPER CHAIN

To illustrate that God numbered the days of Belshazzar's kingdom, make a paper chain like the ones used to count down the days until Christmas. Throughout the lesson, or after you explain this concept, pull off links one at a time until none remain.



IN THE BALANCES

See Year 2 Craft Book, Book 2.

Materials: Craft sheet, scissors, brads, and crayons.

Directions: Pre-cut all pieces from craft sheet. Have children color the pieces. Tape the half circles to the tabs on the crossbar. Glue the verse to the crossbar. Connect the crossbar to the triangle with a brad.



In the Balances
See Year 2 Craft Book, Book 2

TEACH THE BIBLE LESSON

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AGES 6–8



RIDDLE 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 children enter the classroom, ask them if they know what the saying means. Explain that we will learn the meaning in today's lesson.

DISRESPECTING GOD

How would you feel if someone came over to your house for dinner and as he was eating began to say mean things about your mom's cooking? Or what if this same person began to make fun of a project that your dad was proud of and had been working hard on? How would this make you feel? This is what Belshazzar did when he used the vessels from God's temple in his worship of idols.



AN END IS COMING

In Daniel 5:26, Daniel interpreted the word mene and told Belshazzar, "God has numbered your kingdom and finished it." Help the children to understand the idea of God "numbering" the Babylonian kingdom by giving examples of some other things that are numbered. Many children will know that a baseball game lasts for nine innings. The game is numbered; it will not last forever. Similarly, a basketball player has only a limited amount of time—24 seconds—in which to make a free-throw basket; the time is numbered by the clock. These two examples (and many others) can demonstrate the idea of a definite end coming.

WEIGHED AND FOUND WANTING

Bring a scale to class. When discussing how God had weighed Belshazzar and found him wanting (Dan 5:27), ask the children what this means. Before anyone can answer, pull out the scale and ask if this was what God was talking about. Was God talking about Belshazzar's weight? Explain that the phrase means God had evaluated Belshazzar's thoughts, words, and actions and found them deficient (1 Sam 2:3; Ps 62:9).



HANDWRITING ON THE WALL

See Year 2 Craft Book, Book 2.

Materials: Craft sheets, scissors, glue, and crayons.

Directions: Have students color and cut out the rectangles with the dotted lines on them. Color the template. Glue the top portion of each rectangle (marked off by the dotted lines) to the appropriate location on the template.

Handwriting on the Wall
See Year 2 Craft Book, Book 2



AGES 9–11



INTRODUCE

THE HANDWRITING ON THE WALL

Begin by asking the children whether they have heard the saying “The handwriting was on the wall.” Explain that this saying suggests that there will be future doom or misfortune for someone. This saying originated from the text of Scripture that will be studied today. Ask the children for examples of times when “the handwriting was on the wall” in their lives.

WEIGHED IN THE BALANCE

Have you ever watched someone weigh vegetables or fruits at the supermarket? They probably put some vegetables or fruits on the scale and then either added some more or took some off. When they were doing this, they were balancing the amount on the scale with the amount they wanted to buy. In today’s Bible story, Belshazzar is weighed on God’s scale and is found lacking. That is, the scales did not balance because he did not meet God’s standard of perfection.



ILLUSTRATE

GOD MOCKERS

Belshazzar did not love God and did not change his ways when he was warned. Belshazzar was a “God mocker.” If I were to ask you whether you are a “God mocker,” you probably would say no. You would probably say that you don’t make fun of God and don’t talk about Him badly. But the sad truth is that many of us are God mockers. We know what God commands us in His Word, but we don’t obey it. We disobey His Word and think that He doesn’t see us in our disobedience, but He sees all we do. When we disobey God, we mock Him.

BREATHING

Have you ever thought about breathing? We do it all throughout the day, but we almost never think about it. We don’t have to think about doing it for it to happen. We also don’t think about the fact that each breath that we take is a gift from God. How are you spending each breath God has given you: to serve self or to serve God and others?



APPLY

LEARNING FROM OTHERS’ MISTAKES

Would you rather learn a lesson by making a mistake and then being disciplined or by seeing someone else disciplined and then not making the same mistake yourself? In today’s lesson we saw that Belshazzar made a big mistake. He was warned and did not listen to the warning. He rejected God and was punished for his sin. We can see the mistakes that he made and not make them ourselves. The question is, will we learn from Belshazzar’s example or not?