

CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS
AUGUST 31 2024

this party's over

Scripture Story: Daniel 5.
Commentary: *Prophets and Kings* (or *Royalty and Ruin*), chapter 43.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

It is instructive that Daniel 4 closes with a humbled King Nebuchadnezzar, newly awakened from a bout of temporary insanity, while Daniel 5 begins with another puffed-up monarch soon to be punished.

Belshazzar learned nothing from the experience of his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar's fall because of his arrogance. This is evidenced not only by the lavish party that he threw for his friends and compatriots, but his behavior at the gathering. At the party he decided to "bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his [grand]father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them" (Daniel 5:2, NIV). This act of defiance was the final straw that led God to literally write the end of his kingdom, the fulfillment of which happened that very night.

There are several lessons that your students can glean from this awesome biblical narrative. The story of Belshazzar teaches us that while God may tarry, His judgments are no less sure. There are consequences to our actions. It also teaches that lives dedicated to pleasure-seeking often end in destruction, that sacred instruments of worship are not to be tampered with, that choosing the right friends is important, as is being a positive influence on them, and the importance of speaking truth to power no matter what the consequences or bribes.

Perhaps the greatest lesson to be learned, however, is that God is sovereign over all, and we forget about Him at our own peril.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Understand that our motives and behavior matter to God and are the evidence upon which we are judged. *(Know)*
- Sense the importance of heeding God's warning and counsel. *(Feel)*
- Make a decision to choose activities that will ennoble and uplift them. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

The Experience of Salvation, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, No. 10

"In infinite love and mercy God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, so that in Him we might be made the righteousness of God. . . . (Gen. 3:15; Isa. 45:22; 53; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 33:11; 36:25-27. . . .)"

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? *section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.*

This activity is meant to get the class thinking about happenings that can severely alter the course of one's life. After the students have given their responses, ask a volunteer to briefly describe a time in their life when

something truly life-changing occurred.

Make the point that life-altering events often come with little or no warning, but the judgments of God rarely come this way. Belshazzar's failure to heed God's warning led to his destruction.

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

"In one of the most profound passages in the New Testament, Paul states, 'For He [God] made Him [Christ] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him' (2 Cor. 5:21).

"God made Christ to be sin for us. Did Jesus ever sin? Did He ever think an evil thought or commit a sinful act? Certainly not!

"But He who knew no sin became sin. What does this mean? It means that Jesus was accused and condemned for sins we committed. How is this possible? Only through love. . . .

"Understanding what Jesus really suffered helps us comprehend its deeper message. As Paul wrote, 'Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree" ') (Gal. 3:13). . . .

". . . What is the curse of the law? Death. Is it the first death—or the second death? The first death is the death the entire human race dies as the result of the corporate sin of humanity. When Adam and Even [sic] sinned, this world was plunged into death and separated from God, the source of life.

"If the death of Christ on the cross is for only our physical death, we have no salvation. Sin also necessitates the second death, which is banishment forever from the presence of God.

"For us, Jesus was willing to be banished from the presence of God forever. . . . It is incredible love that . . . changes our lives. The thought that Jesus would be lonely in heaven without us is overwhelming. The thought that He would rather be lost than have us miss heaven is the most amazing in all of the universe. . . .

"All we can do is sing with the angels, 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain' (Rev. 5:12). All we can do is fall at His feet and worship Him."—Mark Finley, *Solid Ground*, 2003, p. 255

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

God sends us warnings that we might yield to His Holy Spirit, who alone can give us the strength and power to correct our course. Daniel 5 demonstrates in stark relief the consequences of ignoring God's warnings. As you prepare to explore this biblical narrative, delve into it with the understanding that God truly is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story *section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them:*

- The Old Testament is replete with stories of sin and its consequences. What makes the story of Belshazzar's rise and fall unique?
- The handwriting on the wall spoke of God numbering the days of Belshazzar's reign. Do you believe that God keeps an account of each of our lives? Is there other scriptural support for this idea?
- *Underline* the parts of the narrative where power and influence are seen.
- *Circle* parts of the story that are new to you, the parts that deepen your understanding of the narrative.
- What parallels can be drawn between the entertainment practices in Daniel's time and those in our times that do not meet God's approval? What are some reasons that such entertainment is displeasing to God?
- What actions of Belshazzar's do you think especially outraged God and why?
- What is Daniel's chief role in this story? What parallels can be drawn between the role that Daniel is playing in Babylon's kingly court and our role in society today?
- What part of Daniel's actions can be likened to that of Christ while He ministered on earth?
- Daniel's reputation for interpretation was well known. How did Daniel prevent this special gift of God from becoming a source of personal pride?
- Pay close attention to Belshazzar's reaction to the handwriting on the wall. What does

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

RABBI 101

Great Expectations

It is said that people will often rise no higher than what is expected of them. It is the rare person who is self-motivated to go beyond what others expect. This maxim is especially true of young people.

What would God want your students to learn in your class? What would He expect them to do with what they learn? Share with your students the lessons God has revealed through His Word. Then, let them know that God is patient and willing to help them make right decisions based on what they have learned. Let them know that Jesus wants to come into their lives to help them live lives that please God and meet His great expectations for them.

his reaction tell us about the power of God to humble the greatest person in a moment?

- In what had Belshazzar placed his security?
- Belshazzar's wise men were unable to read the writing on the wall. Why didn't God write in a language that all could understand?

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today's story: Ecclesiastes 12; Romans 1; Psalm 51.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

1. **Babylon now.** If you want to get to Babylon today you'll need to go to the nation of Iraq. You'll need to get on the road to Babylon, the main Baghdad-Hilla highway. You'll have to get by several checkpoints of armed guards. After a while you'll come to the fertile Mesopotamian plain between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. There you will find a mound with a few mud-brick buildings, all broken down and in much disrepair. This is all that remains today of mighty Babylon.

   More than 100 years before its destruction, Jeremiah wrote this: "Babylon's thick wall will be leveled and her high gates set on fire; the peoples exhaust themselves for nothing, the nations' labor is only fuel for the flames" (Jeremiah 51:58, NIV). Isaiah added, "She will never be inhabited or lived in through all generations" (Isaiah 13:20, NIV).
2. **Daniel's contemporaries.** The Israelites who were taken into captivity by the Babylonians were not left without comfort and divine instruction. God raised up faithful servants, such as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who modeled the behavior they were to adopt while in exile. But even before the captivity, Jeremiah's voice could be heard weeping and calling the people to repentance. Jeremiah's ministry continued into the

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Key Text**
  Invite the students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory.
- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight *statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book* Prophets and Kings. *Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from* Out of the Story.
- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that speaks most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.
- **Further Insight**
  Ask them how the quotes in Further Insight *convey the point of the story in this lesson.*

first part of the Babylonian captivity. There were others whom God sent to His people. Ezekiel was a prophet and priest who ministered during this time. He exhorted the stubborn Israelites, warning them of Jerusalem's impending destruction, and that God expected their obedience and worship while under Babylonian control.

3. **Sin against knowledge.** Should Belshazzar have known the true God? Absolutely. Here's what Ellen White says on this point: "Many had been his opportunities to know the divine will and to understand his responsibility of rendering obedience thereto. He had known of his grandfather's banishment, by the decree of God, from the society of men; and he was familiar with Nebuchadnezzar's conversion and miraculous restoration. But Belshazzar allowed the love of pleasure and self-glorification to efface the lessons that he should never have forgotten. He wasted the opportunities graciously granted him, and neglected to use the means within his reach for becoming more fully acquainted with truth" (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 522).
4. **The final straw.** The act that doomed Belshazzar and Babylon to infamy was the misuse of the gold and silver goblets from the old Jerusalem temple plundered by King Nebuchadnezzar. Not only did Belshazzar and his guests drink wine from them, they "praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone" (Daniel 5:4, NIV). It was after this act of worship that "suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared" (verse 5, NIV).

The question of worship has always been at the center of human existence. From the Fall to the end of time, whom we choose to worship is the most important question we must answer. The first angel's message of Revelation 14:7 commands humanity to worship God, the Creator of heaven and earth.

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

This week's lesson urges us to make positive changes before we face the consequences of our behavior, but many teens don't know how to start. Talk through the following general steps to making lasting change, then ask God to bless the students as they chart new courses in their lives.

1. Decide firmly to make a change and ask God what in your life needs to change.
2. Spend time consistently each day in prayer, asking God for strength and wisdom to implement the steps that will lead to the changes that you desire to experience.
3. Set goals and write them down on paper.
4. Identify one small step you can make toward your first goal and do it. Continue this way each day. Ask someone to help you.
5. When you become afraid, find a Bible promise that fits your need, then ask God to enable you to respond to His transforming power.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

The rise and fall of Belshazzar makes for fascinating reading.

When we apply the lessons of this story to our lives, our hearts are humbled. Through Belshazzar God is warning us to remember Him in all our dealings, that He alone is sovereign over all and can bring an end to sin at any moment. God is exhorting us to worship Him and to put away the idols that please and entertain us.

In Daniel 5 God also summons us to the holy calling that He gave Daniel during his prophetic ministry. We are to shine so brightly that when the world is groping in darkness—as Belshazzar and his guests were that fateful night—they will call for us. We are called to be faithful witnesses for God.



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *Prophets and Kings* (or *Royalty and Ruin*), chapter 43.

*A special adaptation of *Prophets and Kings* has been created by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press® Publishing Association. Get more info about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

LESSON 9

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STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: Daniel 5.
Commentary: *Prophets and Kings* (or *Royalty and Ruin*), chapter 43.

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keytext

"'This is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN. Here is what these words mean: *Mene:* God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. *Tekel:* You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting.'"

(Daniel 5:25-27, NIV)

flashlight

"In his pride and arrogancy, with a reckless feeling of security Belshazzar 'made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand.' All the attractions that wealth and power could command, added splendor to the scene. Beautiful women with their enchantments were among the guests in attendance at the royal banquet. Men of genius and education were there. Princes and statesmen drank wine like water and reveled under its maddening influence" (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 523).

what do you think?

Life-changing events happen in every life. On a scale of 1 (most difficult to deal with) to 7 (not a problem), rate your reaction to the following life-changing experiences:

___ A. Your best friend's mom dies.
___ B. You receive several rejection letters from colleges you hoped to attend.
___ C. Your parents decide to divorce.
___ D. Your pet dies.
___ E. Your parents take away your car.
___ F. Several schoolmates hurt you.
___ G. A close friend betrays you.

Explain your choices of the most and least life-changing events.

_____
_____
_____

did you know?

Did you know that at the time that Belshazzar, king of Babylon, threw his ill-fated party, the nation of Babylon was under siege from the Medes and Persians? King Darius and his mighty armies had cut off Babylon's ability to get food and other supplies in or out of Babylon. In spite of this impending doom, Belshazzar chose to party and have a good time.

INTO THE STORY

"King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them. While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. So they brought in the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.

"Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote. His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his legs became weak and his knees were knocking.

"The king summoned the enchanters, astrologers and diviners. Then he said to these wise men of Babylon, 'Whoever reads this writing and tells me what it means will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around his neck, and he will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom.'

"Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or tell the king what it meant. So King Belshazzar became even more terrified and his face grew more pale. His nobles were baffled.

"The queen, hearing the voices of the king and his nobles, came into the banquet hall. 'May the king live forever!' she said. 'Don't be alarmed! Don't look so pale! There is a man in your kingdom who has the spirit of the holy gods in him. In the time of your father he was found to have insight and intelligence and wisdom like that of the gods. Your father, King Nebuchadnezzar, appointed him chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners. He did this because Daniel, whom the king called Belteshazzar, was found to have a keen mind and knowledge and understanding, and also the ability to interpret dreams, explain riddles and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means.' "

(Daniel 5:1-12, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

Circle the main characters in this week's Scripture story.

What parts of the story of Babylon's fall are new for you?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Underline the scriptural passages that tell us something about Belshazzar's character.

Place an *asterisk* by those parts of the story that reveal something about Daniel's character.

Place a *checkmark* by those verses where you see God at work.

What exiled persons were at the center of this story but were not mentioned by name?

_____
_____
_____
_____

What are two lessons you have learned from this week's Scripture focus?

_____
_____
_____
_____

What parallels can you draw between the entertainment practices in Daniel's time versus in our times that do not meet God's approval? What are some reasons that such entertainment is displeasing to God?

_____
_____

What parallels can you draw between the role that Daniel was playing in Babylon's kingly court and our role in society today? In what practical ways can you exercise your influence to be an effective witness for God and reflect Jesus in your interactions with others?

_____
_____
_____

punch lines

"Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall" **(Proverbs 16:18, NIV).**

"Then people will say, 'Surely the righteous still are rewarded; surely there is a God who judges the earth' " **(Psalm 58:11, NIV).**

" 'I am with you and will save you,' declares the LORD. 'Though I completely destroy all the nations among which I scatter you, I will not completely destroy you. I will discipline you but only in due measure; I will not let you go entirely unpunished' " **(Jeremiah 30:11, NIV).**

"Then Daniel answered the king, 'You may keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else. Nevertheless, I will read the writing for the king and tell him what it means' " **(Daniel 5:17, NIV).**

" 'I will rise up against them,' declares the LORD. . . . 'I will wipe out Babylon's name and survivors' " **(Isaiah 14:22, NIV).**

further insight

"In order to continually increase in spiritual intelligence, and to become more and more efficient, you need to cultivate habits of usefulness in the minor duties lying in your pathway."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church,* vol. 4, p. 380

"Jesus, the served of all, came to be the servant of all. And because He ministered to all, He will again be served and honored by all. And those who would partake of His divine attributes, and share with Him the joy of seeing souls redeemed, must follow His example of unselfish ministry."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 651

Sabbath

Read Daniel 5:4-6.

Complete the *What Do You Think?* activity. What experience did you feel would change your life the most? What experience would be the most difficult to overcome? What radical experience happened in the life of Belshazzar?

_____

How did Belshazzar react to this supernatural occurrence? _____

How do you think the rest of the guests responded? _____

Why do you think God chose to intervene in Belshazzar's life in the way that He did?

_____

Sunday

Read Daniel 5.

Read the *Into the Story* section of this week's lesson and respond to the *Out of the Story* section. Daniel 5 paints a picture of two very different individuals—Daniel and Belshazzar. How would you describe Daniel in a sentence or two?

_____

How would you describe the kind of person Belshazzar was?

_____

Describe an aspect of God's character that comes through in the story.

_____

If you had to share with a friend the most important lesson that God wants us to learn from this Bible episode, what would you say?

_____

Monday

Read Psalm 90:12.

Check out this week's *Key Text.* Daniel shared with King Belshazzar the meaning of the writing on the wall. When God wrote to Belshazzar, "[I have] numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end," do you think Belshazzar knew that his kingdom and his life would end that same night?

_____

What does God tell us to do in today's Bible passage?

_____

What do you think God is asking us to do?

_____

Tuesday

Read Proverbs 16:18.

Read this week's *Flashlight* quotation from Ellen G. White. What are some of the activities that were going on at Belshazzar's big party?

_____

How did alcohol influence Belshazzar's decision making that fateful night?

_____

What are some safeguards to help you resist and avoid drugs or alcohol?

_____

How do you choose friends who have a positive influence on you?

_____

Wednesday

Read the *Further Insight* section of this week's lesson. Why is humility necessary for the Christian?

_____

How can you learn to become meek and humble like Jesus? What are some Bible passages that show you how to be more like Him?

_____

Thursday

Read Daniel 5:13-17.

Daniel's role in the unfolding drama of Belshazzar's dark night is a crucial one. What did Belshazzar promise to give Daniel if he could successfully interpret the writing on the wall?

_____

What was Daniel's reply?

_____

Daniel was summoned by the king to interpret a coded message from God. If God simply wanted to deliver a message to Belshazzar, why didn't He just write in a language that Belshazzar could understand?

_____

Why did God involve Daniel in this process? Why does He choose to use us to warn others of destruction when He could do it Himself?

_____

Friday

Read Proverbs 16:18-20.

Ellen G. White comments: "Many had been his opportunities to know the divine will and to understand his responsibility of rendering obedience thereto. He had known of his grandfather's banishment, by the decree of God, from the society of men; and he was familiar with Nebuchadnezzar's conversion and miraculous restoration. But Belshazzar allowed the love of pleasure and self-glorification to efface the lessons that he should never have forgotten. . . . That which Nebuchadnezzar had finally gained at the cost of untold suffering and humiliation, Belshazzar passed by with indifference" (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 522).

What is something that you enjoy doing that may be preventing you from hearing God's voice of warning?

this week's reading*

Prophets and Kings (or *Royalty and Ruin*), chapter 43.

**Royalty and Ruin* is a special adaptation of *Prophets and Kings*, created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press®. Get more information about it at http://www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.URlhF1rBO9s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.