

Daniel 5

Aim of Lesson

To show that God will not leave unpunished those who are proud and dishonour his name.

Background study

Daniel 4.

Suggested outline of lesson

Approach this lesson by talking about parties and how enjoyable they can be. However, explain that some parties can become too wild, when grown-ups drink too much wine and begin behaving foolishly. In the time of Daniel this kind of party was often associated with idol worship. Explain that today's story begins with such a party, at the king's palace in Babylon. Introduce Belshazzar who was probably acting king, ruling in the absence of his father, Nabonidus, who was in Arabia. Describe the scene, the opulence of the palace, the vast number of guests, the excessive quantity and variety of food and wine. In no time Belshazzar was feeling merry, and he became even more arrogant and expansive than usual. To further impress his pleasure-seeking guests, he sent for the gold and silver goblets, part of the treasure that Nebuchadnezzar had plundered from the temple in Jerusalem. They were sacred vessels, which had been used only in the temple worship, and to put them to such a base use amounted to sacrilege. They further dishonoured God by drinking to their pagan gods.

Having painted a picture of noisy revelry, convey the sudden interruption of the proceedings by an eerie, frightening happening. Knowing they had been drinking, the Babylonians might have thought at first that they were imagining things, but they really did see the disembodied fingers of a man's hand, writing on the wall. The king was terrified and like Nebuchadnezzar before him, he consulted his 'wise' men. He did not understand the words but he knew, instinctively, that the message was ominous. He was frantic. When the initial shock had passed, everyone began talking at once, and the commotion reached the ears of the queen mother. She was able to remember when the 'wise' men had failed to solve a mystery and only Daniel, the prophet of God, had been able to reveal it.

Although it was the king who summoned Daniel, his servant, yet in the interview that followed it was Daniel who spoke with authority. Fearlessly, he reminded Belshazzar of Nebuchadnezzar's humiliation before the true God, in order that he might acknowledge God's supremacy. He denounced Belshazzar's blasphemy, wickedness and pride and pronounced the judgements of God against him and against his kingdom.

Having promised to reward any man who could interpret the writing, Belshazzar kept his word. The judgements of God against Babylon were carried out forthwith. That very night Belshazzar was killed at the hands of the invaders, and his kingdom passed into the hands of another world power, led by Darius the Mede and Cyrus the Persian.

Belshazzar had failed to learn what Nebuchadnezzar had finally realised - that God exerts his power over the affairs of men, and controls the tide of history. The era of the head of gold had now passed.

Relevance to the children's lives

Belshazzar thought that he could do as he liked and get away with it. Many people today have the same idea. They do just as they please, regardless of what they know to be right, even to the extent of offending God. Knowing that God wants us to belong to him, how should we behave? Is it wrong to enjoy ourselves?

Worksheets

The jigsaw reads: 'You did not honour the God who holds in his hands your life & all your ways'.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, we are glad that you are in control of the world. Please help us to see that, in pleasing you, we can find true happiness. Amen.

Memory verse

"The Most High God rules the kingdom of men, and sets over it whom he will" (Daniel 5:21).