

Aim of lesson

To consider, from the example of Belshazzar, how we can honour or dishonour God.

Bible background

Daniel 5.

Outline of lesson

The banquet

Tell the class to imagine they are servants of king Belshazzar. This king was co-regent with his father Nabonidus and ruled in Babylon while Nabonidus was campaigning in Arabia. It is probably for this reason that Belshazzar offers to make Daniel the third, not the second, ruler in the kingdom. You could read with the class Daniel 5 and ask the class to write a conversation in the workbook between two who saw what happened at the banquet. The chapter could be read in sections e.g. v1-6, v7-12, v13-17, v18-30 or it could be read as a whole, using different members of the class to read the parts of Belshazzar, the queen, Daniel and the narrator. The class could prepare the conversation between the servants in pairs and then read their version to the rest of the class. If you wish, the servants could be supposed exiles who came as young children from Jerusalem to Babylon.

The cups

Ask the class to think about what had happened to the cups that Belshazzar used. They had been made by King Solomon over 400 years earlier for the service of God's Temple. They had been used in the Temple in Jerusalem for nearly 400 years until Nebuchadnezzar had invaded and carried off prisoners and articles from the Temple, see Daniel 1:1-2. Now Nebuchadnezzar's grandson uses the cups for drinking wine at his banquet, while praising gods of gold and silver. Belshazzar has no respect for God in contrast with Nebuchadnezzar who through Daniel learned to respect him.

The writing

Discuss with the class the strange message that God sent to Belshazzar. The words were common enough. They were measures of weight, or units of money but the meaning of the message was not clear until explained by Daniel. God sees the value of our lives. He holds our lives and all our ways in his hands. Belshazzar did not measure up to what God required. In the workbook ask the class to write in the weight things about Belshazzar that were not pleasing to God. They could include his disrespect for God; not humbling himself before God, and his worship of idols. All this can be found in Daniel's speech, especially v22-23.

The end of Babylon

This banquet was held in the year 539 B.C. During that night the Medo-Persian army took Babylon by diverting the river and entering the city by the dried up waterways. Darius the Mede took the city for Cyrus the Great, and Belshazzar was slain. The class should note this in the workbook.

Digging deeper

Babylon city

This section looks at the city of Babylon (including Daniel 4): what happened to it, and how this fits with Nebuchadnezzar's image and the vision of the ram in Daniel 8.

Relevance to our lives

Ask the class to consider how we can honour or dishonour God. What actions show that we respect him and which show that we do not? Respect involves taking notice of what God says, humility and consideration for others as people whose lives are also in God's hands and are important to him.

Prayer

'Thank you, God, that you have all things within your control, including me.'

What prayer might the servants have said if they survived that night?

Other suggestions for activities

- The best ideas that come out of the conversations of the servants could be put together as a recorded 'radio play'.
- A 'television news programme' broadcast from Babylon the next day could be prepared.
- The class may like to read Daniel 4 and discuss the lesson that Nebuchadnezzar learned that his grandson Belshazzar did not. The queen or probably the queen mother had not forgotten, 5:10.
- The class may like to find out about the fall of Babylon and how Darius cut off the water supply.

Note that the first section of next week's lesson suggests some preparation the class could do during the previous week.