SESSION SUMMARY

As we continue our study of how God sustained His people in exile, we come to a scene in which God demonstrated His opposition to those who rise against Him and ignore His warnings. The story of Belshazzar and the “writing on the wall” is a vivid illustration of the truth that “the Most High God rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he will” (Dan. 5:21). From this event, we learn that we should not place our faith in the security of earthly kingdoms or leaders who exalt themselves above God. Knowing the consequences of rebellion, we heed the warnings of God and lovingly warn others of God’s judgment.

SCRIPTURE

Daniel 5:1-9,13-31
THE POINT

God opposes those who remain prideful against Him.

INTRO/STARTER  5-10 MINUTES

Option 1
Just as God wrote the law in stone with His finger (Ex. 31:18), He wrote a message of warning on the wall in front of Belshazzar and his party guests. Although God may not write on the wall to warn you about the direction your life has taken, He warns us of the consequences of certain behaviors in His Word. Write the following on a white board or poster board at the front of the room: God’s warning, God’s judgment, trusting in human power rather than God, placing one’s security in the things of the world instead of the eternal, exalting oneself above God, unrepentant sin and consequences.

Allow students to work in pairs to find an example in Scripture that demonstrates each of these themes. Ask for volunteers to share their answers, then ask the students to consider how these themes or stories may apply to their own lives.

• In what ways has God warned you of the consequences of your sin? How did you respond?
• When have you been tempted to trust in something or someone other than God for security?
• How does continuing in our sin and placing our security and trust in the wrong things allow us to exalt ourselves above God?

Option 2
In most U. S. states, when you go to the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to get your drivers permit or license, you have to take a signs test in addition to the driving test. There are many different types of signs, including construction signs, directional signs, warning signs, regulation signs, and recreation signs. With road signs, both the shape and the color of the signs often indicate the meaning.

• What are some common signs that indicate direction or warnings on the roadways?

In the same way that these road signs give directions and warn us of coming changes or trouble, God also warns us through His Word and His people. In today’s session, God warned Belshazzar through Daniel. Belshazzar trusted in himself rather than God, exalted himself above God, and failed to repent of his sin. For these reasons, God sent a warning to Belshazzar of what would come because of his disobedience and opposition.

• How might God be warning you about certain sins and consequences in your own life? What can you do to focus on God and obeying Him above all?
THE POINT
God opposes those who remain prideful against Him.

CHARACTERS

• **The Triune God** - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
• **Belshazzar** - king of Babylon; grandson of Nebuchadnezzar
• **Daniel** - was taken captive to Babylon after the fall of Jerusalem; remained faithful to God during his time in exile

PLOT

Years had passed and another Babylonian king was in charge. The grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, rose to power and the sinful tendencies in this family were passed down from generation to generation. He brought out the items taken from God’s temple for use at a party with other nobles. Not only that, but the guests also praised other gods as they used the objects that were devoted to the one true God. As a display of power, majesty, and authority God sent a message to Belshazzar through a hand writing on the wall. Though “wise men” were called, no one could interpret the message except Daniel.
God Responded to Belshazzar’s Sin

The Hebrew people had been defeated and exiled, but God was in control and they were learning to trust Him even when they could not see His hand at work. There is a chronological gap of roughly 20 years between Daniel 4 and Daniel 5. Up until this point, we have dealt with King Nebuchadnezzar. However, in this chapter, we are introduced to his successor—King Belshazzar.

King Belshazzar made a great feast for a thousand of his lords and drank wine in front of the thousand. Belshazzar, when he tasted the wine, commanded that the vessels of gold and of silver that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple in Jerusalem be brought, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. Then they brought in the golden vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. They drank wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone. Immediately the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, opposite the lampstand. And the king saw the hand as it wrote. Then the king's color changed, and his thoughts alarmed him; his limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together. The king called loudly to bring in the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers. The king declared to the wise men of Babylon, “Whoever reads this writing, and shows me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around his neck and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.” Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or make known to the king the interpretation. Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, and his color changed, and his lords were perplexed. (Dan. 5:1-9)

Here the all-powerful Babylonian king, Belshazzar, was throwing a party for the ages. However, what he didn’t know was that he was the last in the line of Babylonian kings. Darius the Mede was about to invade Babylon and bring its empire to an end.

Many bad decisions were being made at this party—drunkenness and blasphemy being two of them. In Belshazzar’s drunken stupor, he commanded that the vessels of gold and silver, which Nebuchadnezzar stole from the Temple in Jerusalem, be brought so that his fellow party guests might drink from them. Then, they added idolatrous worship to their behavior as they praised their false gods. By doing so, Belshazzar was not only mocking the God of the Jews, but was also celebrating the gods of Babylon as being superior.
Suddenly, the king was brought to his senses. What yanked him back into reality? The same fingers that wrote the Ten Commandments for the Hebrew people (Ex. 31:18; Deut. 9:10) also confronted blasphemous Belshazzar with his sins and told of imminent judgment.

The king tried to gain his composure and get a grip on things, but that was difficult to say the least. He called for Babylon’s “wise men” and promised them honor, wealth, and status if they could interpret the writing on the wall. However, these trusted and “wise men” of Babylon proved to be totally useless. And as a result, the king began to realize the danger he faced.

- When have you faced something difficult and had to learn to trust God even though you didn’t see Him at work in that situation? (p. 22, PSG)

**DANIEL CONFRONTED BELSHAZZAR**

The story continued when Daniel, then much older, was brought before the king to interpret the strange message on the wall. As we see in Daniel’s translation of the message, King Belshazzar was guilty of failing to learn from his predecessor—Nebuchadnezzar—that pride goes before a fall. Exalt yourself against God, and you will be struck down.

Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king answered and said to Daniel, “You are that Daniel, one of the exiles of Judah, whom the king my father brought from Judah. I have heard of you that the spirit of the gods is in you, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you. Now the wise men, the enchanters, have been brought in before me to read this writing and make known to me its interpretation, but they could not show the interpretation of the matter. But I have heard that you can give interpretations and solve problems. Now if you can read the writing and make known to me its interpretation, you shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around your neck and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.” Then Daniel answered and said before the king, “Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another. Nevertheless, I will read the writing to the king and make known to him the interpretation. O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father kingship and greatness and glory and majesty. And because of the greatness that he gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whom he would, he killed, and whom he would, he kept alive; whom he would, he raised up, and whom he would, he humbled. But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit was hardened so that he dealt proudly, he was brought down from his kingly throne, and his glory was taken from him. He was driven from among the children of mankind, and his mind was made like that of a beast, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. He was fed grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, until he knew that the Most High God rules the
kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he will. And you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this, but you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven. And the vessels of his house have been brought in before you, and you and your lords, your wives, and your concubines have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see or hear or know, but the God in whose hand is your breath, and whose are all your ways, you have not honored. “Then from his presence the hand was sent, and this writing was inscribed.” (Dan. 5:13-24)

Daniel’s response to the king’s offered reward was not disrespectful, but direct. To paraphrase: “Keep your stuff or give it to someone else. I don’t need it and I don’t want it.” Daniel knew his wisdom in interpretation came from God. He would not exercise his gift in order to earn rewards from the king; he utilized the gift in order to communicate God’s message to the king.

According to Daniel, the Most High God gave Belshazzar’s grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar, his kingdom along with the glory and privileges that go with such a position. His grandfather became arrogant and prideful, so God took him down and caused him to live like a beast, with animals like oxen and donkeys. God did this so that he would know God rules over all and even sets earthly rulers in place as He wills (v. 21). By saying this, Daniel was essentially pointing the finger at Belshazzar and saying he should know better because of what happened to his grandfather.

DANIEL INTERPRETED GOD’S WARNING

Next, Daniel translated the writing that was inscribed on the wall. It was bad news for Belshazzar.

And this is the writing that was inscribed: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, and PARSIN. This is the interpretation of the matter: MENE, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; TEKEL, you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting; PARSIN, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.” Then Belshazzar gave the command, and Daniel was clothed with purple, a chain of gold was put around his neck, and a proclamation was made about him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom. That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed.” (Dan. 5:25-31)

Belshazzar showed no signs of repentance for his arrogance, blasphemies, idolatry, pride, and sensualities. He died that night, Darius the Mede took over the kingdom. The Babylonian king had challenged and mocked the Most High God. He had been confronted with his sin and showed no repentance. In this case, God’s judgment came as fast as a lightning bolt from heaven.
To those who knew the Scriptures, this was no surprise. God’s prophets had already laid out Babylon’s destiny. They knew this kingdom was a passing fad, here today and gone tomorrow, according to God’s timing.

**CHRIST CONNECTION**

In this story, an exiled Hebrew man came out of nowhere to confront the powers of their world with their sins of blasphemy, mockery, arrogance, pride, and idolatry. He was a man of impeccable character who could not be bought or seduced by the idols of this world. Why? Because in this man of unsurpassed wisdom was the Spirit of the Holy God (v. 11). In fact, even the pagans acknowledged his good testimony that he had “an excellent spirit, knowledge, and understanding to interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve problems” (v. 12).

This sounds familiar with respect to another exile from Judah who came on the scene in the first century—a man by the name of Jesus who said God had anointed Him and that the Spirit of the Lord was on Him (Luke 4:18). Later, even His enemies admitted that no one had ever spoken as He did (John 7:46). Daniel pointed forward to the coming Messiah.

Daniel’s wisdom, abilities, and position were similar to the patriarch Joseph (Gen. 37-50). His life looked back. However, as the mediator of God’s wisdom to sinful humanity, his life looks forward to the ultimate mediator between God and humanity, the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 2:5), the One Paul described as the wisdom of God for His people (1 Cor. 1:30), and the One in whom we find all wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3).
GROUP QUESTIONS

God’s Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

• Belshazzar’s sin made him dull to and unaware of what was taking place around him. What are some modern day examples of sin dulling our senses? Why do you think sin blinds us and makes us oblivious to reality? Persistent sin can cause one to become hardened and desensitized to the things of God. If one is engaged in immoral sexual behavior or is constantly trying to find ways to cheat in school, that person will likely fail to see how that sin is not only hurting himself, but also those around him.

• What are the major character distinctions between Daniel and Belshazzar? Between the two, which character shows up more in your own life? Answers will vary.

• When have you sensed God warning you away from sin or self-exaltation? Answers will vary.

• What can we learn from this account when it comes to listening to God’s wisdom over the wisdom of this world? Answers will vary.
HEAD

It is interesting to note that the “wise men” of Babylon could not interpret Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in chapter 2 and had to be bailed out by Daniel and that the same thing happened again in chapter 4. For the third time, the king’s “wise men” were brought in and failed to interpret the message. Because of accounts like these, we are reminded to not put our trust in worldly wisdom, but in the unfailing wisdom that comes from God.

- When have you felt pressure to choose between the wisdom of this world and wisdom revealed in Scripture? What was the outcome of that situation? Answers will vary.
- Why can we have assurance that biblical wisdom will win every time, even over the best of human wisdom? Biblical wisdom not only instructs us on what we should know, but also teaches us how to live life well. Because it connects directly with everyday life, biblical wisdom will always be the best decision.

HEART

This story reminds us once again of the spiritual dangers of a prideful heart. Pride tries to elevate the self above God by denying any dependence upon Him. Belshazzar was prideful and acted out on that pride by gloating over the items stolen from the temple. As Scripture makes abundantly clear, God opposes the prideful but gives grace to those who are humble and acknowledge their complete dependence upon Him (Jas. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5).

- Why do you think it is easy to recognize pride in others but often difficult to see it within ourselves? Answers will vary.
- In what areas has pride surfaced in your own life? Answers will vary.

HANDS

This story not only teaches us how to stand up for truth even when it isn’t personally convenient, but also how to respectfully challenge those who are clearly in sin and in need of personal repentance. Daniel wasn’t assured that speaking the truth and confronting Belshazzar’s sin would result in his personal safety. After all, the pagan king could have reacted quite negatively to what Daniel had to say. Nevertheless, Daniel did what he was called to do, giving us an example of how to speak truth in a loving way, while calling others to repentance.

- Give an example of when you or someone you know stood up for truth when it wasn’t personally convenient. Answers will vary.
- Why is it important that we focus both on speaking truth and being gracious in the manner in which we speak? The truth of what we say and the tone in which we say it go hand-in-hand. Not only are we called to be bearers of truth, but we are also called to display the type of character that embodies that truth in our daily interactions with others.
ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK
For this session, refer students to pack item #5, which contains a discussion poster regarding things people tend to place their ultimate trust in. Use this as you walk through the session, noting how king Belshazzar had misplaced trust in himself, in his “wise” advisors, and so forth.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES
Check out the following additional resources:
- Leader Training Videos
- One Conversations
- Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPWIN17Dan)
- Circular Timeline Poster
- App (for both leader and student)

Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources And for free online training on how to lead a group visit MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject