Preschool–Grade 6

The Handwriting on the Wall

Sunday School Lesson for 3rd to 5th Grade, 45–60 minutes

Main point: Humble your heart before God. God's things are holy, and the most high God rules.
Bible passage: Daniel 5:1–31. Read it before class.
Memory verse: "TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting." *Daniel 5:27 (KJV)*
You need: a Bible for each child (or one for every two children), paper and a pencil for each child, a whiteboard or large paper, a marker, and one take-home sheet for each child.
Before class: write the memory verse on the board. Under it, write this secret message in number code: **7-15-4 18-21-12-5-19**. Do not write the key yet (A=1, B=2, C=3, and so on to Z=26).

1. Opening game: Secret Writing (5–10 minutes)

Give each child paper and a pencil. Point to the number code and ask: "Who can read this message?" Let them try. After a minute, write the key on the board (A=1, B=2, C=3 ... Z=26) and let them work it out: **GOD RULES**. Ask: *Why could you read it now?* Say: "Today a king saw writing on a wall that nobody in his kingdom could read, until one man who served God came in."

2. Bible story: Weighed in the Balances (15 minutes)

Kids open their Bibles to Daniel 5. When you reach a **Look up** line, a child finds the verse and reads it out loud. Tell the rest in your own words.

The feast. Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords (Daniel 5:1). He sent for the golden and silver **vessels** (cups and bowls) that his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple in Jerusalem (5:2). **Look up Daniel 5:3.** They were the golden vessels "taken out of the temple of the house of God." They drank wine in them and praised the gods of gold, silver, brass, iron, wood and stone (5:4): idols that "see not, nor hear, nor know" (5:23).

The writing. Look up Daniel 5:5. In the same hour, fingers of a man's hand wrote on the **plaister** (plaster) of the palace wall, over against (across from) the **candlestick**, a lampstand. The king saw the part of the hand that wrote. His face changed, his thoughts troubled him, and his knees smote (knocked) one against another (5:6). He promised that whoever could read it would be clothed with scarlet, wear a chain of gold and be the third ruler in the kingdom (5:7). But none of his wise men could read the writing (5:8).

Daniel is brought in. The queen told the king about Daniel, a man with "an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding" (5:10–12). Daniel was brought in (5:13). **Look up Daniel 5:17.** Daniel did not want the king's gifts, but he would read the writing. Years before, Daniel had told Nebuchadnezzar, "there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets" (Daniel 2:28).

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Daniel's warning. Daniel reminded the king that the most high God had given Nebuchadnezzar his kingdom and glory (5:18). But when his heart was lifted up in pride, he was put down from his throne. He lived with the wild animals and ate grass like oxen, until he knew "that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men" (5:20–21). **Look up Daniel 5:22.** Belshazzar knew all this, but he had not humbled his heart. He had lifted himself up against the Lord of heaven, used the vessels of God's house and praised idols, and he had not glorified "the God in whose hand thy breath is" (5:23).

What the writing said. The words were **MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN** (5:25). **MENE:** "God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it" (5:26). **Look up Daniel 5:27. TEKEL:** the king was weighed in God's balances and found wanting, not enough. **PERES:** "Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians" (5:28). (Upharsin and Peres are forms of the same word.)

That night. Belshazzar had Daniel clothed with scarlet and made third ruler (5:29). That night Belshazzar was slain, and Darius the Median took the kingdom, about sixty-two years old (5:30–31).

3. Questions to ask (10 minutes)

Thinking questions (no single right answer; let kids talk)

1. The vessels were made for worshiping God (5:3). Why was using them at a party for idols so wrong?
2. Belshazzar knew what happened to Nebuchadnezzar (5:22). Why is knowing the right thing not enough?
3. Daniel said no to the king's gifts (5:17). Why do you think he did?
4. What does it look like to humble your heart before God at school or at home?
5. Daniel 5:23 says God holds our breath in His hand. How should that change how we treat Him?

Recall questions

1. How many lords came to the feast? *(A thousand, Daniel 5:1)*
2. Where did the fingers write? *(On the plaister of the palace wall, over against the candlestick, 5:5)*
3. What four words were written? *(MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN, 5:25)*

4. Memory verse: Erase a Word (5 minutes)

Explain the old words: **TEKEL** is one of the words on the wall; **weighed** means checked to see how heavy; **balances** means a scale; **wanting** means not enough, too light. Read the verse on the board together. Erase two words and read it again. Keep erasing two words at a time until the board is empty and the class can say it alone. Then kids say it to a partner.

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5. What this means for us (5 minutes)

Say: "God weighed Belshazzar and found him wanting. On our own, all of us come short. God loves you. The Bible says: 'For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23, KJV). That means all of us have done wrong, and none of us is as good as God. Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, which means God came to earth as a man (1 Timothy 3:16). Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). How do we obey the gospel? 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.' (Acts 2:38, KJV) To **repent** means to turn away from sin; our old self dies (Romans 6:6). We are **buried with Jesus in baptism**, all the way under the water, in Jesus' name. **Remission** means our sins are washed away, and we come up to live a new life (Romans 6:4; Acts 22:16). And God fills us with the **Holy Ghost**, and we speak with other tongues as the Spirit gives the words (Acts 2:4). The Bible calls this being born again (John 3:5)."

Pray with the kids, and encourage them to talk with their parents and pastor about being baptized in Jesus' name and filled with the Holy Ghost. Never pressure a child.

This week: when you do well at something, thank God out loud instead of bragging. Treat your Bible and God's house with respect.

6. Activity: Bible Look-Up Race (10–15 minutes)

Kids work in pairs with one Bible. Read a reference and a question. The first pair to find the verse and read the answer out loud wins the point.

1. Daniel 5:1: How many lords came to the king's feast? *(A thousand)*
2. Daniel 5:3: Where were the golden vessels taken from? *(The temple of the house of God at Jerusalem)*
3. Daniel 5:6: What did the king's knees do? *(They smote one against another; they knocked together)*
4. Daniel 5:8: Could the wise men read the writing? *(No, they could not)*
5. Daniel 5:17: What did Daniel say about the king's gifts? *(Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another)*
6. Daniel 5:21: What did Nebuchadnezzar finally know? *(That the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men)*
7. Daniel 5:27: What did TEKEL mean? *(Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting)*
8. Daniel 5:31: Who took the kingdom, and how old was he? *(Darius the Median, about threescore and two years old, that is, about 62)*

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7. Prayer

"Dear God, You are the most high God, and our breath is in Your hand. Help us humble our hearts, put You first and treat Your holy things with respect. Thank You for loving us and coming to save us in Jesus. In Jesus' name, amen."

For the teacher: this lesson leaves out the list of everyone who drank at the feast (5:2–3) and the names of the king's fortune-tellers (5:7, 5:11), and it tells the king's death in one sentence (5:30), as the Bible does.

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