

CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS
AUGUST 24 2024

humility check

Scripture Story: Daniel 4.
Commentary: *Prophets and Kings* (or *Royalty and Ruin*), chapter 42.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

Nebuchadnezzar had witnessed on several occasions the sovereign hand of God, and throughout those experiences responded with wisdom and submission to God's plan. Over time, the glory of his empire and the success of his rule caused pride in his heart to surge. Again, the king was given a dream that portrayed a tree growing full and rich, but being cut down and devastated at the word of a heavenly Messenger. Clearly the message depicted a person whose glory would change to shame. This seven-year season of madness would end with an unmistakable reality—his kingdom was not only temporary, but granted at the will of the Sovereign Lord. The entire chapter is a personal testimony from the king himself offered to the world as a witness to God's glory and mercy.

The topic of this week's lesson deals with Nebuchadnezzar's humility check. But consider the merciful way God offers the king an opportunity to respond and accept the reality of God's eternal kingdom. There is a openness toward God in this great king's heart. While he was pagan from birth, his heart often inclined toward the God in heaven. Perhaps another angle for this week's lesson might even be the power of a great leader's personal testimony. Babylon's wealth and power is considered one of history's wonders, and the fact that Nebuchadnezzar, in his wealth and wisdom, ultimately submitted his life to God is a powerful statement.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Deepen their understanding of God's plan to establish His kingdom on earth. *(Know)*
- Experience a sense of God's compassion and desire for everyone to trust in Him. *(Feel)*
- *Surrender* their pride and embrace the humility which ultimately brings people to greatness. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

The Great Controversy, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, No. 8

"All humanity is now involved in a great controversy between Christ and Satan regarding the character of God, His law, and His sovereignty over the universe. This conflict originated in heaven when a created being, endowed with freedom of choice, in self-exaltation became Satan, God's adversary, and led into rebellion a portion of the angels. He introduced the spirit of rebellion into this world when he led Adam and Eve into sin. This human sin resulted in the distortion of the image of God in humanity, the disordering of the created world, and its eventual devastation at the time of the global flood, as presented in the historical account of Genesis 1-11. Observed by the whole creation, this world became the arena of the universal conflict, out of which the God of love will ultimately be vindicated. To assist His people in this controversy, Christ sends the Holy Spirit and the loyal angels to guide, protect, and sustain them in the way of salvation. (Gen. 3; 6-8; Job

1:6-12; Isa. 14:12-14; Ezek. 28:12-18; Rom. 1:19-32; 3:4; 5:12-21; 8:19-22; 1 Cor. 4:9; Heb. 1:14; 1 Peter 5:8; 2 Peter 3:6; Rev. 12:4-9.)"

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.*

Invite the students to share the person they ranked "hardest to humble." If they had a chance to speak truth to someone they thought was extremely powerful in the world today, who would they choose and what would they say?

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

God is in control, but sometimes great and mighty leaders fail to see this truth. Napoleon, at the very height of his military career, mused over his accomplishments when one of his staff asked him if he thought God was on their side in the war. Napoleon smirked and chided, "God is on the side that has the heaviest artillery." What Napoleon was really saying was: "God does not enter into the equation. The one who wins is the one who is stronger and better, and even if God exists, He has nothing to do with the victory or defeat." Napoleon was famous for his arrogance and for the high opinion he had of his own opinion. But his tone eventually changed.

During the Battle of Waterloo Napoleon was surprisingly defeated (surprising to him), and he lost not only the fight but his leadership of the mighty empire he built. Some years after the war, while he was exiled on St. Helena, he quoted the words of Thomas à Kempis, who said, "Man proposes, God disposes."

In this world great leaders have come and gone, but God's hand is guiding and shaping events according to His plan. If people are not mindful of God's power they can easily become impressed with their own. The pattern throughout history is that when powerful people pay too much attention to their power, they soon come to a destructive end. Think about other world leaders in history, and examine their attitudes and their ending. Then think of some powerful people in history who had a clear sense of God's power and worked with a humble attitude. Do you think it is easy or difficult to be powerful and be humble at the same time?

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

Nebuchadnezzar was a mighty leader, but, much like Napoleon, had to learn that he was but a speck in God's great world. However, Nebuchadnezzar discovered that although he was really very small, the God of heaven chose him to work out His plan. The king of Babylon had a choice in the way he responded to God's mighty hand. Read the story as told by Nebuchadnezzar himself and witness the choice this great king made.

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.*

- What words and themes seem to be repeated in this passage?
- As you read this story, *highlight* what you think is the key thought in this passage and why.
- *Underline* all of the words Nebuchadnezzar used to describe himself through this experience (good and bad).
- Read Daniel 4:10-18, list the specific points of the king's dream, and write what you think each part means.
- How does Daniel respond to the king's request and the meaning of the king's dream?
- What other stories in Scripture does this event remind you of, and why? How are they similar and how are they different?
- What one word would you use to describe the essence of this story? Why?
- Who do you think the message in this story is for . . .
  - Leaders?
  - Believers (like Daniel)?
  - Young people today?
- In what ways do you see God's mercy and

grace revealed in this story?

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today's story: Acts 4; Daniel 1–3; Matthew 24.

Sharing Context and Background

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

The event of Nebuchadnezzar's second dream is a timeless story of the conflict between God's reign and the tentative rule of man. The first dream of Nebuchadnezzar's reign found in Daniel 2 comes at the beginning of his leadership, whereas the dream in Daniel 4 emerges at the end of his time as ruler in Babylon. Nevertheless, the central issue of God's sovereign rule is the same.

The structure of chapter four is interesting in that the story begins and ends with what some scholars claim as songs of praise. Sandwiched in the middle is the personal testimony of a king who conveys frankly the story of his pride, fall, and submission to the rule of God. Zdravko Stefanovic states: "The chapter was intended to be an open letter that was to be read publicly throughout the Neo-Babylonian Empire" (*Commentary on the Book of Daniel* [Pacific Press®, 2007], p. 148). Stefanovic adds: "The main event in the chapter is left undated, yet the context of the story, described in the king's own words, betrays the era of 'Nebuchadnezzar the builder'—the second phase of this king's reign, which was characterized by great building projects, mostly in the city of Babylon. Most commentators agree that the chapter should be dated to the closing years of Nebuchadnezzar's long reign" (Stefanovic, p. 148). Clearly, the problem with pride is one that monarchs and mainstream people throughout history continually struggle with.

Part of getting perspective on the significance of the king's dream in chapter 4 has to do with understanding the timing of the other events in the book of Daniel. The events in chapters 1–3 occurred in the first part of the Babylonian captivity, whereas the dream that came to Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 4 occurs toward the end of his 42-year reign. In verse 4 it says that the king was "at rest" which "indicates that the king was now in undisturbed possession of his

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

Invent a Parable

This lesson includes a message coming in from God in the form of a dream. Heavenly wisdom often comes in the form of a parable because of the way symbolic stories teach. Parables are simple, powerful tools for teaching. In fact, one of the best ways to get young people to learn is to give them a concept and have them invent a parable that teaches the concept effectively. It is no wonder that teaching might be the greatest form of learning.

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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 quote in Further Insight *conveys the point of the story in this lesson.*

kingdom" (*The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 788).

One interesting facet in this story has to do with speaking truth to power. In ancient times it was common to flatter their sovereign leaders instead of telling them the truth. Clearly, anyone hearing this dream of the glorious tree being cut down and broken is going to sense the doom in the dream. Even the king himself knew it was bad because the text claims: "I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind terrified me" (Daniel 4:5, NIV). But the group of "experts" did not offer an interpretation. Notice that the King James Version translates it this way:

- "But they could not interpret it for me" (verse 7, NIV).
- "They did not make known unto me the interpretation thereof" (verse 7, KJV).

Herein lies the salient quality of a prophet: A man or woman called by God to speak for God.

III. CLOSING

Activity

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

Invite students to think of an important lesson that needs to be taught in the world today and couch it in a parable. Have them divide into groups of two to four to devise a story that teaches, and introduce the parable, saying, "I was asleep when I received a dream. . . ." Have the students share their dreams and invite the others to interpret. Or, if there is not much time, challenge the students to modernize this story in Daniel 4 as if it were to happen today.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

The most important part of Nebuchadnezzar's story is also the most important part of our story: our acknowledgement of Who God is and our willingness to ascribe to Him the honor for everything good we experience in life. Notice Nebuchadnezzar's last words recorded in history:

"Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble" (Daniel 4:37, NIV).

It has been said: "There are two things sure in this life: (1) There is a God, and (2) you are not Him." While very few ever feel tempted to claim to be God, we often give our deepest loyalties to ourselves. Perhaps the lesson this king had to learn is after all a lesson for us all: no matter how great, powerful, smart, or whatever you become, God will always be God. The most amazing part of this truth is that God loves humanity so much that He made the ultimate sacrifice to make sure we know who He is. Our eternal lives depend on our response to God's great gift of salvation. So, like King Nebuchadnezzar, what would be your final thoughts on the matter? This whole chapter is a personal testimony. What is yours?



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 42.

*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.

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STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: Daniel 4.
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humility check



Photo by Jacqui Janetzko

keytext

"Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble."

(Daniel 4:37, NIV)

flashlight

"God's purpose that the greatest kingdom in the world should show forth His praise was now fulfilled. This public proclamation, in which Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged the mercy and goodness and authority of God, was the last act of his life recorded in sacred history" (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 521).

what do you think?

Rank the following:

Which person do you think would have the hardest time being humble (1 hardest, 5 the least)? Why?

____ president or leader of a country
____ famous movie star
____ champion athlete
____ Nobel Peace Prize winner
____ business tycoon
____ a person called by God to do a special work for Him by serving others

did you know?

The word "Babylon" means "the gate of God." One of the things Babylon is famous for was its legendary hanging gardens during Nebuchadnezzar's reign. While no one has any evidence of the hanging gardens, the folklore describes gardens that were suspended in such a way that it looked as if the plants and vines were virtually floating.

INTO THE STORY

"I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous. I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind terrified me. . . . [For a detailed description of the dream and interpretation, read Daniel 4:6-27.]

"All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, he said, 'Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?'

"Even as the words were on his lips, a voice came from heaven, 'This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes.'

"Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like the ox. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird.

"At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever.

His dominion is an eternal dominion;
his kingdom endures from generation to generation.
All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing.
He does as he pleases with the power of heaven and the peoples of the earth.
No one can hold back his hand or say to him: 'What have you done?'

"At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble."

(Daniel 4:4, 5, 28-37, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

What words and themes seem to be repeated in this passage?

_____

As you read this story, *highlight* what you think is the key thought in this passage and why.

Underline all of the words Nebuchadnezzar used to describe himself through this experience (good and bad).

Read Daniel 4:10-18 and list the specific points of the king's dream. Write what you think each part means.

_____

_____

How does Daniel respond to the king's request and the meaning of the king's dream?

_____

What other stories in Scripture does this event remind you of, and why? How are they similar and how are they different?

_____

What one word would you use to describe the essence of this story? Why?

_____

What do you think is the message in this story for:
Leaders? _____
Believers? _____
Young people today? _____

In what ways do you see God's mercy and grace revealed in this story?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

punch lines

"Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time" **(1 Peter 5:6, NIV).**

"He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble" **(Luke 1:52, NIV).**

"The LORD . . . planned it, to bring down her pride in all her splendor and to humble all who are renowned on the earth" **(Isaiah 23:9, NIV).**

"For the LORD takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with victory" **(Psalm 149:4, NIV).**

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth" **(Matthew 5:5, NIV).**

further insight

"A Christian reveals true humility by showing the gentleness of Christ, by being always ready to help others, by speaking kind words and performing unselfish acts, which elevate and ennoble the most sacred message that has come to our world."—Ellen G. White, *Christian Experience and Teachings of Ellen G. White*, p. 74

Sabbath

Read Luke 7:1-10.

Read and respond to the *What Do You Think?* activity, and reflect on what Jesus said about the centurion in today's Bible verses. While the centurion is not the leader of an entire empire, he might be tempted to be self-absorbed about his authority. Examine the centurion's viewpoint on authority and imagine how Nebuchadnezzar's story might be different if he had the same spirit as the centurion.

Sunday

Read Luke 1:52.

Get *Into the Story* this week by answering the questions in the *Out of the Story* section in this lesson. If you are reading this story for the first time, what about this passage impressed you the most? Why? If you have read this story before, what new insights did you get out of the passage? It was traditional to record only good things about yourself that would be remembered in history, but Nebuchadnezzar immortalizes this seemingly embarrassing event in Scripture. In your own words, what lesson do you think Nebuchadnezzar learned?

Monday

Read Daniel 4:37.

Read the *Key Text* in this week's lesson. Think of a time in your life when this statement that the king makes would have been easy for you to say. Also, think of a season in your experience when this verse would be very difficult to say. Memorize this passage or write it down where you will see it often. But in place of Nebuchadnezzar, put your own name to personalize the passage to you.

Tuesday

Read James 1:17.

Read the *Flashlight* quote from *Prophets and Kings*. Clearly, God's purpose is not to break down great kingdoms but simply to get them to recognize that every good gift comes from Him! Throughout history, God has blessed great kings such as Nebuchadnezzar, whether they are pagan or believers. But notice the last line in this quote: "This public proclamation . . . was the last act of his life recorded in sacred history." If it were to be recorded for all to read, what would you want your last and final testimony to be?

Wednesday

Read the *Punch Lines* for this week and find the passage that is speaking to your heart today. Perhaps you have aspired to greatness at times and need to be reminded that while God's desire is that you become great, you always remember what true greatness is. In light of these passages, how would you define true greatness? Think about someone you know who is great, but also humble, and say a prayer of thanks for them today.

Thursday

Read 1 Peter 5:6.

Nebuchadnezzar's lesson in humility taught a lesson to the king: Humble yourself or be humbled. Think about an area of your life that you are really confident about. Practice humility by asking someone else for advice or instruction in an area of your strength.

Area of strength:

Advice given:

Friday

Read Micah 6:8.

Take time to reflect on God's patient work to bring Nebuchadnezzar to the truth about who he was and who God is. The same God, who loves each one earnestly, works to bless His children with both struggles and success to teach that His kingdom is eternal. Scan through your experience and consider how God has led you to a knowledge of His rule.

this week's reading*

Prophets and Kings (or *Royalty and Ruin*), chapter 42.

**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.