

CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS
AUGUST 03 2024

"obedience" is a good word!

Scripture Story: Daniel 1.
Commentary: *Prophets and Kings* (or *Royalty and Ruin*), chapter 39.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

Daniel and his friends were taken into captivity. It is plain that they were from some form of royal Israelite line. They were taken for the express reason of becoming the ruling class in Babylon, and to help integrate Israelites into Babylonian society. To integrate into another culture, three things help to make this process more complete: (1) an ability to communicate in their language, (2) an understanding of their literature and thinking, and (3) an appreciation for their food—since food is such an integral part of social life in any culture. Daniel 1 reveals that King Nebuchadnezzar knew this (see Daniel 1:3-5). As such the king treated the young men with respect and gave them positions of favor within the kingdom. In fact, the king even gave them food from his own table! But herein lay the trouble. The Babylonian society put a high value on idol worship. Even the names given to the young men had a history of idolatry. Whether the boys knew this or not is not known. However, they were committed to honor God with their lives.

It is a story that is well-known. For 10 days they did not partake of the food given to idols; rather they just ate vegetables and water. After 10 days they were tested, and the text tells us that they did "ten times better" than their Babylonian counterparts.

This lesson points us in the direction of obedience. However, it is not an obedience that is born out of fear of rejection. Rather, it is an obedience that comes from a knowledge of who God is, and the fact that He loves us enough to save us. This is an important fact in teaching this lesson. It is an important fact in life. We obey not to gain favor, but because we respond to the grace given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Understand the difference between obeying in order to gain acceptance and obeying because they are accepted. *(Know)*
- Sense that God loves them deeply and wishes to bless them. *(Feel)*
- Integrate the knowledge of the love of God into their responses to Him. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

Christian Behavior, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, No. 22

"We are called to be a godly people who think, feel, and act in harmony with biblical principles in all aspects of personal and social life. For the Spirit to recreate in us the character of our Lord we involve ourselves only in those things that will produce Christlike purity, health, and joy in our lives. This means that our amusement and entertainment should meet the highest standards of Christian taste and beauty. While recognizing cultural differences, our dress is to be simple, modest, and neat, befitting those whose true beauty does not consist of outward adornment but in the imperishable ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit. It also means

that because our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, we are to care for them intelligently. Along with adequate exercise and rest, we are to adopt the most healthful diet possible and abstain from the unclean foods identified in the Scriptures. Since alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and the irresponsible use of drugs and narcotics are harmful to our bodies, we are to abstain from them as well. Instead, we are to engage in whatever brings our thoughts and bodies into the discipline of Christ, who desires our wholesomeness, joy, and goodness. (Gen. 7:2; Exod. 20:15; Lev. 11:1-47; Ps. 106:3; Rom. 12:1, 2; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20; 10:31; 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; 10:5; Eph. 5:1-21; Phil. 2:4; 4:8; 1 Tim. 2:9, 10; Titus 2:11, 12; 1 Peter 3:1-4; 1 John 2:6; 3 John 2.)"

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.*

Ask the students which question they marked as the best answer. This exercise was simple in that the correct answer was very clear. They all should have chosen it.

Now lead them in this exercise: Ask them if they would rather climb a mountain with someone they knew or with someone they didn't. Ask them if they would rather scuba dive with someone that they knew cared about them, or with someone that they were not sure about. Ask them if they would like to skydive with someone who was trained, or with someone of whose background they knew nothing.

The answers are simple. As is the answer to why we are motivated to obey. Do we do it because we hope God *will* love us, or do we do it because we know that God *does* love us?

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

There once were two best friends. They went everywhere together and knew each other very well. They shared everything they had and always seemed to know what the other was thinking and feeling. When one would ask the other to do something the other would immediately do it. One day they were apart. One had a test to take, and the other had to go to the beach. Before the first one took his test he asked the second to bring him back some sand.

"Sand?" said the second. "Why?"

"Don't worry, just do it!" said the first.

So the second friend went to the beach. He played in the water, played on the shore, and generally had a great time. When it came time to leave, he grabbed a handful of sand and stuck it in his pocket.

When he saw the first friend once again, the second immediately said he had the sand in his pocket. He reached into it and found it to be empty! He looked at his friend and apologized profusely, bringing out only a few grains of sand left in his pocket. He hoped his friend would still be his friend after losing all the sand.

The first friend smiled and said, "No problem; it's not about the sand!"

"What do you mean?" asked the second, puzzled.

"It was never about the sand. It was about whether or not you trusted me!"

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

It is hard to trust sometimes—especially when you are not sure about the object of that trust. In this story, the young men were sure about who God was and is. It is that much easier to trust when you are sure that the object of that trust is trustworthy.

Obedience comes down to a question of trust in that which we will obey. Daniel and his friends knew this, and they knew beyond a shadow of a doubt who God was.

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.*

- Read the story and have the students play the different parts with different voices. It will help make the story come alive.
- Have the students *underline* where Daniel and his friends took risks and leaps of faith.

Use the following as more teachable passages that

relate to today's story: Romans 5:19; Romans 16:19; 2 John 1:6.

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 Israelites were a conquered people. Daniel and his friends were away from their homeland, and even though they were living in luxury, they were still essentially slaves. Yet they chose to believe that God cared for them, and that He was watching out for them.

These young men obviously knew the God they served. They knew that He had desires for them that went beyond what was convenient for them. They were in a city that was the center of the world, and God was allowing them to have an influence over Nebuchadnezzer, arguably the most powerful man of his age. What a huge responsibility was placed on their shoulders!

Babylon, in modern-day Iraq, would have been a city of many wonders and great wealth. The hanging gardens were said to be one of the wonders of the ancient world. This is the opulence and grandeur that these young men would have been becoming accustomed to. It would have been amazing, especially compared to their lives before coming to Babylon. They probably would have lived either in a small village or in the small city of Jerusalem. Either experience would have paled in comparison.

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

Sensory Teaching

Anytime that you can give your students the opportunity to use more than one of their senses to learn is a good thing. Some students learn visually, some by hearing, and some by doing. Any activity that you create to give them these sensory experiences will help them learn more quickly and allow that knowledge to lead to enduring understanding.

Even things as simple as standing up and sitting down have a profound effect on the student. When teaching a story that is this well known, it is good to think of ways to help the story come alive for each of the students. The more diverse the activities, the more easily you will reach all learners, engaging them actively in learning, and will help them take away lessons from Sabbath School that they will later apply in their own lives. Activities will help a student have a hook to hang their proverbial hat on when it comes to the story you are studying.

However, these young men were not blinded by the opulence of the Babylonian royal court, but they remained faithful to the God of their fathers with unshakable faith. They were committed to their God because they knew Him personally and

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.*

had experienced His faithfulness and love. They found God to be trustworthy again and again. Their responses to Him were coming from a strong understanding that their God loved and accepted them completely.

III. CLOSING

Activity

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

Have the students think of five people whom they trust completely. Ask them if they would do what any of those five people asked of them. Then ask them why they would obey. Remind them that the quality of a relationship is often what allows us to obey the requests of others. It is possible, however, that those whom we have trusted sometimes betray us. Yet God will never betray our friendship. We can always come to Him with our joys and our sorrows, with our thanks and with our needs, knowing that we can trust Him who has our best interest at heart (see Isaiah 49:15). Pray with them that they might live their lives in response to a God who loves them completely.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

These young men were put to the test and passed. However, they did not enter into risk because they were seeking to be loved by God. Rather they responded to the love that was already displayed by God. Their response became their acts of worship. They were able to respond so boldly because they knew who God was and what He would do. They were not fearful of His response to them because He had already proven Himself worthy of their love. It is a really special relationship that we get to have with God. He loves us, we love Him, and He proves to us His love again and again.

The blessing bestowed upon the young Hebrew men was much more than they had in mind. Our attempts to serve God and our prayers for His intervention are often too humble. Yet the storehouse of His blessings is open for us if we would only ask (see Matthew 7:7), just as when He generously blessed the four Hebrew youth who remained faithful to Him.



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 39.

*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 1.
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Photo by Jacqui Janetzko

keytext

"In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom."

(Daniel 1:20, NIV)

flashlight

"Among the children of Israel who were carried captive to Babylon at the beginning of the seventy years' captivity were Christian patriots, men who were as true as steel to principle, who would not be corrupted by selfishness, but who would honor God at the loss of all things. In the land of their captivity these men were to carry out God's purpose by giving to heathen nations the blessings that come through a knowledge of Jehovah. They were to be His representatives. Never were they to compromise with idolaters; their faith and their name as worshipers of the living God they were to bear as a high honor. And this they did. In prosperity and adversity they honored God, and God honored them" (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 479).

what do you think?

What do you think it means to be "obedient" to what God wants for your life? Put an X by the answer you think it is:

____ It means that I follow a bunch or rules and regulations to avoid punishment.

____ It means that I follow rules and regulations to earn salvation.

____ It means that I live in harmony with the principles of God's law of love in response to the grace and love that God has given us.

This may seem a bit obvious, but when our actions become responses to love as opposed to rules that might obtain us acceptance, the word "obedience" becomes less like a burden and more like a blessing.

did you know?

The names Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were given to Daniel's friends. It's true! They even gave Daniel the name Belteshazzar. This was done by the Babylonians in an attempt to integrate these young men into Babylonian society. While they were prisoners, they were not slaves. They were taken from the royal Israelite families in order to help govern those lands conquered by the Babylonians. This was a common practice in antiquity. By the food they were given it is seen that they were treated even better than many Babylonians. This means that their step in faith to refuse the king's bounty was a very serious risk. Obviously, these were young men who were committed to their God and following what He had for them in their lives.

INTO THE STORY

"In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. . . .

"Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility—young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service.

"Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

"But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, but the official told Daniel, 'I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you.'

"Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, 'Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see.' So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.

"At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.

"To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

"At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. In every matter of wisdom and understanding about

which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.

"And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus."

(Daniel 1:1, 3-21, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

Are you familiar with the names mentioned in this story?

_____

_____

What significance do they have later on in the Bible?

_____

_____

Do you think it is an accident that these young men were able to be obedient to God's call?

_____

_____

Would you have done what they did in the same circumstance?

_____

_____

What does following God mean in your life?

_____

_____

Were you surprised at how well they were treated by their enemies?

_____

_____

Does this story have any implications for your lifestyle and the way you eat?

_____

_____

_____

punch lines

"For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the **obedience** of the one man the many will be made righteous" **(Romans 5:19, NIV).**

"Everyone has heard about your **obedience,** so I rejoice because of you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil" **(Romans 16:19, NIV).**

"And this is love: that we walk in **obedience** to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love" **(2 John 6, NIV).**

further insight

"Let none who profess godliness regard with indifference the health of the body, and flatter themselves that intemperance is no sin, and will not affect their spirituality. A close sympathy exists between the physical and the moral nature. Any habit which does not promote health degrades the higher and nobler faculties. Wrong habits of eating and drinking lead to errors in thought and action."

—Ellen G. White, *The Sanctified Life*, p. 25

Sabbath

Read Daniel 1:3-8.

Complete the exercise in the *What Do You Think?* section of this week's lesson. This week's lesson focuses on four Hebrew young men who were willing to risk a great deal in order to obey what they believed God was calling them to do. It seems that they were not obeying in order to become accepted by anyone—for if they had, they would surely have eaten the food of the king in order to gain his acceptance. Rather, they were obeying God as a response to the love that He had already shown them! This must have changed everything for them. Rather than taking a risk to find out if God loved them, they took a risk because they knew God loved them. This, in all our lives, can be a vast source of strength!

What does obedience mean to you? Have you learned to obey? Explain.

Sunday

Read Romans 16:19.

Read this week's story from Scripture and answer the questions given in the *Out of the Story* section. Put yourself into the circumstances of these young men. Would you have done the same thing? Is there a place in your life in which you find yourself having a hard time being obedient? Why do you think that is? Do you have the assurance that God loves you beyond a shadow of a doubt? Do you think that you must be obedient in order to gain favor? Or do you believe that you are loved and want to do exactly what that source of love wants for you?

These questions all are asking the same question really: "Do you *know* you are loved by God?" Answer this, and everything becomes easier!

Monday

Read Daniel 1:20.

God blesses us in much greater ways than we normally imagine. In our *Key Text* it is said that the king found them to be "ten times better" than the others from his own kingdom. Do you think that Daniel and his friends imagined that they would pass each test with such flying colors? They were obedient to God, to be sure. But what they found out was that God was willing to go beyond their wildest desires for success and prove His goodness to them in the outcome of their tests. How can we be wise stewards of the blessings that God is willing to bestow upon us?

Tuesday

Read 2 John 6.

Read this week's *Flashlight* quote that describes the character of some captives who remained faithful to God regardless of the circumstances. Notice the sentence: "Among the children of Israel who were carried captive to Babylon at the beginning of the seventy years' captivity were Christian patriots, men who were as true as steel to principle, who would not be corrupted by selfishness, but who would honor God at the loss of all things."

The strength that these young men were able to muster came from a "knowledge of Jehovah." They were not guessing that God might be faithful. No, they came into this trial *knowing* that God would honor His promises to them. How did they know?

They were constantly seeking Him and His ways. They knew who God was, they understood His character, they desired His will for their lives. It is hard to follow someone you are not sure you trust. However, it's easy to follow your best friend. The four Hebrew young men had spent the time to understand and experience that God is faithful to His promises.

Wednesday

Read Romans 5:19.

Read the *Punch Lines* in this lesson. How important is obedience? In today's Bible text it says that the world was saved by the obedience of *one man* (Jesus!). Even as the world was lost because of one man's disobedience (Adam). It is plain to see that this concept of obedience makes a world of difference in all of our lives.

"How important is obedience to us?" This is a question that each one of us has to answer for ourselves in light of our relationship with God.

Thursday

Read Proverbs 3:5, 6.

Is it easy to trust God? That really is what obedience is, right? Isn't it just the ability to believe that what God wants for your life is truly what is best for you? Sometimes it's hard to trust, to believe, but the more we do it, the easier it becomes. So the question for you is: Do you trust God? How does your life reflect that trust?

Friday

Read John 14:15.

Obedience takes many shapes and forms. The reality is that God wants you to obey because it is what is best for you, and it truly shows our connection to Him. By being those who trust God we show the world that God is trustworthy. We obey not to gain the acceptance of God, but because we have been accepted. Do you really believe that God loves you? Do you believe that He accepts you?

this week's reading*

Prophets and Kings (or *Royalty and Ruin*), chapter 39.

**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.