

CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS
AUGUST 17 2024

choose your kingdom

Scripture Story: Daniel 3.
Commentary: *Prophets and Kings* (or *Royalty and Ruin*), chapter 41.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

This familiar story can be approached in many ways. The Scripture portion used in the student lesson is the part of the story in which Nebuchadnezzar creates the golden statue formed after the one God had shown him in his dream. Then he demands that all worship this image at his command. Only the three Hebrew youth choose not to kneel in worship. Neither do they want the second chance Nebuchadnezzar offers them, implying that they don't answer to him and therefore won't be changing their minds (Daniel 3:16). The fire is heated up. Those carrying out Nebuchadnezzar's orders die from the heat, but the three young men—having been joined in the fire by Jesus Himself—don't even smell like smoke when they finally come out at Nebuchadnezzar's command.

The student lesson is focused on the idea that these young men were simultaneously experiencing two different kingdoms: the earthly one ruled by Nebuchadnezzar, and the kingdom of God ruled by the King of kings and Lord of lords. They were wisely choosing to give their allegiance to, and to trust, the most powerful Ruler (the one who could keep them from smelling like smoke, let alone be killed by the fire), even though they did not know for sure that He would choose to spare them. This allegiance and trust is what will be needed as this type of scenario is replayed near the end of time. God has promised to be with us through the trials in the same way as He was with these young men.

Another interesting theme is the one of forced religion. Nebuchadnezzar tried to force everyone to worship his image—that he had copied from God's design. And then when he admitted that God was truly more powerful than he was, he tried to force everyone to worship God—which was just as displeasing to God, who wants His creations to worship Him only on the basis of unconditional love, using their freedom of choice.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Understand that they function in both a temporal and a spiritual kingdom. Times come when one must choose allegiance to the spiritual kingdom over the temporal—when they conflict. *(Know)*
- Sense the kingdom of God as a reality in which their lives function. *(Feel)*
- Create a personal reminder to help them visualize the reality of God's kingdom. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

Growing in Christ, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, No. 11

"By His death on the cross Jesus triumphed over the forces of evil. . . . His constant presence with us through the Spirit transforms every moment and every task into a spiritual experience. (1 Chron. 29:11; Ps. 1:1, 2; 23:4; 77:11, 12; Matt. 20:25-28; 25:31-46; Luke 10:17-20; John 20:21; Rom. 8:38, 39; 2 Cor. 3:17, 18; Gal. 5:22-25; Eph. 5:19, 20; 6:12-18; Phil.

3:7-14; Col. 1:13, 14; 2:6, 14, 15; 1 Thess. 5:16-18, 23; Heb. 10:25; James 1:27; 2 Peter 2:9; 3:18; 1 John 4:4.)"

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.*

Have the students share their responses. Follow up their reported answers with questions such as:

- What do you mean by . . . ?
- What reasons do you have . . . ?
- Tell me more.

If they answer with "I don't know," ask:

- If you were in a similar situation, what would you do, or what would you say?
- When is it necessary to resist the influences in society? What harmful influences do you recognize around you that you must resist?

Concepts you might explore are:

- Is it harder to stand up to a lot of people you don't know well, or to a few that you do know well?
- What does being "Christian" mean? Is it always convenient to be a Christian? What are some challenges and risks involved in being a Christian? Why or why not?

(For more guidance on "Stirring Things Up With Questions," see Cool Tools for Sabbath School at: https://www.sabbathschoolpersonalministries.org/page-205.)

Illustration

Share an illustration in your own words:

From your own life experience, something you have read recently in a Christian periodical, or an online mission story (www.adventistmission.org) share a story of God's care and intervention that has a setting much more current than Bible times. The closer you can bring these truths about God to your students' lives, the better.

The point is to make this experience as "real life" to the students as possible, encouraging them to trust in a kingdom and a power outside of themselves, and outside of the visible "reality" that they live in daily and often can't see beyond.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

For many young people who have grown up in a Christian home, this story is familiar. It is intriguing, as a fairy tale is intriguing. They believe it along with the Creation story if they are from a conservative Christian background. But to benefit from the important lessons that they will need in their own difficult times, they should be guided to look at the story from a slightly different angle to get a fresh perspective on the timeless truth of God's trustworthiness, power, and authority over everything.

A preacher recently preached a sermon on a Bible story that is closely linked to this one—Daniel and the lions' den. His sermon was titled "Whose Den Was It—Daniel's or the Lions'?" His premise was that even though the devil is "a roaring lion" seeking to devour us, if we are "with God" in His kingdom, the Lion of the tribe of Judah is with us, and the supreme power in that den when Daniel was in there was God's power. The lions who regularly resided in that den were, during that period of time at least, residing in a different kingdom. They were not the supreme authority about who got eaten and who didn't.

This general principle can be applied to the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Just think about the physical reality of the fire. Who was the Supreme Commander to whom the three young men were paying due allegiance—the earthly power who couldn't even keep his own soldiers from being killed by the heat, or the heavenly Power who didn't even allow the robes of the Hebrew young men to smell like smoke? As your students come to consider the sometimes tangible and concrete evidence of the power of God and the reality of His kingdom, they may trust God to see them through difficult times.

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.*

- Whose original idea was the image in this story (see Daniel 2:28, 31)? *(Point out that God was the author even of the idea that Nebuchadnezzar decided to pervert and make his own.)*

a. How "in control" was Nebuchadnezzar when he first saw this vision?
b. How did he finally come to understand what the vision was all about?
c. How might this story have been different without the previous story?

- Compare the image from the dream in chapter 2 and the image in this passage. What are the similarities? The differences? *(Nebuchadnezzar copied God's image, except for the details that showed that Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom would someday come to an end.)*
  a. In what ways was Nebuchadnezzar trying to "rewrite" God's prophecy?
  b. How might God have intervened in Nebuchadnezzar's self-worship even if there had not been a Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?
  c. In whose kingdom does this story take place? *(Start your students thinking about the fact that God was ultimately in control. Look at the* Punch Lines*. From an earthly perspective and a simply physical point of view, it appeared that Nebuchadnezzar was the ruler of the kingdom of Babylon.)*
- Who were the subjects of this kingdom? *(Continue the line of discussion from the previous question.)*
- To what kingdom did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego belong? *(Their ultimate allegiance was to God. Part of the constitution of God's kingdom is that we are to obey earthly kingdoms as long as they don't directly violate the law of God, since, in reality, God has the power to set them up or set them down as He sees fit.)*
- What information in the story supports your answer? *(Point out that the three young men respectfully declined to acknowledge Nebuchadnezzar's command as the one they were obliged to obey.)*
- Why do you think the three said to the king, "We do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter"? *(While some commentators have considered this an arrogant comment, the* Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary *points out that there are other ways of interpreting it. They did not need to defend themselves or to apologize, because the charge against them was true. They, however, did not intend to alter their course of action even though they did not know what the outcome might be.)*
- Were they being insubordinate? *(Point out that, while respectful, they were making it clear that they were functioning in the framework of another kingdom in which Nebuchadnezzar himself was actually the one being insubordinate.)*
- Is it ever appropriate to be insubordinate to the ruler of the kingdom to which you belong? *(Discuss the differences between the earthly and the spiritual kingdoms. Remind the students of what Jesus said in Matthew 22:15-22. This might be a good time to use the* Rabbi 101 *activity.)*

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.*

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

RABBI 101

Graphic Organizers

Educational theory states that knowledge is stored in two forms—one using words, and one using imagery. That means that when it is possible to use a graphic to help organize information, or to show relationships among ideas, the learning is increased.

One type of graphic organizer that is often used to show the similarities and differences between two things is called a Venn diagram. It consists of two circles that represent two things, which are allowed to overlap partially. The unique qualities of each thing are written in the parts of the circle that don't overlap (thus showing the differences), and the similarities are written in the parts of the two circles that do overlap.

For this lesson, you might have students create a Venn diagram to compare the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Babylon, or God and Nebuchadnezzar, or this story and the story of Daniel in the lions' den, etc.

Sharing Context and Background

"The fiery furnace was probably a brickkiln. Since all buildings were constructed of bricks, many of them of burned bricks, kilns were numerous in the vicinity of ancient Babylon. Excavations show that ancient brickkilns were similar to modern ones, which are found in that area in great numbers. These kilns are ordinarily cone-shaped structures built of bricks. The unbaked bricks to be fired line the inner walls. An opening on one side of the wall permits fuel to be thrown into the interior. Fuel consists of a mixture of crude oil and chaff. A tremendous heat is thus produced, and through the opening the observer can see the fired bricks heated to a white glow" (*The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, pp. 782, 783).

III. CLOSING

Activity

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

This is a repeat of the activity suggested for the students to do in the Friday portion of their lesson. If you have a class in which most of the students study their lesson each week before it is taught, this is a good time to compare and share ideas about this activity.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

The more we talk with God, study His Word, and trust Him, the more real His kingdom becomes to us. As we strengthen our "grasp" of God's kingdom, the hold that the earthly kingdom has on us loosens. The more this can happen in our lives, the more prepared we will be to live in the reality of God's kingdom, even when it is in conflict with the ideologies prevalent in our society.

The story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego is a good example of respectful noncompliance with an earthly kingdom when it is in conflict with God's kingdom. Their chief desire was to honor God supremely and live in harmony with His will. In response to their faithfulness God intervened miraculously to deliver His children in the hour of their trial.



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 41.

*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 3.
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keytext

"Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God."

(Daniel 3:28, NIV)

flashlight

"In the closing period of earth's history the Lord will work mightily. . . . He who walked with the Hebrew [youth] in the fiery furnace will be with His followers wherever they are. His abiding presence will comfort and sustain. . . . Satan with all the hosts of evil cannot destroy the weakest of God's saints. Angels that excel in strength will protect them, and in their behalf Jehovah will reveal Himself . . . able to save to the uttermost those who have put their trust in Him" (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 513).

what do you think?

Circle A if you agree, and D if you disagree, with the statements below. Then write a number between one (very little) and five (very much) for how strongly you agree or disagree.

A D ___ When with a small group of close friends, it would be relatively easy for me to do what I thought was right, even if they didn't.

A D ___ If I were in a large group with none of my friends, it would be difficult for me to do what I thought was right if everyone else didn't think the same way.

A D ___ I am fine doing whatever my group of friends thinks is best as long as they are Christians.

INTO THE STORY

"King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, sixty cubits high and six cubits wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. . . .

"Then the herald loudly proclaimed, 'Nations and peoples of every language, this is what you are commanded to do. . . . Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.' . . .

"At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. . . . 'Your majesty has issued a decree. . . . But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty.'. . .

"Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, 'Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up?'. . .

"Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, 'King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.'

"Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. . . . He . . . commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. . . . The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

"Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, 'Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?'

". . .'Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.' "

(Daniel 3:1-25, NIV)

did you know?

The term *theophany* means "appearances of God." There are several foreshadowings of God or the preincarnate Christ in a visible form in the Old Testamant. This story of His appearance in the fiery furnace is one of them. Nebuchadnezzar probably did not "recognize" the Son of God (verse 25) in the sense that he was given knowledge about what Jesus would look like when He took human form many years later. But Ellen White shares in our chapter for this week that the Hebrew young men had shared about the expected coming of the Son of God. And they represented by their lives "the principles of righteousness" so much that Nebuchadnezzar recognized their companion in the flames.

OUT OF THE STORY

Whose original idea was the image in this story (see Daniel 2:28, 31)?

_____

Compare the image from the dream in chapter 2 and the image in this passage. What are the similarities? The differences?

_____

_____

In whose kingdom does this story take place? Who were the subjects of this kingdom?

_____

_____

To what kingdom did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego belong?

_____

What information in the story supports your answer?

_____

Why do you think the three said, "We do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter" to the king? Were they being insubordinate?

_____

When is it necessary to resist the prevailing influences in society? What influences should you resist? Explain.

_____

_____

What did the test of the furnace prove in the end? Who was in control of what went on there? Has your faith ever been tested in the "furnace" of troubles and difficulties? Have you relied on God to carry you through that time of testing?

_____

_____

punch lines

"They will wage war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will triumph over them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers" **(Revelation 17:14, NIV).**

"He deposes kings and raises up others" **(Daniel 2:21, NIV).**

"Without inquiry he shatters the mighty and sets up others in their place" **(Job 34:24, NIV).**

"Give thanks to the Lord of lords: His love endures forever" **(Psalm 136:3, NIV).**

"God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords" **(1 Timothy 6:15, NIV).**

further insight

"As through Jesus we enter into rest, heaven begins here. We respond to His invitation, Come, learn of Me, and in thus coming we begin the life eternal. Heaven is a ceaseless approaching to God through Christ. The longer we are in the heaven of bliss, the more and still more of glory will be opened to us; and the more we know of God, the more intense will be our happiness. As we walk with Jesus in this life, we may be filled with His love, satisfied with His presence. All that human nature can bear, we may receive here."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 331

Sabbath

Read Daniel 3:16.

Look over the statements in *What Do You Think?* and give some careful and honest thought about how you would respond in similar situations. Think of times in the past, or imagine situations in the future, that might test your response to these statements. The young men in today's Bible verse were not being arrogant. They knew they were guilty of the charge, but didn't feel that they were guilty of insubordination to the kingdom in which they were functioning, or any unrighteous action. Why do you think they felt that way?

Sunday

Read Revelation 17:14.

Read *Into the Story* and then thoughtfully answer the questions in *Out of the Story.* Who was in charge in this story? To what kingdom were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego giving due respect? Consider where the original idea of a statue representing kingdoms came from. Who was really in charge of the fiery furnace and of the people in it? If you were faced with the choice of submitting to earthly kingdoms versus submitting to God's kingdom, to what authority or power would you submit? Explain.

Monday

Read Daniel 3:28.

Consider the *Key Text.* Why do you think it was so easy for Nebuchadnezzar to make such a demand about who deserved respect and worship after the furnace incident? What previously gained knowledge do you think Nebuchadnezzar had about God? What previous experience do you think the young men had that would cause them to trust God's plan even though they weren't sure He would rescue them?

Tuesday

Read Nahum 1:7.

The *Flashlight* quotation tells us that we will face similar tests of our trust in God. What might give you the courage to act as the young men did in this story? What might you be able to do to strengthen that faith to enter in the kingdom with the more powerful ruler when the time came?

Wednesday

Read Haggai 2:7.

In the *Further Insight* section of the lesson the quote by Ellen G. White is from *The Desire of Ages*, which tells us about Jesus' life. Today's Bible verse tells us why she named her book as she did. Jesus is who we desire, need, and the one who gives us peace. When we are in our own fiery furnace and call out our need to Him, He will provide just as He did for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Do you trust that Jesus will provide for you? Is Jesus your Desire of Ages? Read this week's *Punch Lines.* Do they encourage you to rely on God and His Son to provide for you in your time of need? Who would you rather give your ultimate allegiance to—someone whose guards were killed getting close to a fire, or Someone who kept His subjects from even smelling like smoke after they had been hanging out in the middle of the fire?

Thursday

Read Romans 12:1, 2.

Even though you may not have to choose between allegiance to God's kingdom and allegiance to an earthly government, situations come up all the time when you have to choose between faithfulness to God and the secular influences of contemporary society. For instance, when you are with a group of friends that has a "leader" other than yourself, how easy is it for you to choose not to go along with something the group decides to do? What other situations can you think of that might test your allegiance to God's kingdom? How might it help you if you thought about the "ruler" or "leader" that was actually the more powerful? (Write your answer in the Notes section in the back of this study guide.)

Friday

Read Matthew 6:33.

Draw a big circle, and around the outside write "Kingdom of God." Now draw a medium-sized circle in the middle of the larger circle. Label it with the name of the country in which you live. Then draw a smaller circle in the middle of the medium-sized circle. Write your name inside that circle. That is how things would ideally line up in this world if earthly governments or kingdoms acknowledged who was really in charge of them (refer to the *Punch Lines*). Draw these circles again, but make the medium-sized circle partly inside of and partly outside of the "Kingdom of God" circle. In this new graphic, where will you put yourself? If you are part of the kingdom that is not completely lined up with God's kingdom anymore, are you still part of God's kingdom? It, of course, depends exactly how you drew the circles, but you can see where problems might arise. Draw another one of these representations and label it according to the Bible story today. Can you see now why Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego said what they said in Daniel 3:16?

this week's reading*

Prophets and Kings (or *Royalty and Ruin*), chapter 41.

**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.