



CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

AUGUST 15 2020

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 reli-

gion. 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

- Adversity/trial
- Worship
- Kingdom of God
- Courage
- Conviction

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: www.sabbathschoolpersonalministries.org.)

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.)*

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

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

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.

RABBI 101

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.

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).



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 the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.