



CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

AUGUST 22 2020

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 an 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

- Humility
- Repentance
- Learning from failure/mistakes

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?
- What do you think is the message in this story 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 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



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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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.

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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.

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