a word about what's ahead...

The goal of Cornerstone Connections is to lead you to the Bible to see the big story of God and people. This big story continues from the first generation in Eden to your generation today. It’s about the lives of people as the God of the universe interacts with them.

If you are looking for a word from God that is real, Cornerstone Connections captures the message of Scripture and challenges you to make the connections to your real life.

God’s Word is not only real; it is rock-solid. For the first generation to hear God’s voice in the garden as well as the last group standing before Christ at the Second Coming, the Word of God has been and continues to be reliable.

The word from God comes to us in the stories of people who encountered Him and made a decision to either follow Him or walk away.

Real. Solid. Stories. You will find one in Into the Story in each lesson. Out of the Story will provide you with ways to search for truth you can apply to your life. In each lesson you will also find:

• What Do You Think?—a mental activity to get your mind and heart in gear for the story to follow. Every time you approach a Bible story, you are coming to it in the context of the story in which you live every day.
• Did You Know?—a brief statistic or definition that digs a little deeper into the story or simply provides some helpful facts to bring to the lesson.
• Key Text—a verse that points out a key concept from the story. It is also a great place to find verses that you can memorize and store away for later use.
• Punch Lines—a few other verses from Scripture that punctuate key concepts of the lesson. You may see connections between them and the Bible story as well as your own life.
• Flashlight—a brief snapshot of Ellen White’s input on the story. These glimmers that shed light onto the biblical passage will also give you a glimpse of what awaits you in the suggested weekly reading from her inspired commentary on the stories—the Conflict of the Ages.*
• Other Eyes—a couple of quotes from various contemporary or historic sources that may open up a slightly different perspective on the central message of the lesson.
• Making It Real—the guide to making the truths about God in this story your very own. Begin here if you are studying this lesson on your own prior to, or after, studying it in a Sabbath School class. Each day of the week you will be directed to explore one of the sections of the lesson, to relate it to the story you live, and to make the message from God apply to you personally.

Welcome to Cornerstone Connections.

—The Editors

PS. Don’t forget to check out the reading plan.

*A special modern adaptation has been created just for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at: www.cornerstoneconnections.net.
July
7—Who, Me? [p. 5]
God called Jeremiah to the task of warning God’s people that His patience was running out. Jeremiah wasn’t sure he was prepared for this daunting task. But God had begun preparing him before he was born. Just like He has us.

14—Storm Warning [p. 9]
The warning message became stronger: Disaster is coming. Repent. The king of Judah should have been the spiritual leader of his people. However, he didn’t want to hear a message of warning. Are we ready to hear one?

21—Israel Takes Its Medicine [p. 13]
Discipline, like medicine, is hard to swallow but necessary for healing. However, the stubborn resistance of the human heart makes God’s life-shaping discipline so hard to stomach.

28—Be Swayed and Besieged [p. 17]
A king’s lack of moral courage to act on his convictions causes disastrous consequences for his family and his people.

August
4—Obedience Is Not a Bad Word! [p. 21]
Four young men are taken from their homeland to help rule a foreign country. But can they fulfill their obligations without disobeying their God?

11—God Even Gave the Dream [p. 25]
It’s one thing to interpret a dream; it’s another to have to do so without even knowing what the dream is. That’s where Daniel discovers how strong his faith really is.

18—Choose Your Kingdom [p. 29]
The consequences of striving to live in the kingdom of God while living in a kingdom with an earthly ruler can be fierce—and deadly. Daniel and his friends chose to take them, no matter what the cost.

September
1—This Party’s Over [p. 37]
Belshazzar learned nothing from his father Nebuchadnezzar’s run-in with God. He disregarded God’s warnings, and his life of pleasure-seeking ended in destruction.

8—Deliverance [p. 41]
To remain faithful to God in spite of dire consequences doesn’t happen overnight. It takes time—and prayer.

15—Troubling Dream [p. 45]
Most of us would love the opportunity to stand in God’s throne room, peer into the future, and see how the world will end. Daniel had that chance.

22—God Is in Control [p. 49]
When the world reveals trouble, tragedy, and rebellion, the certainty from God’s Word that He is still in control can bring comfort.

29—A Man, Some Kings, and the End! [p. 53]
Earthly kings may rise and fall, but in the end God’s kingdom will prevail, and He will rescue His people.

At www.InsightMagazine.org you can join the Web forum and help shape the future. Discuss the Sabbath School lessons in a virtual community. 

*Insight* has stories of people today from which you can learn practical ideas for reality living.
**who, me?**

“For forty years Jeremiah was to stand before the nation as a witness for truth and righteousness. . . . Despised, hated, rejected of men, he was finally to witness the literal fulfillment of his own prophecies . . . , and share in the sorrow and woe that should follow the destruction of the fated city. Yet amid the general ruin . . . , Jeremiah was often permitted to look beyond the distressing scenes of the present to the glorious prospects of the future, when God’s people should be ransomed from the land of the enemy and planted again in Zion” (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 408).

**flashlight**

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”

(*Jeremiah 1:5, NIV*)

**keytext**

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”

(*Jeremiah 1:5, NIV*)
Jeremiah was given an unpopular job to do as God’s prophet in tough times. Has being a Christian ever made you unpopular? Check any of the situations below that have applied to you:

- People have made fun of me for religious beliefs or practices.
- I’ve had to miss out on activities because they conflicted with Sabbath or church activities.
- I’ve had to say no when friends were doing things I believed were wrong—drinking, trying drugs, etc.
- I speak out when people are hurting or bullying others, even though I might get attacked myself.

Jeremiah was called by God to be a prophet to the people of Judah about the year 628 B.C. About a hundred years earlier, the northern kingdom of Israel—made up of 10 of the 12 tribes—had been overthrown by the king of Assyria. The Israelites of the northern kingdom were sent into exile, never again to return to their homeland. For centuries God’s prophets had been warning the people of Israel and Judah that if they didn’t remain faithful to God, destruction would come. For the kingdom of Israel, that day had finally come. Now, a hundred years later, Jeremiah was sent to warn the people of Judah that the same fate was about to happen to them.
OUT OF THE STORY

What was Jeremiah’s first reaction when God called him to become a prophet? Why do you think he reacted this way?

How far back does God’s plan for Jeremiah go? What does this tell you about God’s plan for your life?

If God chose Jeremiah as a prophet before he was even born, was Jeremiah really free to say no?

What was God’s special task for Jeremiah? How do you think he might have felt about being called to this kind of ministry?

What warnings does God give Jeremiah? How do God’s promises match up with His warnings?

PUNCH LINES

“My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be” (Psalm 139:15, 16, NIV).

“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:29-31, NIV).

“Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12, NIV).

“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:11, 12, NIV).

OTHER EYES

“We are apt to mistake our vocation by looking out of the way for occasions to exercise great and rare virtues, and by stepping over the ordinary ones that lie directly in the road before us.”—Hannah More, 18th-century English writer.

“We each man has his own vocation; his talent is his call. There is one direction in which all space is open to him.”—Ralph Waldo Emerson, 19th-century American writer.
Sabbath

God caught Jeremiah’s attention and gave him a special task to do. In Jeremiah 1:6 the prophet said he couldn’t __________ because he was only a __________.

Jeremiah was probably a teenager at the time. He didn’t consider himself ready for the task God had for him, but God assured Jeremiah He’d been planning this for a long time—even before Jeremiah was born!

Do you believe that God has a purpose for your life? What do you think you might say to God if He spoke to you as He did to Jeremiah in Jeremiah 1:5?

Sunday

God’s call for Jeremiah was not to do an easy job that would make everyone like him. In fact, his job was to tell the people of Judah that because they had rebelled against God, He was going to punish them.

People don’t usually like hearing that they’re doing things wrong. God warned Jeremiah up front that his message would be unpopular and people would reject him for it. Jeremiah didn’t go out of his way to make people mad—he just did what God told him to do, and got in trouble for it.


Monday

Ask your parents what they remember about you from before you were born. Do they have ultrasound pictures, or pictures of your mom when she was pregnant? If you were adopted, ask your parents to tell about how you came to be part of their family. Think over what you’ve been told as you reread this week’s key text.

Parents have hopes, dreams, and expectations for their children even before those children are born. In the same way, God has plans for us even before we’re born. Does knowing that God knows all about you even before you’re born make you feel: ___ loved? ___ special? ___ scared? ___ trapped? ___ it depends!

Tuesday

We all like to hear positive words. The Bible is full of hope, promises, and encouragement. But there’s a time for negative words, too—a time to point out sin, to warn people of the consequences of their actions.

“Prophets of doom” exist not just in the church but in the world, too. Scientists warn us about the dangers of damaging the environment and predict that terrible things will happen if we don’t clean up our act. Just like preachers warning that God will punish sin, predictions such as that can be scary. But they can also motivate us to change our ways!

Read the Flashlight section. According to this passage, what did God offer to balance the negative side of Jeremiah’s message?

Wednesday

The Bible verses in the Punch Lines section remind us that Jeremiah’s experience wasn’t unique. God calls __________ believers to do a special work for Him. He knows us so well that He knows the work He has for us to do, even before we’re born. And He warns us that doing His work won’t always be easy. It may make us unpopular, or get us into trouble. Your mission is to learn what that job is and do it the best you can—staying true to Him even when times get tough!

Thursday

Lots of believers, like Jeremiah, see things going on in the world around them—maybe even in the church—that don’t seem right. God calls us to speak out—not in condemnation but in love—against sin, injustice, and cruelty.

What things do you see going on around you that you think are wrong?

What would happen if you spoke out and said those things were wrong? What response might you get from people around you?

Friday

Look back at your answers for yesterday’s two questions. Speaking out against wrongdoing is a tricky business. It’s easy to slip into being judgmental or self-righteous rather than “speaking the truth in love” (see Ephesians 4:15, NIV).

Think and pray about what you wrote yesterday. Do you think God is calling you to be a “Jeremiah” right now by drawing attention to something in your community or church that’s not according to His will? If so, talk to Him and to an older Christian you trust about what would be the best way to approach the situation, so that you’ll bring glory to God.


this week’s reading*

Prophets and Kings, chapter 34.
“Perhaps when the people of Judah hear about every disaster I plan to inflict on them, each of them will turn from his wicked way; then I will forgive their wickedness and their sin.”

(Jeremiah 36:3, NIV)
When somebody gives me a warning or tells me bad things are going to happen if I don’t change my behavior, I
____ thank them for the warning and make changes right away.
____ get annoyed, but later think about it and make changes.
____ get angry and tell them to mind their own business.
____ ignore them completely.
____ do just the opposite of what they told me to, because I hate people bossing me around.

INTO THE STORY

“In the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the Lord: ‘Take a scroll and write on it all the words I have spoken to you concerning Israel, Judah and all the other nations from the time I began speaking to you in the reign of Josiah till now. Perhaps when the people of Judah hear about every disaster I plan to inflict on them, each of them will turn from his wicked way; then I will forgive their wickedness and their sin.’

“So Jeremiah called Baruch son of Neriah, and while Jeremiah dictated all the words the Lord had spoken to him, Baruch wrote them on the scroll. Then Jeremiah told Baruch, ‘I am restricted; I cannot go to the Lord’s temple. So you go to the house of the Lord on a day of fasting and read to the people from the scroll the words of the Lord that you wrote as I dictated. Read them to all the people of Judah who come in from their towns. Perhaps they will bring their petition before the Lord, and each will turn from his wicked ways, for the anger and wrath pronounced against this people by the Lord are great.’

“Baruch son of Neriah did everything Jeremiah the prophet told him to do; at the Lord’s temple he read the words of the Lord from the scroll.

“The king sent Jehudi to get the scroll, and Jehudi brought it from the room of Elishama the secretary and read it to the king and all the officials standing beside him. It was the ninth month and the king was sitting in the winter apartment, with a fire burning in the firepot in front of him. Whenever Jehudi had read three or four columns of the scroll, the king cut them off with a scribe’s knife and threw them into the firepot, until the entire scroll was burned in the fire. The king and all his attendants who heard all these words showed no fear, nor did they tear their clothes. Even though Elnathan, Delaiah and Gemariah urged the king not to burn the scroll, he would not listen to them. Instead, the king commanded Jerahmeel, a son of the king, Seraiah son of Azriel and Shelemiah son of Abdeel to arrest Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet. But the Lord had hidden them.”

(From Jeremiah 36:1-8, 21-26, NIV)
punch lines

“As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?” (Ezekiel 33:11, NIV).

“If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7:14, NIV).

“From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near’” (Matthew 4:17, NIV).

“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9, NIV).

other eyes

“If you have sinned, do not lie down without repentance; for the want of repentance after one has sinned makes the heart yet harder and harder.”—John Bunyan, 17th-century English clergyman and writer.

“Jesus reserved his hardest words for the hidden sins of hypocrisy, pride, greed and legalism.”—Philip Yancey, 20th-century American Christian writer.

“It is a great sign of true repentance when a man approves of the justice of his own punishment.”—Hugo Grotius, 16th-17th-century theologian (Holland).
Sabbath
Remember the last time a teacher, a parent, or someone else told you that what you were doing was wrong? How did you feel? Look over your answers to the What Do You Think? section.

People respond to correction in very different ways. Sometimes it depends on how we’re feeling. Sometimes it depends on who’s doing the correcting—it’s much easier to take correction and warnings from someone we respect and have a good relationship with.

The king of Judah was presented with a warning from God. How did he choose to respond? Read Jeremiah 36:21-23:

Sunday
Read the Into the Story section, then read and think about the Out of the Story questions. The king of Judah had a hard time accepting correction and rebuke. He didn’t want to hear Jeremiah’s warning.

Often we don’t like to hear words of warning. We may respond by attacking the person who’s warning us. Some people choose to ignore God’s Word. But even if the warnings are ignored, the message is still there; there’s a storm on the horizon, and we need to be prepared.

Monday
Read this week’s Key Text. Mark the statements below true or false based on what you read in that text:

If God was planning to punish the people of Judah for their sins, then He had His mind made up, and nothing was going to change it.

Many of the predictions and warnings that the prophets brought to God’s people were conditional. If they continued in their wicked ways, destruction would come. But if they were willing to change, the outcome would be different.

Most of the warnings we face are conditional too. They’re what computer programmers call “if-then” statements—if you do this, then this will happen. If you watch TV instead of studying, then you’ll fail your exam—but if you change your ways and study, then you’ll pass.

Think of some other if-then warnings that relate to your everyday life:

If I . . . THEN . . .

Even the final destruction of sin at the end of time is something we can avoid. If we turn away from sin and put our trust in Jesus, then we’ll enjoy eternity in heaven with Him.

Tuesday
The Flashlight suggestion for this week suggests that the more often we ignore God’s warning and refuse to repent, the harder it will be for us to change. (Check out the quote by John Bunyan in the Other Eyes section for the same idea in different words.)

Get in the habit of listening to God! Read your Bible, pray, and pay attention to the advice of Christian friends, teachers, parents, and leaders. If you get used to responding to God’s guidance, then it will get easier to follow!

Wednesday
Read through the Punch Lines texts and then use a Bible concordance to look up some more verses about repentance. In your own words, complete the statements below:

God has to punish sin because . . .

Repentance means . . .

If we repent, then God will . . .

Thursday
As we’ve seen, some people take correction better than others.

Below are some positive responses you could give to someone who offers a warning or correction. Can you add a few of your own?

• “Thanks for pointing that out. I’ll think and pray about it.”
• “I’m sorry. I’ll try to do better next time.”
• “I never thought of it that way before…. Thanks.”

Friday
Can you think of things in your life that the Holy Spirit wants to convict you about?

What are you prepared to change in your life in response to God’s call?

Israel takes its medicine

"To the end of time, men will arise to create confusion and rebellion among those who claim to be representatives of the true God. Those who prophesy lies will encourage men to look upon sin as a light thing. When the terrible results of their evil deeds are made manifest, they will seek, if possible, to make the one who has faithfully warned them responsible for their difficulties, even as the Jews charged Jeremiah with their evil fortunes. But as surely as the words of Jehovah through His prophet were vindicated anciently, so surely will the certainty of His messages be established today" (Prophets and Kings, p. 442).

keytext

“This is what the Lord says: ‘When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’” (Jeremiah 29:10, 11, NIV)
Bad choices lead to unfavorable consequences. As humans, we often seek to find other ways to deal with our situation rather than owning the problem. Which method of denial do you think is most common today? Rank them according to the way you tend to respond. (1 most common, 5 being the least.)

When my actions cause unpleasant circumstances I tend to . . .

____ justify my actions by comparing them to more heinous actions of others.
____ minimize what is wrong.
____ avoid the truth by filling the time with busy behavior.
____ consider alternative perspectives.
____ focus on the seemingly judgmental spirit of my oppressors.

John Maxwell claims the following about leaders:

“Eighty-nine percent of what people learn comes through visual stimulation; 10 percent through audible stimulation; and 1 percent through other senses. So it makes sense that the more followers see and hear their leaders being consistent in action and word, the greater their consistency and loyalty.” What do you think?

This is the text of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets and all the other people Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. (This was after King Jehoiachin and the queen mother, the court officials and the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen and the artisans had gone into exile from Jerusalem.)

“He entrusted the letter to Elasah son of Shaphan and to Gemariah son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. It said:

“This is what the Lord . . . , the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon:

“Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.’

“Yes, this is what the Lord . . . , the God of Israel, says: ‘Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them,’ declares the Lord.

“This is what the Lord says: ‘When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,’ declares the Lord, ‘and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,’ declares the Lord, ‘and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.’”

(Jeremiah 29:1-14, NIV)
"I am with you and will save you," declares the Lord. "Though I completely destroy all the nations among which I scatter you, I will not completely destroy you. I will discipline you but only with justice; I will not let you go entirely unpunished." (Jeremiah 30:11, NIV).

“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:11, NIV).

“Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent” (Revelation 3:19, NIV).

“Blessed is the man whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty” (Job 5:17, NIV).

“You save the humble but bring low those whose eyes are haughty” (Psalm 18:27, NIV).

As you read this section of Scripture underline the parts you think are key. List what you think are the key points in the story and the ideas they convey.

Circle the people mentioned in this passage, and try to identify who they are and their contribution to the story.

Put a rectangle around the words or phrases that are repeated in this passage. In this story, is there a . . .

• truth to believe?
• promise to claim?
• behavior to adopt?

According to verse 2, this message was delivered after the children of God went into exile. Why do you think the message of comfort and promise comes after they are made captives?

Why do you think this passage is in the Bible?

What is the message God has for you in this story?

In a sentence, write what you think the good news is in this passage.

So, if you are a Christian looking for an easy ministry in a post-Christian culture where Christians are a minority, you are unrealistic in your outlook. It was not to be so in Jeremiah’s day, and it cannot be so in ours.”—Francis Schaeffer, 20th-century U.S. Evangelical theologian, philosopher, and pastor.

“A man who wants to lead the orchestra must turn his back on the crowd.”—Max Lucado, current U.S. Christian author and minister.

“When you have to make a choice and don’t make it, that in itself is a choice.”—William James, 19th-20th-century American philosopher and psychologist.
Sabbath

As you respond to the What Do You Think? section of this week’s lesson, read Hebrews 12:11. What does this passage say about the way we relate to discipline? Why do you think it is so easy to find another way rather than face up to discipline?

Sunday

Read the passage in the Into the Story section of the student lesson and respond to the study questions provided. What parts of this story are new to you, and what insights have you gained from this passage?

Do you think if we could see the big picture of God’s will we would embrace adversity better, or do you think we would turn away from the challenges that lie ahead?

Monday

Consider the message of the Key Text in this week’s lesson from Jeremiah 29:10, 11, NIV. “This is what the Lord says: ‘When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’” While this promise is one of the well-known passages of Scripture, the message of hope comes as a precursor to 70 years of submission to Babylon. How does knowing the context of this promise change the impact of the passage on you personally?

Wednesday

Read the Punch Lines in this week’s lesson and identify the passage that is speaking to you today. Why does this Scripture seem to be so relevant to you now? What do you think God is trying to say to you?

Continue to reflect on the passages about how we grow through discipline and ask God to give you an opportunity to share your insights with someone else this week.

Thursday

In this week’s lesson there are false prophets who try to persuade the people of God to minimize their need for discipline and subvert God’s plan for their growth. Their message was popular and easier to receive than Jeremiah’s, but completely untrue. Identify some of the voices that are “false prophets” in your life—voices that urge you to take the easy way instead of the right way. Maybe you have a close friend who struggles with honesty, or you find yourself wrestling with habits or temptations that derail your focus on Christ. Measure those voices against the promise of God in Jeremiah 29:10, 11 and choose firmly to walk with God even though the future may seem unpleasant. Discover for yourself that God’s promise is sure!

Friday

Reflect on the way God has guided you through seasons of learning that, although not pleasant, brought about real change and growth in your life. Perhaps you can identify with a person in Scripture that made a similar journey. Understanding the nature and purpose of God’s discipline deepens our trust in God and our loyalty to His cause in our lives.

this week’s reading*

Prophets and Kings, chapter 36.

A special adaptation of Prophets and Kings has been created just for you by the White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at: www.cornerstoneconnections.net. By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.

www.cornerstoneconnections.net
**be swayed and besieged**

"With tears Jeremiah entreated Zedekiah to save himself and his people. With anguish of spirit he assured him that unless he should heed the counsel of God, he could not escape with his life, and all his possessions would fall to the Babylonians. . . . He sacrificed the noble freedom of his manhood and became a cringing slave to public opinion. With no fixed purpose to do evil, he was also without resolution to stand boldly for the right. Convicted though he was of the value of the counsel given by Jeremiah, he had not the moral stamina to obey; and as a consequence he advanced steadily in the wrong direction" (Prophets and Kings, pp. 457, 458).

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**keytext**

"The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place. But they mocked God’s messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the Lord was aroused against his people and there was no remedy."

(2 Chronicles 36:15, 16, NIV)
what do you think?

To what degree are you swayed by the following influences:

Friends
Almost never  Almost always
1   2   3   4   5

Parents and family
Almost never  Almost always
1   2   3   4   5

The popular masses
Almost never  Almost always
1   2   3   4   5

Which of the above have the most influence in your life? Why?

did you know?

The Hebrew word for “falter” means to limp around. Someone who limps or falters is almost walking correctly. One leg works; the other doesn’t. One step is sure; the other stumbles. Walking, and even falling, is more difficult than stumbling around. It requires a full commitment either way. But to stumble in your walk with God all you have to do is believe in something and never really do anything about it.

“Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eleven years. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord his God and did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke the word of the Lord. He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him take an oath in God’s name. He became stiff-necked and hardened his heart and would not turn to the Lord, the God of Israel.

“Furthermore, all the leaders of the priests and the people became more and more unfaithful, following all the detestable practices of the nations and defiling the temple of the Lord, which he had consecrated in Jerusalem. The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place. But they mocked God’s messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the Lord was aroused against his people and there was no remedy.

“He brought up against them the king of the Babylonians, who killed their young men with the sword in the sanctuary, and spared neither young man nor young woman, old man or aged. God handed all of them over to Nebuchadnezzar. He carried to Babylon all the articles from the temple of God, both large and small, and the treasures of the Lord’s temple and the treasures of the king and his officials. They set fire to God’s temple and broke down the wall of Jerusalem; they burned all the palaces and destroyed everything of value there.

“He carried into exile to Babylon the remnant, who escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and his sons until the kingdom of Persia came to power. The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah.”

(2 Chronicles 36:11-21, NIV)
OUT OF THE STORY

This week’s passage from 2 Chronicles 36 is a summary of the events of Jeremiah 37, 38, and 39. Read through these chapters to get specific insights into the story.

In what way was Zedekiah stiff-necked and hard-hearted?

In what way does Zedekiah’s age factor into his struggle as a king? What are the positives and negatives of being a young leader?

This story is a classic example of how the stubbornness of leaders can cause horrific pain and tragedy for many. Some might think the destruction of Jerusalem was harsh. Read Jeremiah 38:14-24 and compare the exchange between Jeremiah and Zedekiah to this summary in 2 Chronicles. How does a person become so careful of public opinion, even when the threat of death and shame is near?

What do you think it means when the Bible says: “The land enjoyed its sabbath rests” (2 Chronicles 36:21, NIV)?

How would you summarize the key message in this story?

How does this story affect your perception of leaders? How does it affect your perception of God?

other eyes

“There is a time when we must firmly choose the course we will follow, or the relentless drift of events will make the decision.”—Herbert V. Prochnow, 20th-century U.S. banking executive, toastmaster, and author.

“If men will not be governed by God, then they must be governed by tyrants.”—William Penn, 17th-18th-century English Quaker, founder of Pennsylvania.
**Sabbath**

As you respond to the exercise in the *What Do You Think?* section of this week’s lesson, who (parents, friends, masses) do you think has an unhealthy level of influence in your life? Read Romans 12:2 and rewrite this verse in your own words. Try not to use any of the major words contained in the verse.

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**Sunday**

Read this week’s story from Scripture and answer the questions given in the *Out of the Story* section. But first, take a few moments to read Jeremiah 37–39 for a more detailed sample of the drama between the prophet, false prophets, and King Zedekiah. Why do you think this story is in the Bible? What does it tell us about people? What does it say about God?

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**Monday**

Read the *Key Text* found in 2 Chronicles 36:15, 16 and think about how frustrating it must have been for God as well as for the faithful remnant. Perhaps you know of people whose hearts have hardened so much that they resist any prompting from God, friends, or strangers. Take time to pray for such people today.

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**Tuesday**

This week’s *Flashlight* quote truly captures the problem for Zedekiah, and for believers in every age. Notice the sentence “With no fixed purpose to do evil, he was also without resolution to stand boldly for the right.” Consider the brief word study in the *Did You Know?* section, and reflect on the times in your life when you took a stand for God that was risky? How did you feel? Compare that experience with times you chose not to do anything.

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**Wednesday**

Read the *Punch Lines* for this week and rank them 1-5 as if you were using them for a Bible study with someone who was struggling to take a stand for God. Maybe you know someone who is wavering between making a decision or not making a decision. How would you organize these verses to help them respond? What other verses might you include?

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**Thursday**

Write out three things you believe to be true about God and His plan for your life. How much do you believe these words? What evidence could you give from your own experience that demonstrates your convictions?

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**Friday**

Reflect today on the patience of God throughout history—not only with biblical characters, but with you. As you ruminate on the great moments of grace, say a prayer of thanksgiving to God for pursuing you relentlessly.

Dear God,

Thank you for ______________________

_____________________________

_____________________________

_____________________________

_____________________________

Dear God,

Thank you for ________________

_____________________________

_____________________________

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*this week’s reading*

*Prophets and Kings*, chapter 37.

A special adaptation of *Prophets and Kings* has been created just for you by the White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at: www.cornerstoneconnections.net. By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.
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 it means to be “obedient” to what God wants for your life? Put an X by the answer you think it is:

_____ It’s about rules and regulations.
_____ It means that there are things we have to do in order for God to like us.
_____ It’s about our responding 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.

**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 in 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 these 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 sympathy 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 in, 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 enchanter’s in his whole kingdom. And Daniel remained there until the first year.

**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.
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 am full of joy over 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 1:6, NIV).

other eyes

“Strength was the virtue of paganism; obedience is the virtue of Christianity.”
—David Hare, current British dramatist, screenwriter, and director.

“One act of obedience is better than one hundred sermons.”—Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 20th-century German Lutheran pastor and theologian.


“There is no justification without sanctification, no forgiveness without renewal of life, no real faith from which the fruits of new obedience do not grow.”—Martin Luther, 15th-16th-century German monk and theologian whose questioning of certain church practices led to the Protestant Reformation.
Sabbath

I was driving the other day and I saw a sticker on an electrical box on the side of the road. The sticker simply said: “OBEY,” with a weird looking face on it. Almost scary! But it got me thinking about what it means to obey.

This week’s lesson focuses on some young men who were willing to risk a great deal in order to obey what they believed God was calling them to. 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!

Are you an obedient person? Have you learned to obey? Explain.

Monday

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 do we tend to undersell the blessings that God is willing to bestow upon us?

Tuesday

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. Perhaps they had spent the time to understand that God is a God of kept promises, not broken ones!

Wednesday

How important is obedience? Read Romans 5:19. 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.

Thursday

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

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?

God even gave the dream

“In the annals of human history the growth of nations, the rise and fall of empires, appear as if dependent on the will and prowess of man; the shaping of events seems, to a great degree, to be determined by his power, ambition, or caprice. But in the Word of God the curtain is drawn aside, and we behold—above, behind, and through all the play and counterplay of human interest and power and passions—the agencies of the All-merciful One, silently, patiently working out the counsels of His own will” (Prophets and Kings, p. 499).

keytext

“Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him. The king said to Daniel, ‘Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery.’”

(Daniel 2:46, 47, NIV)
Please answer the following questions:

1. Why do you think that Nebuchadnezzar tested his wise men and soothsayers in this story?
2. Doesn’t chopping them up and destroying their homes seem to be a pretty extreme punishment?
3. Do you think that the king had trouble remembering his dream and that was why he asked the wise men to not only interpret the dream but to tell him what it was as well?
4. Couldn’t they have simply made up a story for him? Why or why not?

“Once more they replied, ‘Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will interpret it.’ Then the king answered, ‘I am certain that you are trying to gain time, because you realize that this is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me the dream, there is just one penalty for you. You have conspired to tell me misleading and wicked things, hoping the situation will change. So then, tell me the dream, and I will know that you can interpret it for me.’...

“Then Daniel went to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to execute the wise men of Babylon, and said to him, ‘Do not execute the wise men of Babylon. Take me to the king, and I will interpret his dream for him.’ Arioch took Daniel to the king at once and said, ‘I have found a man among the exiles from Judah who can tell the king what his dream means.’ The king asked Daniel (also called Belteshazzar), ‘Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?’ Daniel replied, ‘No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come. Your dream and the visions that passed through your mind as you lay on your bed are these:

"As you were lying there, O king, your mind turned to things to come, and the revealer of mysteries showed you what is going to happen. As for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because I have greater wisdom than other living men, but so that you, O king, may know the interpretation and that you may understand what went through your mind.’"
OUT OF THE STORY

How would you feel if you were one of the wise men? Afraid? Angry?

Have you ever had a conversation with God when you felt as if He were talking back to you? How did you feel?

How often do you find yourself completely depending on God as Daniel did?

How can you be someone who finds wisdom from what God is telling you?

How did Daniel give the glory to God and not to himself?

In what situation could you find yourself giving honor to God, even if you had done something well?

punch lines

“Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior” (Habakkuk 3:17, 18, NIV).

“Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God” (Psalm 20:7, NIV).

“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1, NIV).

“For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4, NIV).

other eyes

“Faith is to believe what you do not see; the reward of this faith is to see what you believe.”—Augustine, 4th-5th-century church father, bishop of Hippo.

“That’s the thing about faith. If you don’t have it you can’t understand it. And if you do, no explanation is necessary.”—Kira Nerys, in Star Trek: Deep Space Nine.

“Life is a battle between faith and reason in which each feeds upon the other, drawing sustenance from it and destroying it.”—Reinhold Niebuhr, 20th-century U.S. Protestant theologian.
Daniel once again is found to be completely relying on the wisdom that God has given him. It's amazing when you think about everything Daniel was able to do throughout his life by having complete dependence on God. I guess the question is this: “Do we live our lives with that same dependence?” Sometimes I think that I am so capable that I don't really need God to direct my ways. I think as humans we all fight with those emotions. Why is it that we have such a hard time depending on God for everything? Remember, Daniel didn’t depend on God just for the interpretation of the dream; he depended on God for the actual dream itself.

Have you ever taken credit for something that was not entirely your accomplishment? Have you ever been a part of something great that was not as much your work as that of a team, yet you still thought you should get the glory? Daniel was very clear on whom to give credit to for the telling and the interpretation of the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar. His is a great example of how to give credit to God for the things He does and reveals to us. He began by proclaiming God’s divine power and His responsibility for the great things that happen.

When King Nebuchadnezzar asked the wise men what his dream was, they must have been surprised. The king had put them on the spot by not telling them the dream, so they could not come up with whatever came to their heads at that moment. This must have created a great deal of anxiety from these charlatans who called themselves wise men! They were having to prove their worth to the king. This they could not do.

Daniel, however, was not interested in proving his worth to the king; rather, he was interested in proving God’s worth to the king. And he simply let God do what He is best at: taking care of His people.

How can we get caught up in trying to “prove ourselves” to others? What can Daniel’s story teach us?

Daniel replied, “No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come” (Daniel 2:27, 28, NIV).

Describe a time when God could work through you in the same way so that those around you can see what a powerful God He is.

Why was God able to give Daniel the dream that King Nebuchadnezzar had? As the quote in the Flashlight section tells us, God has all this in His hand. Daniel trusted in God to be simply the God he knew had the power to see all that can be seen. This gives us a great deal of comfort in that we know that no matter what happens, God has this all in control!

How do we test our faith in God? Sometimes it is as simple as trusting Him when you don’t feel like you should. Sometimes it is trusting Him when all you have left is that trust. Sometimes it is going forward in spite of your unbelief. God will not fail you. Believe and have faith in that!

What can you do this week that will provide you the opportunity to live by faith?

I believe that if you ask God for the opportunity to trust Him, the opportunity will show itself.

This week’s reading*
Prophets and Kings, chapter 40.

A special adaptation of Prophets and Kings has been created just for you by the White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at: www.cornerstoneconnections.net. By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.

www.cornerstoneconnections.net
choose your kingdom

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).

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)
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 the group I am with thinks is best as long as they are Christians.

The term *theophany* means “appearances of God.” There are several foreshadowings of God or the preincarnate Christ in a visible form in the Old Testament. 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.

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 the king, ‘O 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 save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, 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 . . . and 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, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12-14, 16-20, 22-25, NIV)
punch lines

“They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome 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 sets up kings and deposes them” (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).

other eyes

“A community of Jesus which seeks to hide itself has ceased to follow Him.”

“God grant that the kingdom of Jesus Christ may grow in his church on earth, God hasten the end of the kingdoms of this world, and establish his own kingdom in power and glory!”—Dietrich Bonhoeffer (The Cost of Discipleship, p. 166).

“Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and I care not whether they be clergymen or laymen, they alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven on earth.”—John Wesley, 18th-century English minister and theologian.
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. Now read Daniel 3:16. These young men 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?

The Flashlight quotation tells us that we will face similar tests of our trust in God’s love for us and His ultimate plan and protection. 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 trust, and the chances that you would be able to function in the kingdom with the more powerful ruler when the time came?

Now 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 lined up with the kingdom that is not completely lined up with God’s kingdom anymore, are you still lined up with 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?

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 that could be compared. 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 which “ruler” or “leader” was actually the more powerful? (Write your answer in the Notes section in the back of this study guide.)

Consider the Key Text. Why do you think it was so easy for Nebuchadnezzar to make such an “about face” 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?

Draw 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. Consider who had no control over whom the fire did and did not kill. Which “authority” or “power” would it make more sense to align yourself with?

Now consider the Other Eyes section of the lesson are two statements by a German theologian named Dietrich Bonhoeffer. A book he wrote, The Cost of Discipleship, discusses what it is like to live as first a loyal citizen of God’s kingdom before being a loyal citizen of the kingdom (country, government) in which we live on earth. Why might we consider ourselves citizens, first of God’s kingdom, and then of our earthly countries? Read through the Punch Lines. Do they help you answer the question? 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?

Some raw 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 lined up with the kingdom that is not completely lined up with God’s kingdom anymore, are you still lined up with 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?

also think of times in the past, or imagine situations in the future, that might test your response to these statements. Now read Daniel 3:16. These young men 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?

The Flashlight quotation tells us that we will face similar tests of our trust in God’s love for us and His ultimate plan and protection. 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 trust, and the chances that you would be able to function in the kingdom with the more powerful ruler when the time came?

Now 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 lined up with the kingdom that is not completely lined up with God’s kingdom anymore, are you still lined up with 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?

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Consider the Key Text. Why do you think it was so easy for Nebuchadnezzar to make such an “about face” 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?

Draw 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. Consider who had no control over whom the fire did and did not kill. Which “authority” or “power” would it make more sense to align yourself with?

Now consider the Other Eyes section of the lesson are two statements by a German theologian named Dietrich Bonhoeffer. A book he wrote, The Cost of Discipleship, discusses what it is like to live as first a loyal citizen of God’s kingdom before being a loyal citizen of the kingdom (country, government) in which we live on earth. Why might we consider ourselves citizens, first of God’s kingdom, and then of our earthly countries? Read through the Punch Lines. Do they help you answer the question? 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?

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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).

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

1. President or leader of a country
2. Famous movie star
3. Champion athlete
4. Nobel Peace Prize winner
5. Business tycoon

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.

“I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous. I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in my 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?’ The words were still on his lips when 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 cattle. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men 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 cattle. 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 powers 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, 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 strange story?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

“Pride makes us artificial; humility makes us real.”—Thomas Merton, 20th-century Roman Catholic monk and author.

“A mountain shames a molehill until they are both humbled by the stars.”—Unknown.

“To be clothed with humility does not mean that we are to be dwarfs in intellect, deficient in aspiration, and cowardly in our lives, shunning burdens lest we fail to carry them successfully. Real humility fulfills God’s purposes by depending upon His strength.”—Ellen G. White, 19th-century inspired writer and church cofounder.

“Pride makes us artificial; humility makes us real.”—Thomas Merton, 20th-century Roman Catholic monk and author.
Sabbath
Read and respond to the What Do You Think? activity, and reflect on what Jesus said about the centurion in Luke 7:1-10. 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
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 will 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 the Key Text in this week’s lesson from Daniel 4:37. 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 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 where 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
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 (e.g., sports, music, school). Practice humility by asking someone else for advice or instruction in an area of your strength.

Advice given:

Friday
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, loved 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.

flashlight

“In his pride and arrogance, with a reckless feeling of security Belshazzar ‘made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand.’ All the attractions that wealth and power could command added splendor to the scene. Beautiful women with their enchantments were among the guests in attendance at the royal banquet. Men of genius and education were there. Princes and statesmen drank wine like water and reveled under its maddening influence” (Prophets and Kings, p. 523).

keytext

“This is the inscription that was written: Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin. This is what these words mean: Mene: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. Tekel: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting.’ ”

(Daniel 5:25-27, NIV)
Life-changing events happen in every life. On a scale of 1 (most difficult to deal with) to 7 (not a problem), rate your reaction to the following life-changing experiences:

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Explain your choices of the most and least life-changing events.

________________________________

______________________________

______________________________


**ID YOU KNOW?**

**D**id you know that at the time that Belshazzar, king of Babylon, threw his ill-fated party, the nation of Babylon was under siege from the Medes and Persians? King Darius and his mighty armies had cut off Babylon’s ability to get food and other supplies in or out of Babylon. In spite of this impending doom, Belshazzar chose to party and have a good time.

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**INTO THE STORY**

“King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them. While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. So they brought in the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.

“Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote. His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way.

“The king called out for the enchanters, astrologers and diviners to be brought and said to these wise men of Babylon, ‘Whoever reads this writing and tells me what it means will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around his neck, and he will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom.’

“Then all the king’s wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or tell the king what it meant. So King Belshazzar became even more terrified and his face grew more pale. His nobles were baffled. The queen, hearing the voices of the king and his nobles, came into the banquet hall. ‘O king, live forever!’ she said. ‘Don’t be alarmed! Don’t look so pale! There is a man in your kingdom who has the spirit of the holy gods in him. In the time of your father he was found to have insight and intelligence and wisdom like that of the gods. King Nebuchadnezzar your father—your father the king, I say—appointed him chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners.

“’This man Daniel, whom the king called Belteshazzar, was found to have a keen mind and knowledge and understanding, and also the ability to interpret dreams, explain riddles and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means.’”

(Daniel 5:1-12, NIV)
“Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18, NIV).

“Hearty will say, ‘Surely the righteous still are rewarded; surely there is a God who judges the earth’ (Psalm 58:11, NIV).

“I am with you and will save you,” declares the Lord. "Though I completely destroy all the nations among which I scatter you, I will not completely destroy you. I will discipline you but only with justice; I will not let you go entirely unpunished” (Jeremiah 30:11, NIV).

Then Daniel answered the king, “You may keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else. Nevertheless, I will read the writing for the king and tell him what it means” (Daniel 5:17, NIV).

“I will rise up against them,” declares the Lord. . . . “I will cut off from Babylon her name and survivors” (Isaiah 14:22, NIV).

“By living fully, recognizing that all we do is by His power, we honor God; He in turn blesses us.”—Rebecca Laird, current U.S. Christian author.

“Life is a long lesson in humility.” —James M. Barrie, 19th-20th-century Scottish dramatist and novelist.

“Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man’s character, give him power.”—Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865), 16th president of the U.S.
What does God tell us to do in Psalm 90:12? __________________________

What do you think God is asking us to do? __________________________

What was Daniel’s reply? __________________________

Monday
Check out this week’s Key Text. Daniel shared with King Belshazzar the meaning of the writing on the wall. When God wrote to Belshazzar, “[I] have numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end,” do you think Belshazzar knew that his kingdom and his life would end that same night?

Tuesday
Read this week’s Flashlight quotation from Ellen G. White. What are some of the activities that were going on at Belshazzar’s big party?

Wednesday
Read the Other Eyes. How do you think power can test a man’s or woman’s character?

Thursday
Read Daniel 5:13-17. Daniel’s role in the unfolding drama of Belshazzar’s dark night is a crucial one. What did Belshazzar promise to give Daniel if he could successfully interpret the writing on the wall?

Friday
Ellen G. White comments: “Many had been his opportunities to know the divine will and to understand his responsibility of rendering obedience thereto. He had known of his grandfather’s banishment, by the decree of God, from the society of men; and he was familiar with Nebuchadnezzar’s conversion and miraculous restoration. But Belshazzar allowed the love of pleasure and self-glorification to efface the lessons that he should never have forgotten. That which Nebuchadnezzar had finally gained at the cost of untold suffering and humiliation, Belshazzar passed by with indifference” (Prophets and Kings, pp. 522, 523).

What is something that you enjoy doing that may be preventing you from hearing God’s voice of warning?

Sabbath
Complete the What Do You Think? activity. Which experience did you feel would change your life the most? would be the most difficult to overcome? What life-altering experience happened in the life of Belshazzar? (Daniel 5:4-6).

How did Belshazzar react to this supernatural occurrence? __________________________

How do you think the rest of the guests responded? __________________________

Why do you think God chose to intervene in Belshazzar’s life in the way that He did? __________________________

Describe an aspect of God’s character that comes through in the story.

If you had to share with a friend the most important lesson that God wants us to learn from this Bible episode, what would you say?

Sunday
Read the Into the Story section of this week’s lesson and respond to the Out of the Story section. Daniel 5 paints a picture of two very different individuals—Daniel and Belshazzar. How would you describe Daniel in a sentence or two?

How would you describe the kind of person Belshazzar was?

Describe an aspect of God’s character that comes through in the story.

God did not prevent Daniel’s enemies from casting him into the lions’ den; He permitted evil angels and wicked men thus far to accomplish their purpose; but it was that He might make the deliverance of His servant more marked, and the defeat of the enemies of truth and righteousness more complete. ‘Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee’ (Psalm 76:10), the psalmist has testified. Through the courage of this one man who chose to follow right rather than policy, Satan was to be defeated, and the name of God was to be exalted and honored” (Prophets and Kings, p. 543).

“Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?”

(Daniel 6:20, NKJV)

Scripture Story: Daniel 6.
Commentary: Prophets and Kings, chapter 44.
What would you do in the following situations?

1. Someone in your class cheats on a test using the answers from your paper, without you knowing it. Later the teacher accuses you of cheating and gives you a zero for the test. The other student does not admit to cheating and gets a passing grade. What would you do?

2. Someone tells your best friend something about you that is not true, and your friend stops talking to you. The person who was dishonest becomes good friends with your best friend. What would you do?

The lion is often thought of as a symbol of power, nobility, and courage. Lions have a social system based on teamwork, and live in groups called prides. The teamwork of the pride is evident in their hunting methods. The female lions of the group work together to track and overpower their prey. The lions in the den of Daniel 6 worked as a team to overpower Daniel’s adversaries and broke them into pieces before they even hit the bottom of the den. (See Daniel 6:24.)

“Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. . . . Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree. . . .

“So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions’ den. The king said to Daniel, ‘May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!’ . . . Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep.

“At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions’ den. When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, ‘Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?’ Daniel answered, ‘O king, live forever! My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his
After reading the story in Daniel 6, answer the following questions.

Have you ever been wrongfully accused? How did you handle it? What would you do next time?

________________________________________________________________________________________

The princes and governors had a plan in Daniel 6, but God had a different plan. What was God’s plan?

________________________________________________________________________________________

Circle the words that show the things that make up an excellent spirit. Cross out the words that are left.

faithfulness    prayer    jealousy
loyalty    greed    deception
honesty    pride    kindness    patience

What does the story teach us about being faithful to God?

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

“The reputation of a thousand years may be determined by the conduct of one hour.” —Japanese proverb.

“Love all, trust a few, do wrong to none.” —William Shakespeare, 16th-17th-century English dramatist and poet.

“Prayer may not change things for you, but it for sure changes you for things.” —Samuel M. Shoemaker, 19th-century U.S. clergyman.

“The trouble with our praying is, we just do it as a means of last resort.” —Will Rogers, 19th-20th-century U.S. actor and humorist.
Sabbath

In the What Do You Think? section of this week’s study you were asked to describe what you would do in certain situations. Think about your responses. Why did you choose to handle each situation the way you did? When Daniel heard about the decree that his enemies had devised for King Darius to sign, he went straight to the Lord in prayer. Daniel 6:10 says that he prayed three times that day, just as always. When you go to the Lord for help, do you think things will turn out the way that you expect them to? Why would the Lord choose to help us in a way that is different than we expect or want?

Sunday

Review the Into the Story section. What character traits do you think motivated the princes and governors to bring an accusation against Daniel? List three of these character traits below.

What character traits motivated Daniel?

_________________________________

_________________________________

_________________________________

Review your responses to the Out of the Story questions. How does a Christian handle unfair treatment differently than a non-Christian?

_________________________________

_________________________________

_________________________________

_________________________________

Monday

Daniel trusted in his God. He knew that God had the power to deliver him from the lions. Trusting God the way that Daniel did comes from having a personal connection with Him. It comes from daily prayer and studying God’s Word, and the determination to obey His will.

Read the Key Text of the lesson again. Then reflect on your own experiences. Do you believe that God is able to deliver you from problems or difficult situations? Name something in your life that you would like to be delivered from or that you want the Lord to help you with.

Tuesday

In the Flashlight section we read that “God did not prevent Daniel’s enemies from casting him into the lions’ den.” Instead of removing the danger, the Lord used it to show His power to deliver His servant. Just as in Daniel’s case, God does not always prevent bad things from happening to us. In many cases, the Lord uses our experiences for our own good, or to bring about some future blessing. We may not understand why things happen the way they do, but like Daniel, we must trust that the Lord has our best interest in mind. Can you think of other Bible characters who were treated wrong but in the end were blessed by God? (See Genesis 37:28 and 1 Samuel 19:1, 2 for two examples.)

1. _______________________________

2. _______________________________

3. _______________________________

4. _______________________________

Wednesday

Review the verses listed in the Punch Lines section. Some of the key words in these verses are listed on the left below. Draw a line to connect the words on the left to the synonyms that match on the right.

| courage | shelter |
| strength | set free |
| deliver | brave |
| refuge | faith |
| trust | power |

How many of the Punch Line verses are promises?

Which verse is a prayer?

Thursday

When we are faced with danger or with a difficult situation it is natural to become fearful—especially if we cannot see a solution to the problem. List some specific things you can do to overcome fear:

_________________________________

_________________________________

_________________________________

Fearfulness comes as a result of doubting God. What can we do when faced with doubt? (See Mark 9:24.)

_________________________________

_________________________________

_________________________________

_________________________________

Friday

Standing for what is right can be a hard choice to make. Many things prevent a person from doing the right thing—wanting to be like everyone else, wanting to be accepted by others. Sometimes doing what is right means missing out on something. The choice to keep the Sabbath holy might mean missing out on certain school activities. The choice to live healthfully might mean missing out on some favorite foods. The choice to accept and treat everyone the same might mean not being popular with certain people. What are you willing to miss out on, for the sake of doing the right thing and choosing to obey God’s Word?

_________________________________

_________________________________

_________________________________

_________________________________

What Do You Think? What character traits do you think motivated the characters who were treated wrong but in the end were blessed by God? (See Genesis 37:28 and 1 Samuel 19:1, 2 for two examples.)

1. _______________________________

2. _______________________________

3. _______________________________

4. _______________________________

Out of the Story

Review the verses listed in the Punch Lines section. Some of the key words in these verses are listed on the left below. Draw a line to connect the words on the left to the synonyms that match on the right.

| courage | shelter |
| strength | set free |
| deliver | brave |
| refuge | faith |
| trust | power |

How many of the Punch Line verses are promises?

Which verse is a prayer?

What character traits motivated Daniel?

_________________________________

_________________________________

_________________________________

_________________________________

Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.
“Shortly before the fall of Babylon, when Daniel was meditating on these prophecies and seeking God for an understanding of the times, a series of visions was given him concerning the rise and fall of kingdoms. With the first vision, as recorded in the seventh chapter of the book of Daniel, an interpretation was given; yet not all was made clear to the prophet” (Prophets and Kings, p. 553).

Scripture Story: Daniel 7.
Commentary: Prophets and Kings, chapter 45.

“Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey Him.”

(Daniel 7:27, NIV)
The answers to the following quiz are going to require that you do some research to find out who made these predictions:

1. “There is no reason anyone would want a computer in their home.”

2. “There is practically no chance communications space satellites will be used to provide better telephone, telegraph, television, or radio service inside the United States.”

3. “Television won’t last. It’s a flash in the pan.”

**did you know?**

Did you know that many nations around the globe have animals as their national symbol? For instance, what nation has a bear as one of its national symbols? The correct answer is Russia. Here’s an easy one. The bald eagle is the national symbol of what country? Powerful, majestic birds and animals are often chosen as national symbols, but Ellen G. White writes: “The ensign of the Messiah’s kingdom is a lamb. While earthly kingdoms rule by the ascendancy of physical power, Christ is to banish every carnal weapon, every instrument of coercion” (Letter 32, 1899).

“I, Daniel, was troubled in spirit, and the visions that passed through my mind disturbed me. I approached one of those standing there and asked him the true meaning of all this. So he told me and gave me the interpretation of these things: ‘The four great beasts are four kingdoms that will rise from the earth. But the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever—yes, for ever and ever.’ Then I wanted to know the true meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others and most terrifying, with its iron teeth and bronze claws—the beast that crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left.

“I also wanted to know about the ten horns on its head and about the other horn that came up, before which three of them fell—

“He gave me this explanation: ‘The fourth beast is a fourth kingdom that will appear on earth. It will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it. The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this kingdom. After them another king will arise, different from the earlier ones; he will subdue three kings. He will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time.

“But the court will sit, and his power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever. Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.’ This is the end of the matter. I, Daniel, was deeply troubled by my thoughts, and my face turned pale, but I kept the matter to myself.”

(Daniel 7:15-28, NIV)
OUT OF THE STORY

What aspects of this portion of Daniel 7 are new to you?
____________________________________________________________________________________

Who is speaking to Daniel, helping him to interpret his dream?
____________________________________________________________________________________

Why did God give Daniel such a troubling dream?
____________________________________________________________________________________

Underline portions of this week’s passage that demonstrate how humans use power and authority.
____________________________________________________________________________________

Circle words or sentences in this passage that Daniel found comforting.
____________________________________________________________________________________

Does God still give visions of future happenings in the world to people today? Explain your answer.
____________________________________________________________________________________

What is one lesson you can learn from the way in which Daniel dealt with his troubling dream?
____________________________________________________________________________________

punch lines

“Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7, NIV).

“I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you” (John 15:15, NIV).

“However, as it is written: ‘No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him’” (1 Corinthians 2:9, NIV).

“For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me” (John 17:8, NIV).

“Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord . . . will accomplish this” (Isaiah 9:7, NIV).

“Prediction is very difficult, especially if it’s about the future.”—Niels Bohr, 20th-century Danish physicist, Nobel Prize winner.

“Has this world been so kind to you that you should leave with regret? There are better things ahead than any we leave behind.”—C. S. Lewis, 20th-century Irish novelist, scholar, broadcaster, Christian apologist.
**Sabbath**

Did you find the answers to the What Do You Think? quiz? Niels Bohr had it right when he quipped that predictions are difficult, especially if it’s about the future. God is seemingly unfazed by the daunting task of predicting what will happen a day, month, year, or century from now.

Read Daniel 7:9 and 10. How did this picture of God add credibility to the message that Daniel was being shown in vision?

If the humans we can see constantly make predictions that fail, how can we trust the Word of a God whom we cannot see?

**Sunday**

Before reading the Into the Story section and completing the Out of the Story questions, first read Daniel 7:1-7 to get the full context of Daniel’s vision. Having read Daniel 8:1-7, what was it that troubled Daniel so deeply?

Why do you think God chose such scary imagery to describe future kingdoms of the world when He could have simply named them and told what they would be like?

Before going very far into the interpretation, Daniel’s divine instructor encourages him greatly. Find and paraphrase below this verse of hope.

**Monday**

This week’s Key Text is one of hope and encouragement. God interpreted Daniel’s dream, much as He had done in times past when Daniel interpreted the dreams and visions of others.

When we give our hearts to God and surrender our lives to Him, God salvages us through His Son, Jesus. What is being salvaged or saved in our Key Text?

This message of hope was not just for Daniel; it was also for us. Your personal salvation is just part of God’s plan to one day take all His people to His kingdom that will never end.

**Tuesday**

This week’s Flashlight quotation offers us some background that helps us understand Daniel’s dilemma. Read Isaiah 44:28 and Jeremiah 25:12. What is the central message of these two scriptures?

These prophecies and many others were known and studied by Daniel and the Israelites who had been held captive by the Babylonians. They read them carefully, praying earnestly for God to show them when they would once again be free. It was in answer to these prayers that God gave Daniel a series of visions that helped to explain the future of ancient Israel and spiritual Israel, all who believe on Jesus and accept Him as their Savior and Lord.

**Wednesday**

Read this week’s Punch Lines. Focus for a moment on John 15:15 and John 17:8. Jesus is the person speaking here. To whom is He speaking in John 15:15? John 17:8?

**Thursday**

God gave to Daniel a vision of the future that almost short-circuited his mind. If God was willing to tell Daniel the future of the world, why don’t more people seek His guidance about the future of their lives? What sorts of things get in the way of seeking God?

**Friday**

Does the unknown scare you? Are you afraid of the future? Do you have friends who may be? Based on this week’s look at Daniel 7, write a short paragraph offering them hope. Quote at least one verse from Daniel 7 in your paragraph.

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**Notes:**

God is in control

Through another vision further light was thrown upon the events of the future; and it was at the close of this vision that Daniel heard ‘one saint speaking, and another saint said unto that certain saint which spake, How long shall be the vision?’ Daniel 8:13. The answer that was given, ‘Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed’ (verse 14), filled him with perplexity” (Prophets and Kings, p. 554).
Daniel received a vision from God about things to come in the last days. It told about some terrible things that would happen to the people of God. The vision not only scared Daniel but the Bible records that after he saw it he fainted and became very sick. Why do you think God showed Daniel such terrible things? What benefit do you think it had? What was the downside to God sharing the future with Daniel?

If something bad were going to happen in your life, would you rather know in advance or be surprised?

What factors would influence your decision?

The 2300-day prophecy is the longest time prophecy in the Bible. One day in prophecy is equal to a year (Ezekiel 4:6), so this prophecy is actually 2,300 years long! It would be that long before God would clean up the mess the little horn caused. Daniel 9:25 tells us this prophecy would begin when the decree went out to rebuild Jerusalem. History books say this happened in 457 B.C. Twenty-three hundred years later takes us to 1844. Remarkably, God gave Daniel this prophecy 90 years before it would begin. Even so, it happened just like He said. How’s that for accuracy!

Into the Story

“In the third year of King Belshazzar’s reign, I, Daniel, had a vision, after the one that had already appeared to me. . . . As I was thinking about this, suddenly a goat with a prominent horn between his eyes came from the west, crossing the whole earth without touching the ground. . . . The goat became very great, but at the height of his power his large horn was broken off, and in its place four prominent horns grew up toward the four winds of heaven.

“Out of one of them came another horn, which started small but grew in power to the south and to the east and toward the Beautiful Land. It grew until it reached the host of the heavens, and it threw some of the starry host down to the earth and trampled on them. It set itself up to be as great as the Prince of the host; it took away the daily sacrifice from him, and the place of his sanctuary was brought low. Because of rebellion, the host of the saints and the daily sacrifice were given over to it. It prospered in everything it did, and truth was thrown to the ground.

“Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to him, ‘How long will it take for the vision to be fulfilled—the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, the rebellion that causes desolation, and the surrender of the sanctuary and of the host that will be trampled underfoot?’

“He said to me, ‘It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be reconsecrated.’ . . .

“And I heard a man’s voice from the Ulai calling, ‘Gabriel, tell this man the meaning of the vision.’ . . .

“The shaggy goat is the king of Greece, and the large horn between his eyes is the first king. . . . In the latter part of their reign, when rebels have become completely wicked, a stern-faced king, a master of intrigue, will arise. He will become very strong, but not by his own power. He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. He will destroy the mighty men and the holy people. He will cause deceit to prosper, and he will consider himself superior. When they feel secure, he will destroy many and take his stand against the Prince of princes. Yet he will be destroyed, but not by human power.’ . . .

“I, Daniel, was exhausted and lay ill for several days. Then I got up and went about the king’s business. I was appalled by the vision; it was beyond understanding.”

(Daniel 8:1, 5, 8-14, 16, 21, 23-25, 27, NIV)
What was Daniel’s reaction to the vision God gave him? Why do you think he felt this way?

________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

The goat had a horn that would start out small but would grow up to the heavens. What kind of things would this little horn do?

________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

God promised the little horn would be destroyed but not for a long time. Why do you think God would allow the little horn to get away with doing wrong for so long?

________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

What does this passage teach us about God?

________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

How can we use this information in our lives today?

________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered” (Daniel 12:1, NIV).

“God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?” (Numbers 23:19, NIV).

“No one of all the Lord’s good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled” (Joshua 21:45, NIV).

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33, NIV).

“For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock” (Psalm 27:5, NIV).

“I would rather walk with God in the dark than go alone in the light.”—Mary Gardiner Brainard, 19th-century U.S. poet.

“I’ve read the last page of the Bible. It’s all going to turn out all right.”—Billy Graham, current U.S. evangelist.

“God, who foresaw your tribulation, has specially armed you to go through it, not without pain but without stain.”—C. S. Lewis, 20th-century Irish scholar, novelist.

“Nothing that is attempted in opposition to God can ever be successful.”—John Calvin, 16th-century French theologian.
Most people like good surprises, but sometimes life throws us surprises that can hardly be considered good. Jesus promised we would have tribulation. He also promised that we would be victorious.

In the What Do You Think? section, you had to decide if you wanted to know in advance of hard times ahead, or if you wanted to be surprised. Whether trials come to us with notice or by surprise, one thing is certain, God is never caught off guard. What feelings do you have about God knowing what lies ahead for you, even before it comes?

The enemy often uses counterfeits to distract us from God’s plan for our life. What kind of counterfeits have you encountered? How did you respond to them?

When we find Daniel, he is in Babylon with the rest of Israel in captivity. Daniel was hoping they would be freed soon, but God kept giving him these disturbing visions. As a result, Daniel was not sure when all of this trouble would end!

Reading this week’s Key Text. On the lines below, rewrite it in your own words.

What does this prayer reveal about Daniel’s faith? What does it reveal about Daniel’s relationship with God?

In this week’s Flashlight, Ellen White talks about God’s solution to the problem the little horn was causing. He was defiling the sanctuary and trying to take away the sacrifices. God would cleanse the sanctuary and reconsecrate it. God would bring restoration. God would do this through judgment. What things come to your mind when you think of judgment?

In a competition, the judging is the most exciting part, because someone is declared a winner. God has declared that all who love Him and keep His commandments would be victorious. Even though we had to fight hard, when judgment comes we will be vindicated and declared winners!

We have pondered why God would share such a distressing prophecy with Daniel. In the Punch Lines section, Jesus gives us a possible answer: “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace” (John 16:33, NIV).

How can we have peace when we know that our future will be tattooed by trouble? Because we have the assurance that God knew about our trouble in advance and has a way for us to either get out of it or get through it. Are you willing to trust God with your future?

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

When times get dark, we must hold on to the light of God’s Word. “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path” (Psalm 119:105, NIV). Choose a promise or two that reminds you of God’s power and His plan to get you through tough times. Commit it to memory. Write it on an index card and put it in a prominent place so you can see it every day.

Nothing, big or small, catches God by surprise. He knows all and has a plan to make it work out in the end. What situations have tempted you to believe God has forgotten about you? What situations have been so bad you have wanted to forget God?

Someone said, “If it hasn’t worked out yet, then it is not the end.” God has solutions for problems you have not even had yet. Write out a prayer of thanksgiving that God has charted out your future.

His Word is sure. Just as we can depend on His prophecies, we must lean on His promises.

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**flashlight**

“In this life we can only begin to understand the wonderful theme of redemption. With our finite comprehension we may consider most earnestly the shame and the glory, the life and the death, the justice and the mercy, that meet in the cross; yet with the utmost stretch of our mental powers we fail to grasp its full significance. . . . The plan of redemption will not be fully understood, even when the ransomed see as they are seen and know as they are known; but through the eternal ages new truth will continually unfold to the wondering and delighted mind. Though the griefs and pains and temptations of earth are ended and the cause removed, the people of God will ever have a distinct, intelligent knowledge of what their salvation has cost” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 651).

**keytext**

“The king will do as he pleases. He will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will say unheard-of things against the God of gods. He will be successful until the time of wrath is completed, for what has been determined must take place.”

(*Daniel 11:36, NIV*)

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*Scripture Story: Daniel 10–12.*

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*flashlight*

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(*Daniel 11:36, NIV*)
If you thought this lesson would be an easy one, think again!

Ask yourself a few tough questions:
1. What is the purpose of prophecy?
2. How can it make a difference in my life today?
3. Why do you think Daniel wrote these visions down?
4. What do you think they meant to the children of Israel, especially while they were in the midst of the Babylonian captivity?
5. Why should we even study this stuff? Have you ever read this before?
6. Why is this so important to the Adventist Church?

“1, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision; the men with me did not see it, but such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and hid themselves. So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless. Then I heard him speaking, and as I listened to him, I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground.

“A hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. He said, ‘Daniel, you who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you.’ And when he said this to me, I stood up trembling.

“Then he continued, ‘Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come.’

“While he was saying this to me, I bowed with my face toward the ground and was speechless. Then one who looked like a man touched my lips, and I opened my mouth and began to speak. I said to the one standing before me, ‘I am overcome with anguish because of the vision, my lord, and I am helpless. How can I, your servant, talk with you, my lord? My strength is gone and I can hardly breathe.’

“Again the one who looked like a man touched me and gave me strength. ‘Do not be afraid, O man highly esteemed,’ he said. ‘Peace! Be strong now; be strong.’

“When he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, ‘Speak, my lord, since you have given me strength.’

“So he said, ‘Do you know why I have come to you? Soon I will return to fight against the prince of Persia, and when I go, the prince of Greece will come; but first I will tell you what is written in the Book of Truth.’

(Daniel 10:7-21, NIV)
punch lines

“If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:2, NIV).

“For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21, NIV).

“Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near” (Revelation 1:3, NIV).

“D. L. Moody once said, “I never preach a sermon without thinking that possibly the Lord may come before I preach another.”—Source Unknown.

“The Lord has wrought through human agents to fulfill the prophecies.”—Ellen G. White, 19th-century inspired writer and church cofounder.

“There are many who do not understand the prophecies relating to these days, and they must be enlightened.”—Ellen G. White, 19th-century inspired writer and church cofounder.
These are tough texts. The language of prophecy is sometimes confusing and hard to understand. However, there is always a point to prophecy. In it we get to see how God is a God who loves us and who always wins. It is easy to get lost in the midst of finding what every jot and tittle means, and while this is important, it is also important to note that these were words that are used to show us who God is and how He relates to us. It is exciting to think that there is a God who understands what this world is all about and can make a difference from the past to the future.

Sabbath

Let’s ask that first question again: “What is the purpose of prophecy?” While it is easy to get lost in the large amount of minutia that is contained in these texts, we must not forget the bigger picture, which is that prophecy reveals God and His character to us. As Revelation 1:3 tells us: “Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy…”

List at least 2 ways that you have been blessed this week by studying prophecy.

Monday

Daniel 11:36 speaks of a king who is willing to do whatever it is that he finds in his fancy to do. What does this say about us? What application can we make from this text? Is it safe to say that there are ways that God expects us to live? Would it be prudent to extract from this text that God is not altogether happy with those who find themselves living with no sort of moral code or ethic? Take some time to reread the text and see what it means to you today!

Tuesday

In Flashlight we begin to see that redemption and salvation are such huge things that we will not fully understand them until we find ourselves sitting at the table with Jesus Christ. It will be a wonderful day when Jesus sits beside us and explains to us all those things we barely were able to understand in texts such as these. What a glorious moment when it is all made clear and plain! However, it is so awesome to know that we understand all that we have to in order to be able to sit with Jesus at that banquet table.

Wednesday

1 Corinthians 13:2 puts in the right place our concept of so many things. It is all subject to the love that is involved. If these prophecies don’t bring us to a place of greater love and appreciation for what Christ has done for us, and a desire to share them with others, then it is not worth much of anything at all! God said and did all of this for love; we have to read and study with the same object in mind: to love well.

Thursday

Have you spent time studying the prophecies in the Bible? It might be an enjoyable exercise to do for a while in your personal Bible study. Don’t be afraid to ask the tough questions and seek the answers with a fervent and loving heart!

Friday

What do these prophecies tell you about God?

What application do they have for your life?

How does this study make you closer to Jesus Christ?

These are important questions that only you can answer for yourself.