

Lesson Three: God Gives Me the Choice to Obey (Middle School)

Lesson Theme

I have the choice to obey or not obey God, but there will be consequences if I choose to disobey Him. I will choose to do what is right!

Theme Verse

“Make a *clean* break with your sins and invest in what is right.” (4:27 VOICE)

Bible Story - Nebuchadnezzar's Pride & Punishment

Ice Breaker Questions

Options #1:

Have you ever gone through an extremely difficult experience? What effect did that experience have on your personal relationship with God?

I have often heard stories about people coming into a relationship with God only after they ‘hit rock bottom’ in their lives. Have you—or someone you know—experienced this? What happened?


In your opinion, how important is it to God that we depend upon Him? In what ways do difficult circumstances bring about dependence upon God?

Option #2:

Why do bad things happen in life? What is God’s purpose in allowing difficult circumstances to come up in our lives? (see Genesis 50:20)

When bad things happen, people often quote Romans 8:28. What does that verse say? It mentions the purposes of God at the end of that verse. What is God’s purpose for salvation? (Romans 8:29 explains that God’s purpose for salvation is for every believer to be conformed to the image of God’s

Son. Ephesians 2:8-10 explains that we have been saved by grace through faith for a purpose—we are created in Christ to do good works. The purpose of salvation is to be like and act like Jesus.)

 *In our study today, we are going to look at the lives of two kings in Babylon to see how God brought about circumstances in their lives to show them that He is the one true God and sovereign over everything.*

Active Listening Activity (Optional)

Before sharing the Bible story, give each student a piece of paper (use Activity Sheet 3.1 if you want it to look like a story board) and ask them to draw a picture of what is happening in the story.

Daniel 4 & 5 (Paraphrase)

A long time ago in a land far, far away called Babylon, there lived a king. This king's name was Nebuchadnezzar. King Nebuchadnezzar was the greatest king of one of the greatest kingdom that ever existed. All this 'greatness' kind of went to the king's head. He became very proud of all he had accomplished.

One day, while Nebuchadnezzar was sleeping, God sent him a vision. He had a vision of a giant tree that was tall and green, and it provided shade and fruit for everyone—birds, animals and even people. But in his vision, a holy messenger commanded that the tree be chopped down, leaving only the stump to remind the people of the greatness of the tree.

One of the king's wise men, Daniel, explained the dream to the king. He said, "Here is what the dream means: the kingdom of Babylon will fall and you, O King, will live outside and eat grass like an animal for seven years. God is doing this to you so you will learn that He is the one who rules over the kingdoms of the world." Then Daniel begged the king, "Please take my advice. Stop sinning and do what is right. Break from your wicked past and be merciful to the poor. Show God that you've really changed and then maybe he will change His mind and let you remain as king."

The king did not change. In fact, a whole year went by and nothing ever happened. Then one day, as King Nebuchadnezzar was looking out from the

roof of his palace, he said, “Look at what an awesome city I have built. Babylon is my creation. I built this by my own power. I built this as my royal home so everyone can see how awesome I am.”

As the king was saying those words, a holy messenger came down and proclaimed, “O King Nebuchadnezzar, you are no longer the king of this kingdom. You will no longer live like a real person; you will live in the fields with the wild animals and eat grass to keep you alive. For seven years, you will live like that. Then we will see if you have changed your attitude and recognize that God is the One who is really in control.”

And so it happened, just as the holy messenger said...

DISCUSS

God gave Nebuchadnezzar this dream as a warning of what would happen to him if he did not recognize that the Most High God is in control of all the kingdoms of the world. When did this dream actually come true (Daniel 4:28-33)? Why did God choose that moment to implement this punishment upon Nebuchadnezzar?

Have you ever had an experience where you felt that God was trying to warn you to stop doing the sinful things you were doing? What happened? What did you do in response to this warning?

But this is a tale of two kings—King Nebuchadnezzar and King Belshazzar. King Belshazzar was a descendant of King Nebuchadnezzar. He too was the king of Babylon, and he too had the wrong idea of the origin of his power and authority. Here's his story:

DISCUSS

Read Daniel 5:1-4. What is Belshazzar doing? There were many things that were happening at Belshazzar's party. What were some of those things? How does that compare to the parties that people you know have today?

Belshazzar was an evil king who liked to have enormous parties where people behaved very badly. One night, the king was having a party for 1,000 of his upper class friends. Everyone was involved with lots of drinking and uncontrolled passion and pleasure. This was not the first time that Belshazzar had a party like this, but at this party he was thinking about doing something that he had never done before—using the sacred, golden cups from God's Temple.

Many years earlier, about the time that Nebuchadnezzar became King of Babylon, the golden cups that were used to worship Jehovah God in the Temple in Jerusalem were brought to Babylon. This happened at the same time that Daniel and his friends were taken as captives to Babylon. These cups were set apart for an holy purpose, but King Belshazzar wanted to use them for an evil purpose.

DISCUSS

These things that were happening were drawing him away from a life lived for God. What are some things that draw us away from God?

Anything that draws you away from God is idolatry. What are some idols in our lives?

- Physical things – (i.e. living to eat and drink, focus on satisfying bodily appetites, addictions to sex, Rx and illegal drugs, alcohol, nicotine, pornography, etc.)

- Material things – (i.e. clothes, electronic gadgets, cars, homes, boats, any kind of property etc.)
- Intangible things – (i.e. degrees, letters and titles, security that comes from wealth)
- Financial priorities – (i.e. buying cars, houses and other stuff, but not able to afford to ‘tithe’)
- Recreational things – (i.e. hunting, fishing, vacations, picnics, outings, sports of all kinds, etc.)
- Social standing – (i.e. power, prestige, influence, etc.)

In both of our stories today, each of these kings had a choice to make—choose to honor God by obeying His command or choose to dishonor Him with their actions and attitudes.

So what did they choose?

King Belshazzar chose to dishonor God. He used the golden cups in his wild party and praised their idols made of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood and stone while he did it. As soon as he did, all the people at the party saw the fingers of a human hand writing on the plaster wall of the king’s palace. When the king saw this, his face turned pale with fear, his knees knocked together and his legs gave way beneath him.

So what was the hand writing on the wall? It wrote these words in Aramaic: **“Mene, mene, tekel upharsin.”** King Belshazzar did not know what the words meant. Fortunately, Daniel was able to explain the meaning of these words.

“Mene means ‘numbered’—God has numbered the days of your reign and has brought it to an end.

Tekel means ‘weighed’—you have been weighed on the balances and have not measured up.

Parsin means ‘divided’—your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and Persians.” (Daniel 5:25-28)

With these four simple words, God declared that the Babylonian Empire would cease to exist. That very night, King Belshazzar was killed.

Belshazzar had a choice—honor God or dishonor God—and he chose poorly! The result of his choices not only brought about his death, but also brought about the end of one of the greatest empires in the history of the world. God tried to get his attention, but he chose to do what he wanted to do with no regard for God and His ways.

So what happened with King Nebuchadnezzar? I'm glad you asked!

You see, King Nebuchadnezzar was also given a choice to honor and recognize God as the ruler over everything. Do you remember what had happened to him earlier? Just after declaring how great he was and how awesome the city of Babylon was, God declared that he would lose his kingship and live like an animal for seven whole years.

At the end of that seven years of living like an animal, the Bible tells us that Nebuchadnezzar looked up to heaven—his sanity restored—and he ‘praised and worshipped the Most High and honored the one who lives forever’ (Daniel 4:34a). In fact, Nebuchadnezzar went on to say this about God:

His rule is everlasting,
and his kingdom is eternal.
All the people of the earth
are nothing compared to him.
He does as he pleases
among the angels of heaven
and among the people of the earth.
No one can stop him or say to him,
‘What do you mean by doing these things?’

“When my sanity returned to me, so did my honor and glory and kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored as head of my kingdom, with even greater honor than before.

“Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and glorify and honor the King of heaven. All his acts are just and true, and he is able to humble the proud.” (Daniel 4:34b-37)

When Nebuchadnezzar recognized God as the supreme ruler of all things, God restored him as the King over the Babylonian Empire. But there was even more to it than that! You see, Nebuchadnezzar recognized that before

his seven years living like a wild animal, he was a very prideful person. The king realized that God was the one who humbled him and brought him to a point of repentance.

DISCUSS

As we consider the outcome of each man's life, what can we learn and apply to our own life? What will it take for God to get our attention?

The Bible says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (Proverbs 3:34, James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5). The Bible also tells us that God hates a prideful attitude (Proverbs 6:16-17), and He will do whatever it takes to humble us and bring us to repentance! What is it going to take in your life for God to get your attention?

When faced with this decision, will you choose your way or God's way?

Activities & Games

SOAP Journal Review

- In Lesson 1, the concept of SOAP Journaling was introduced. The goal in this activity is to encourage the students to continue 'SOAPing' and answer any questions that they might have concerning this process.
- Ask the following series of questions:
 - How many of you tried to do your SOAP Journal yesterday during your quiet time?
 - Is there anything that you didn't understand about it?
 - Why is reading your Bible, prayer and journaling important in your personal spiritual growth?
 - Would anyone like to share something that God taught them through their SOAP Journal yesterday?
- You might consider repeating this activity in Lesson 4.

Building Block Challenge (Optional Introductory Activity)

What You Need:

- Multiple, matching sets of building blocks (wooden blocks, legos, etc.)
- Flat surface that is sturdy for the students to work on. This can be the floor if solid table tops are not available.

How to Play:

- Divide the group into multiple teams (however many sets of blocks that you have available).
- Explain to the students that the goal of this activity is to build the most unique structure out of the sets of blocks within 3 minutes. After the students complete their structures, take pictures of each one with a digital camera.
- Next, explain that they will have another 3 minutes to build the tallest and strongest tower possible out of their sets of building blocks. Again, take pictures of each tower when completed.

Application:

- Ask the students how they felt about their structures. “Was yours the best out of all of them?”
- Explain that the man in our story today was a great builder just like them, but his problem was that he was too proud of what he built.

Loud & Proud Role Play

What You Need:

- Imagination and a little extra time.

How to Do It:

- Role play with students by asking them what they feel they are gifted at. If they don’t know, ask them what others have said they do really well.
- Using their answer, ask the class to role play what a person who is filled with pride says when a compliment is given.
- Then allow them to share ways they can respond that point others to God because He is the one who gave them that ability.

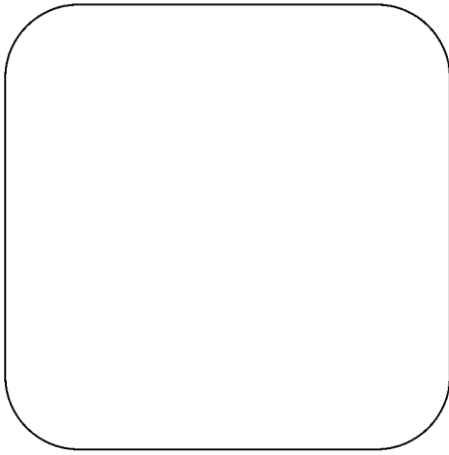
Application:

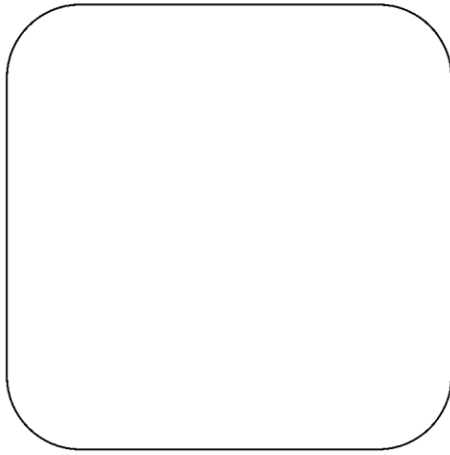
- The goal of this exercise is to help the students understand that what they say when complemented can come across as boastful and proud—and help them to know what to say instead.
- Be sure to point out that we need to give God the glory when we are able to do something well.

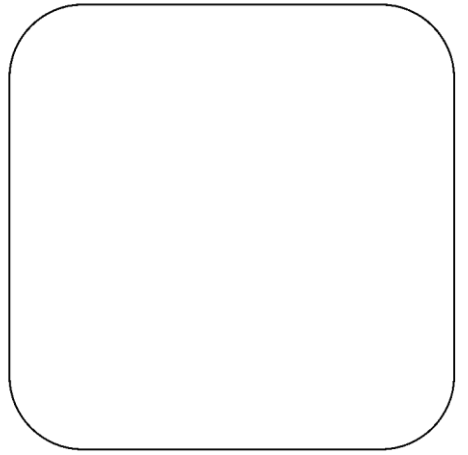
Activity Sheets/Coloring Pages

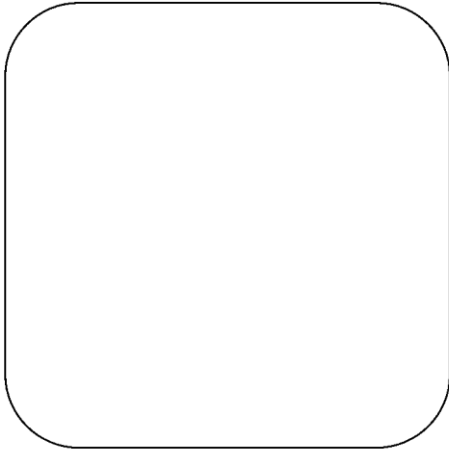
- 3.1 – Nebuchadnezzar’s Story Board
- 3.2 – “Nebuchadnezzar” Coloring Page
- 3.3 – “Choose Wisely” Maze
- 3.4 – “Repent” Maze
- 3.5 – “Change” Coloring Page
- 3.6 – “All Things” Coloring Page
- 3.7 – “Nebuchadnezzar” Word Search
- 3.8A – “A Tale of Two Kings” Outside Page
- 3.8B – “A Tale of Two Kings” Inside Page

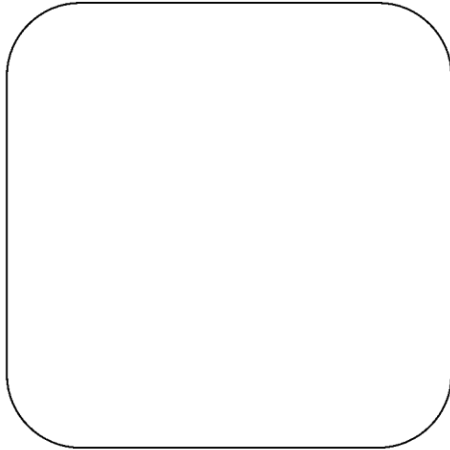
THE TALE OF TWO KINGS

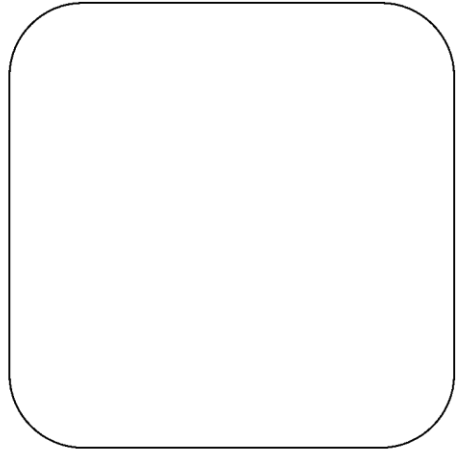


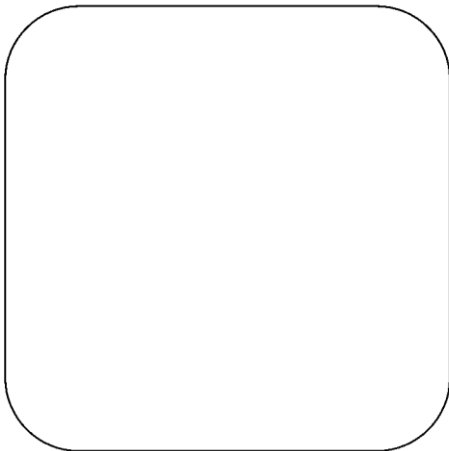


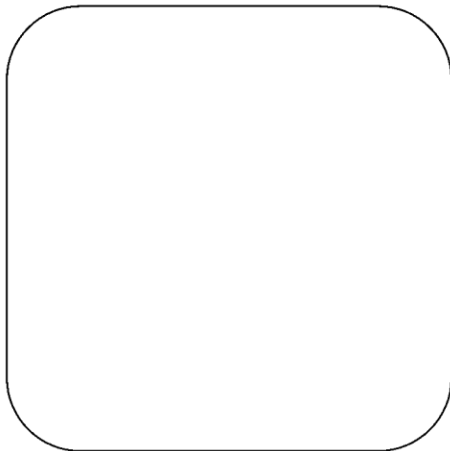


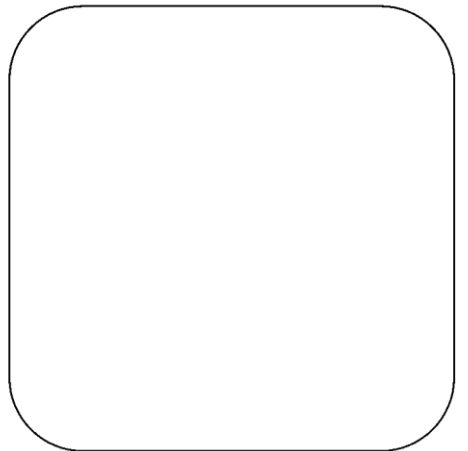












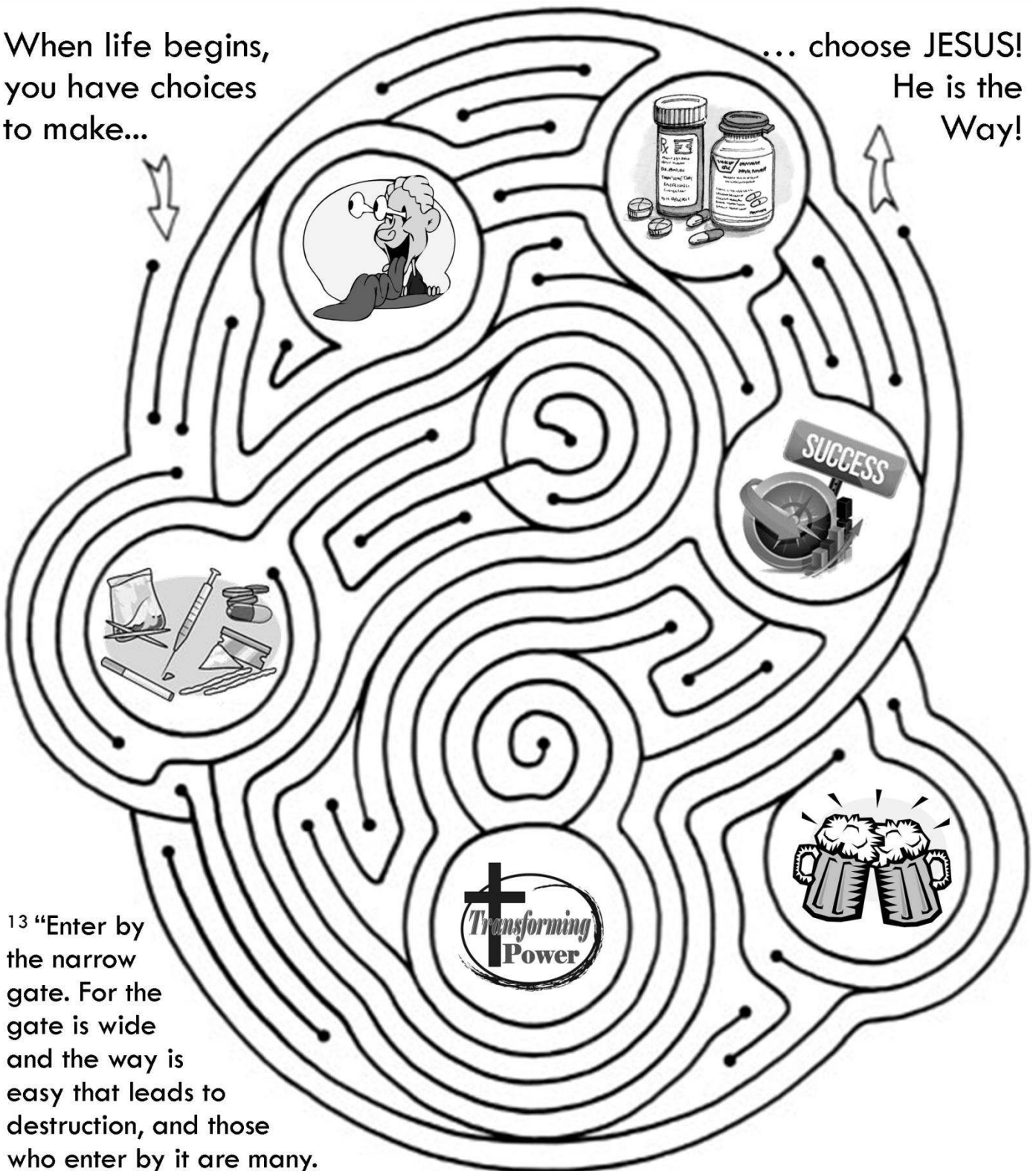


“That same hour the judgment was fulfilled, and Nebuchadnezzar was driven from human society. He ate grass like a cow, and he was drenched with the dew of heaven. He lived this way until his hair was as long as eagles’ feathers and his nails were like birds’ claws.” (Daniel 4:33)

CHOOSE WISELY

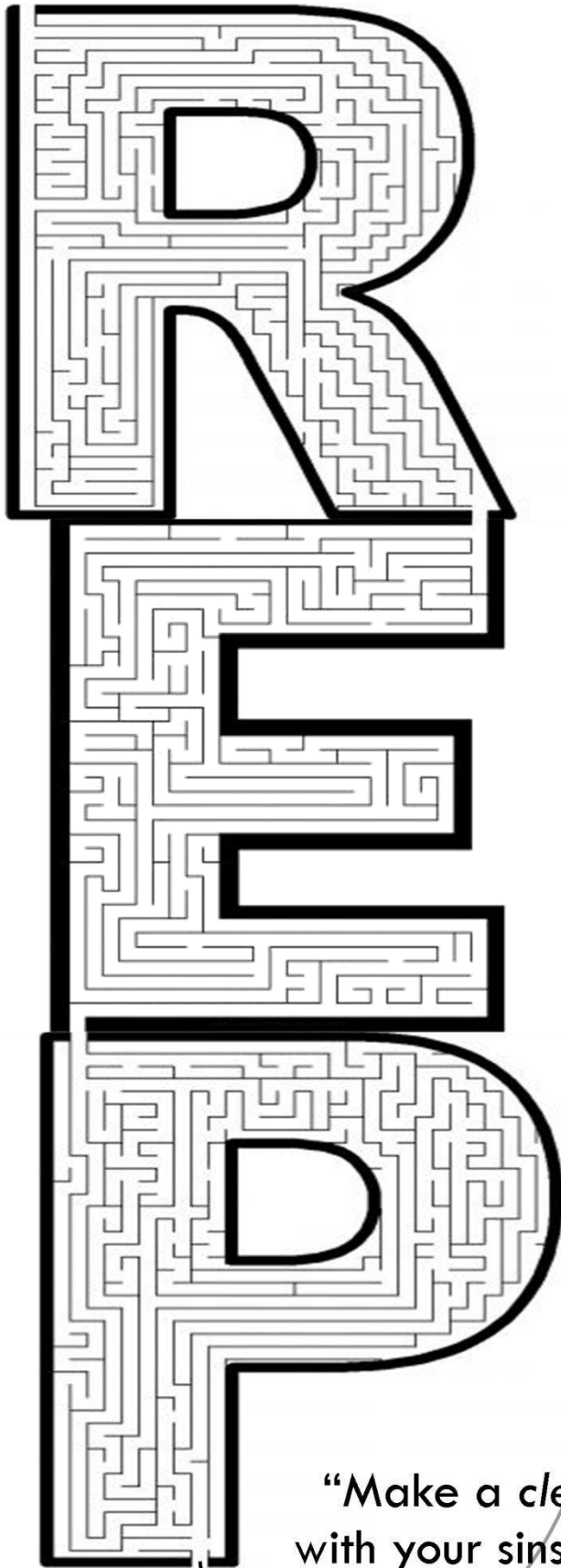
When life begins,
you have choices
to make...

... choose JESUS!
He is the
Way!



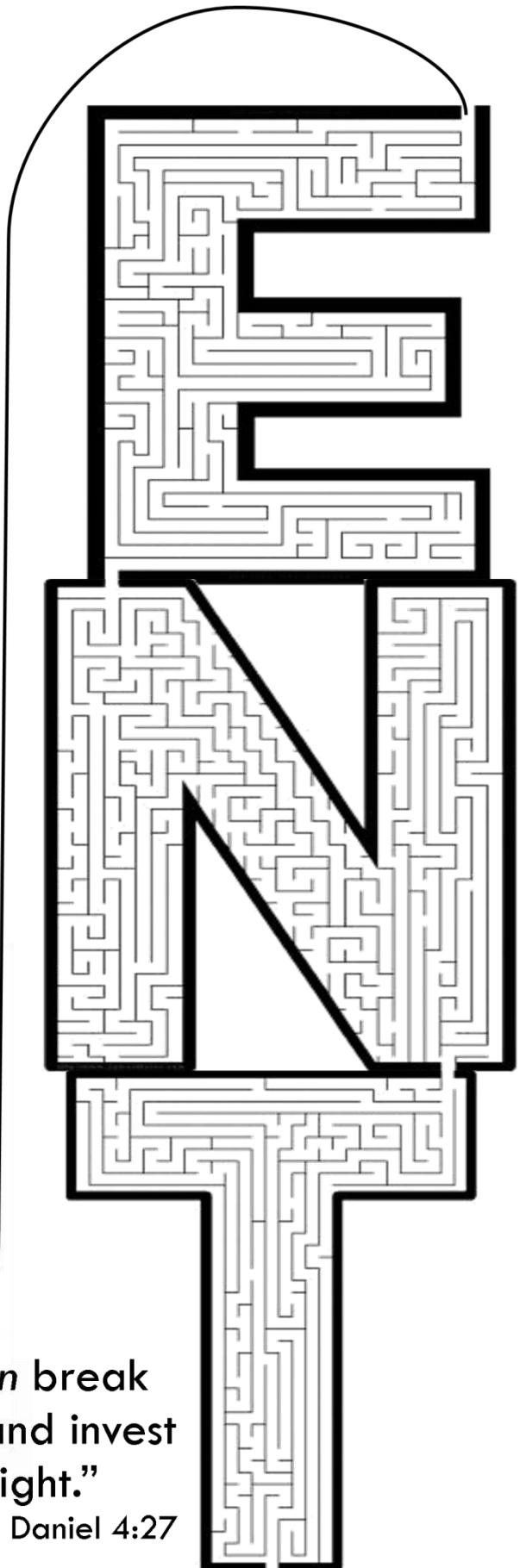
¹³ "Enter by
the narrow
gate. For the
gate is wide
and the way is
easy that leads to
destruction, and those
who enter by it are many.

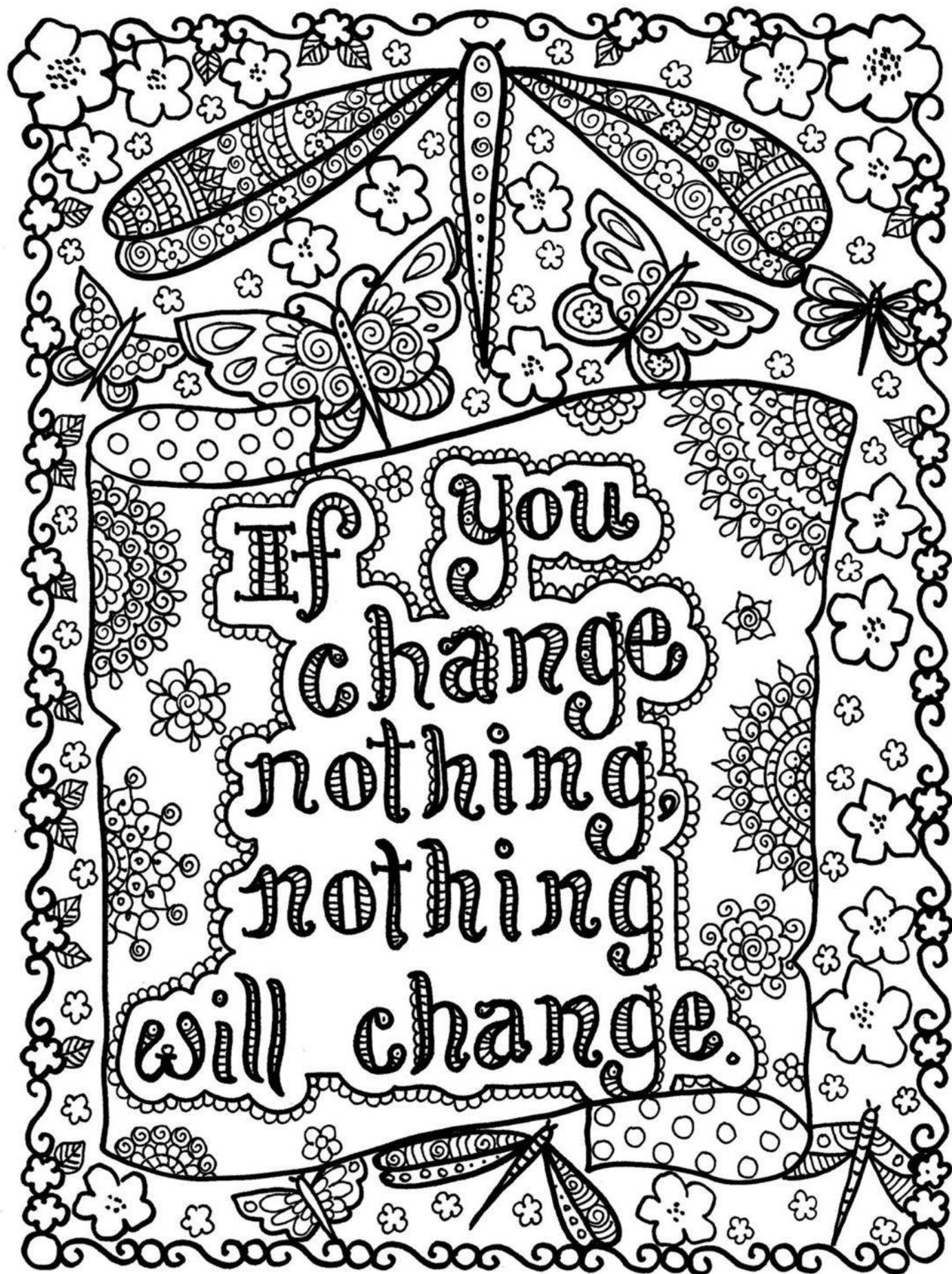
¹⁴ For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads
to life, and those who find it are few." (Matthew 7:13-14)

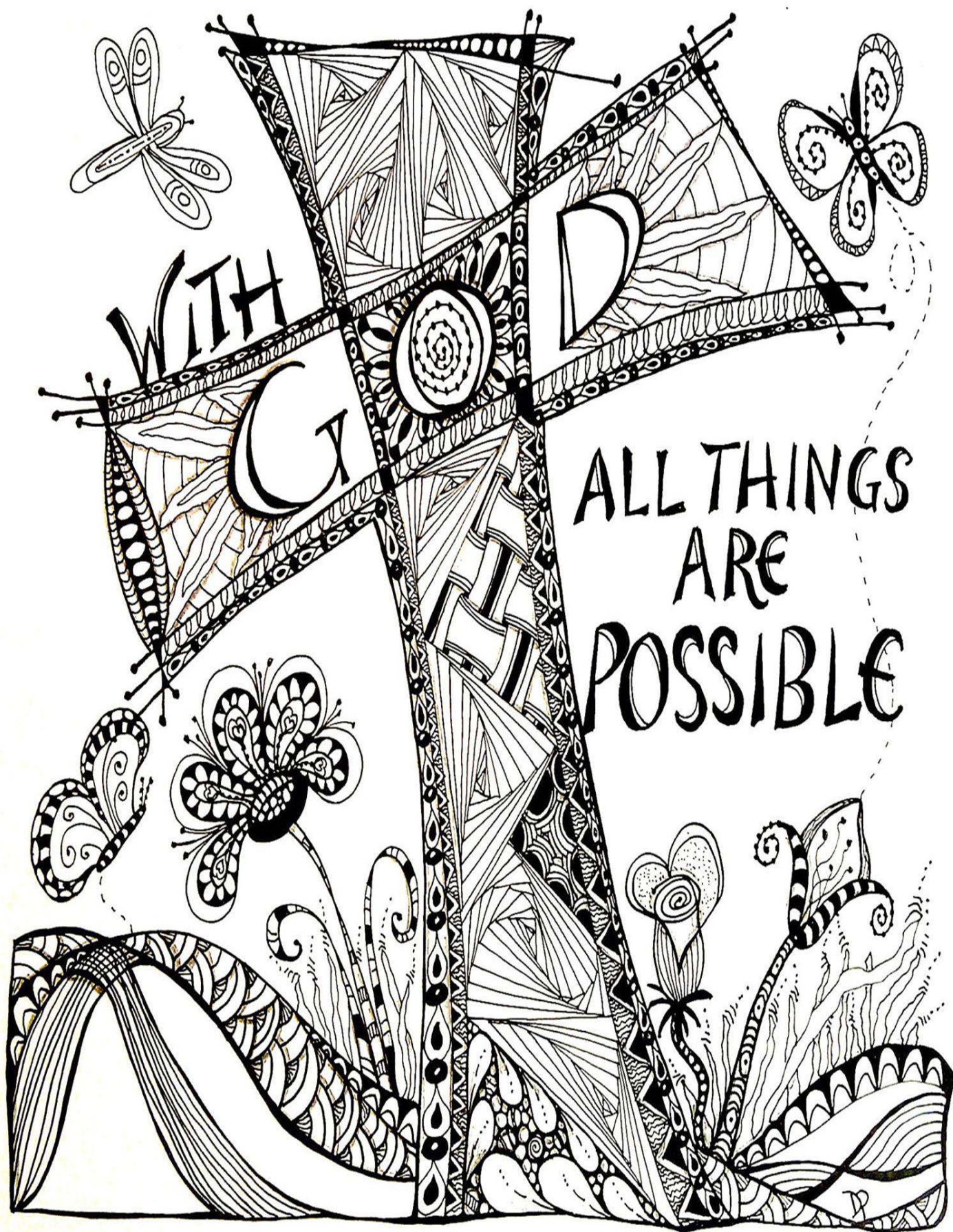


"Make a clean break
with your sins and invest
in what is right."

Daniel 4:27







NEBUCHADNEZZAR WORD SEARCH

H L J J Q M Z A Y F U Z C P E Z F H V T
I I K U H I F B J M D U A C M S L I R W
T J V Y F O W R N E W G Z N V T K U H Y
J C O K P D G L D T E F S C T V T P Y U
H J B R O K Y N O S A E R M O H I K G K
B H I B I E L E Y L E D D P J G Q R M Y
C D Y D H R N W I M E Y G R Q W S E P H
E L D S H Y A G B P B I P E L D S N U F
G Q G W Q T D Z A E D F C M P K B A V Q
H H C A U E C R Z Z V B V H V A O I E P
G Y G L F Z T F L E N L U Y B A E P Z H
Q O E C R E V Z O I N A I Y G G Z Q U M
P F W C D Q O A U I P D L Y Y S P F U G
O R E N M V S N P D Y O A M Q A E R I Q
C G Y Z N L R I A H N E P H D U U C L W
S Q B R V S K S W Z G Z N B C W V G Q G
P S Z D S R D E S S E L B P O U J O B X
Q C A Y L S L H C P N C S R O S B W V W
X P N R B B D L P Z W L C Y K Y I E B D
V C R Q G B F S R V Y W N R P H U J N I

BABYLON

GRASS

PRIDE

BLESSED

HAIR

REASON

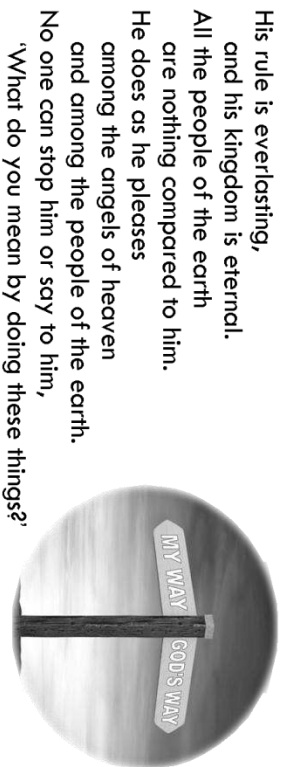
CLAWS

NEBUCHADNEZZAR

TRUTH

DEPARTED

OXEN



"When my sanity returned to me, so did my honor and glory and kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored as head of my kingdom, with even greater honor than before.

"Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and glorify and honor the King of heaven. All his acts are just and true, and he is able to humble the proud." (Daniel 4:34b-37)

When Nebuchadnezzar recognized God as the supreme ruler of all things, God restored him as the King over the Babylonian Empire. But there was even more to it than that! You see, Nebuchadnezzar recognized that before his seven years living like a wild animal, he was a very prideful person. The king realized that God was the one who humbled him and brought him to a point of repentance.

The Bible says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (Proverbs 3:34, James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5). The Bible also tells us that God hates a prideful attitude (Proverbs 6:16-17), and He will do whatever it takes to humble us and bring us to repentance!

What is it going to take in your life for God to get your attention?

When faced with this decision, will you choose your way or God's way?

A TALE OF TWO KINGS

A long time ago in a land far, far away called Babylon, there lived a king. This king's name was Nebuchadnezzar. King Nebuchadnezzar was the greatest king of one of the greatest kingdoms that ever existed. All this 'greatness' kind of went to the king's head. He became very proud of all he had accomplished.

One day, while Nebuchadnezzar was sleeping, God sent him a vision. He had a vision of a giant tree that was tall and green, and it provided shade and fruit for everyone—birds, animals and even people. But in his vision, a holy messenger commanded that the tree be chopped down, leaving only the stump to remind the people of the greatness of the tree.

One of the king's wise men, Daniel, explained the dream to the king. He said, "Here is what the dream means: the kingdom of Babylon will fall and you, O King, will live outside and eat grass like an animal for seven years. God is doing this to you so you will learn that He is the one who rules over the kingdoms of the world." Then Daniel begged the king, "Please take my advice. Stop sinning and do what is right. Break from your wicked past and be merciful to the poor. Show God that you've really changed and then maybe he will change His mind and let you remain as king."

The king did not change. In fact, a whole year went by and nothing ever happened. Then one day, as King Nebuchadnezzar was looking out from the roof of his palace, he said, "Look at what an awesome city I have built. Babylon is my creation. I built this by my own power. I built this as my royal home so everyone can see how awesome I am."

As the king was saying those words, a holy messenger came down and proclaimed, "O King Nebuchadnezzar, you are no longer the king of this kingdom. You will no longer live like a real person; you will live in the fields with the wild animals and eat



grass to keep you alive. For seven years, you will live like that. Then we will see if you have changed your attitude and recognize that God is the One who is really in control!"

And so it happened, just as the holy messenger said...

But this is a tale of two kings—King Nebuchadnezzar and King Belshazzar. King Belshazzar was a descendant of King Nebuchadnezzar. He too was the king of Babylon, and he too had the wrong idea of the origin of his power and authority. Here's his story:

Belshazzar was an evil king who liked to have enormous parties where people behaved very badly. One night, the king was having a party for 1,000 of his upper class friends. Everyone was involved with lots of drinking and uncontrolled passion and pleasure. This was not the first time that Belshazzar had a party like this, but at this party he was thinking about doing something that he had never done before—using the sacred, golden cups from God's Temple.



Many years earlier, about the time that Nebuchadnezzar became King of Babylon, the golden cups that were used to worship Jehovah God in the Temple in Jerusalem were brought to Babylon. This happened at the same time that Daniel and his friends were taken as captives to Babylon. These cups were set apart for a holy purpose, but King Belshazzar wanted to use them for an evil purpose.

In both of our stories today, each of these kings had a choice to make—choose to honor God by obeying His command or choose to dishonor Him with their actions and attitudes.

So what did they choose?

King Belshazzar chose to dishonor God. He used the golden cups in his wild party and praised their idols made of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood and stone while he did it. As soon as he did, all the people at the

party saw the fingers of a human hand writing on the plaster wall of the king's palace. When the king saw this, his face turned pale with fear, his knees knocked together and his legs gave way beneath him.

So what was the hand writing on the wall? It wrote these words in Aramaic:

"**Mene, mene, tekel upharsin.**" King Belshazzar did not know what the words meant. Fortunately, Daniel was able to explain the meaning of these words. He said:

"**Mene** means 'numbered'—God has numbered the days of your reign and has brought it to an end.

Tekel means 'weighed'—you have been weighed on the balances and have not measured up.

Parsin means 'divided'—your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and Persians." (Daniel 5:25-28)

With these four simple words, God declared that the Babylonian Empire would cease to exist. That very night, King Belshazzar was killed.

Belshazzar had a choice—honor God or dishonor God—and he chose poorly! The result of his choices not only brought about his death, but also brought about the end of one of the greatest empires in the history of the world. God tried to get his attention, but he chose to do what he wanted to do with no regard for God and His ways.

So what happened with King Nebuchadnezzar? I'm glad you asked!

You see, King Nebuchadnezzar was also given a choice to honor and recognize God as the ruler over everything. Do you remember what had happened to him earlier? Just after declaring how great he was and how awesome the city of Babylon was, God declared that he would lose his kingship and live like an animal for seven whole years.

At the end of that seven years of living like an animal, the Bible tells us that Nebuchadnezzar looked up to heaven—his sanity restored—and he 'praised and worshipped the Most High and honored the one who lives forever' (Daniel 4:34a). In fact, Nebuchadnezzar went on to say this about God:

