



SESSION 1 of 4

# The king's dream

## MEETING AIM

To explore how glory belongs to God.

## BIBLE PASSAGE

Daniel 2

## BACKGROUND

The book of Daniel is set in Babylon, a hostile territory where Daniel and other faithful Jews lived in exile during the 6<sup>th</sup> Century BC. History isn't the point of Daniel, however, his extraordinary stories are about being faithful to God in a dangerous world in which unpredictable leaders appear to have all the power.

## 5 CIRCLE TIME

As children arrive, chat about dreams. Who remembers theirs? Does anyone have any strange or scary dreams they'd like to share? Wonder together about whether dreams mean anything.

## 5 INTRO ACTIVITY

**You will need:** paper; pens; some pictures of weird animals (eg a platypus or seahorse)  
Put the children in pairs. Give one child a picture of a creature, and give their partner a pen and paper. The first child's job is to communicate to their partner what the creature is without naming it. First, try mind-reading! Then describe it carefully. Their partner should draw the mystery creature according to the description. When the drawing is finished, can it be identified? Compare the drawings with the originals.

## 10 BIBLE STORY

**You will need:** A4 paper; long sheets of lining paper; pens; one even longer, double-width sheet of lining paper; a rubber band  
Before the session, draw a mountain on the double-width sheet of lining paper. Scrunch this up into a ball and secure it with a rubber band. Tell this story:

Once there was a horrible king in Babylon called Nebuchadnezzar. He was so horrible

that he'd probably chop your head off just for saying his name incorrectly! What was his name again? *Ask children to repeat the name and see who would survive!*

One night, King Nebuchadnezzar had a terrible dream. He shook and shouted for all his wise men. "Explain my dream!" demanded the king.

"Yes, your majesty," grovelled the wise men. "Tell us your dream and we will explain it."

"Oh no," said the king, "that would be far too easy. You've got to guess! Go on – tell me what I dreamt!" So the wise men all tried to read the king's mind. *Ask children to draw their own guesses on A4 paper. What dream might have scared the king? Then share your ideas and discuss their variety!*

"No!" shouted the king. "None of you have got it. I'm going to kill you all!"

So the king's executioner rounded up all the wise men in Babylon. He woke up the wisest man of all, whose name was Daniel. Daniel and his three friends were faithful to God, but they were stuck in Babylon, far from home and forced to work for Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel said: "Wait! If the king will give me time I'll explain his dream."

Daniel and his three friends prayed all night long. They asked God, who is more powerful than any king, to show Daniel the dream and its meaning.

The next morning, Daniel said to the king: "None of us knows the answer, but God knows everything and he showed me that you dreamt about a gigantic statue!" *Describe the statue and invite the children to draw the head at the top of their lining paper sheet, then fold it over and pass it on for the next stage of the drawing, like a game of consequences: a golden head, chest and arms of silver, bronze belly and thighs, iron shins and feet of iron and clay. When you have finished, unfold each drawing and admire the results. Ask a volunteer to hold up their statue.*

Suddenly, a small stone smacked into the statue's feet, smashing them to bits. *Ask another volunteer to throw the 'stone' (the screwed-up ball of paper) at the statue and topple it.*

With a terrifying groan, the statue crashed to the ground and turned to dust, but the stone that broke the statue grew into the biggest mountain the world has ever seen. *Open out the 'stone' to reveal a mountain that blots out the fallen statue.*

Daniel said: "This dream shows the future. God gave you your power, oh king, as great as gold. After yours, there will be one kingdom after another until God's kingdom takes over. It may start off small, but it will rule the world and last for ever."

"Wow!" said Nebuchadnezzar. "This God of yours is the greatest!" He rewarded Daniel and his friends with the best jobs in Babylon.

## 5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Chat about the Bible story using these questions. Try to involve all the children in the discussion:

- What was your favourite part of the story?
- Did the dream of the statue and the stone remind you of anything?
- Why do you think this dream scared Nebuchadnezzar?
- What will it be like when God's kingdom rules the world?
- What questions would you like to ask Daniel about this story?

## 5 CREATIVE RESPONSE

**You will need:** stars cut out of gold card (about 8cm wide); permanent markers

Explain that when Daniel saw and understood the king's dream he was able to do something amazing that no one else could do. He explained that he wasn't especially clever or wise: God had shown him the dream and its meaning. Daniel gave God the glory for the things he was good at.

On the gold stars, invite children to write or draw things they are good at. Explain that these gifts are not just limited to talents such as music or football; some people are good at understanding other people's feelings or never giving up. Help each other by suggesting things others are good at. Chat about where these gifts come from. Do our talents belong to us? How do we use them? How can we give God the glory?

## 5 PRAYER

Take the children outside or, if the weather is bad, gather around an open doorway. Invite them to look at God's world and find something that makes them say "Wow!" Natural, man-made, tiny or huge; anything from a daisy to a skyscraper could be an object of wonder.

Say: "God, the world reflects your glory. We praise you! Wow!" Then name something you have noticed.

Invite the children to take turns saying "Wow!" and noticing things. End by saying "Amen" together.

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SESSION 2 of 4

# The fiery furnace

## MEETING AIM

To explore how we can stand up for our faith.

## BIBLE PASSAGE

Daniel 3

## BACKGROUND

We're still in Babylon, a hostile territory ruled by the cruel and unpredictable King Nebuchadnezzar. This story concerns the three faithful Jews who supported Daniel in prayer when all the king's advisers looked to him to interpret the king's dream and save them from execution. This time the trio find themselves on their own and face another threat to their lives.

## 5 CIRCLE TIME

As the children arrive, chat about the physical activities they have done this week. Explain that they will be moving about and using their bodies a lot today, so start with some simple stretching – up high, down low, out to the sides – followed by loosely shaking each arm from fingertips to shoulder, and each leg from toes to hip.

## 10 INTRO ACTIVITY

**You will need:** a selection of "Would you rather...?" questions

Before the session, come up with "Would you rather...?" questions. Have some straightforward ones, such as: "Would you rather eat snails or frogs' legs?" and "Would you rather be too cold in the Arctic or too hot in the jungle?" Also include some more outlandish ones, such as "Would you rather have hair for teeth or teeth for hair?"

Sit the children down to begin with. Invite them to vote by standing up for the first option and staying seated for the second option. Chat about why they made their choice.

## 15 BIBLE STORY

**You will need:** three freeze-frame descriptions on cards (see below)

Make three cards, each bearing one of these descriptions: "Four people alive and singing inside a giant oven", "Three men standing while everyone else is bowing down" and "Two men making a giant bonfire that's burning seven times hotter than it should be".

With no introduction, give the freeze-frame descriptions to the group and ask them to create the scene as if they've paused a film. They can use their bodies, gestures and facial expressions to tell that particular moment of the story in whatever way they choose. Emphasise that they do not have to know the story: they are imagining the freeze-frame in their own way. If you have a small group, create each freeze-frame together in turn; if you have more children, they could divide into three groups and create one each.

Show each freeze-frame to the group and wonder together: who might these people be? What could be happening here? How do you think these people are feeling? What might happen next? Decide together which order the freeze-frames should appear in. Some children might recognise this Bible story, while others might come up with wild interpretations. Accept every answer with enthusiasm, as the aim here is to engage the children in the dramatic moments of the narrative. Go on to tell this story:

King Nebuchadnezzar was the cruel and crazy king of Babylon. If people disagreed with him he killed them in horribly inventive ways. Once he built an enormous gold statue and ordered everyone to bow down and worship it. He threatened to throw them into his fiery furnace if they didn't. It was like a giant pizza oven, full of fire and big enough to swallow several people whole!

The statue went up and everyone in Babylon fell down on their faces to worship it. Everyone apart from three faithful Jews called Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that is. They would only worship God, so they stayed standing. *Show the first freeze-frame.*

"Worship my statue," ordered the king, "or else I'll throw you into my fiery furnace!"

"We love God," replied Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. "He can save us from your fiery furnace. Whatever happens, we'll never worship your statue!"

The king was furious and ordered that his fiery furnace be heated up seven times hotter than it normally was. *Show the second freeze-frame.*

The king's guards threw Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into the giant oven. It was so hot the guards were eaten up by the flames!

The king listened for screams, but instead he heard singing. Impossible! He peered into the fiery furnace and saw not *three* people but *four*! And the fourth shone like a star with a fierce white light, beautiful and terrifying at once, like no human being the king had ever seen. *Show the third freeze-frame.*

The king ordered Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego out of the fiery furnace. When he saw that the fire hadn't even touched them he praised God, saying: "Only Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego's God could have done this amazing thing! He sent an angel to save his servants. Anyone who doesn't worship this God will have their arms and legs pulled off, and their houses knocked down!"

## 10 CHATTING TOGETHER

Chat about the Bible story using these questions. Try to involve all the children in your discussion:

- Which part of this story do you like best, and why?
- What do you think of King Nebuchadnezzar?
- How might Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego have felt when they were the only ones not bowing down to the statue?
- What questions would you like to ask God about this story?
- Have you ever felt like the odd one out because you believe in God?

## 10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

**You will need:** glossy magazines; a large sheet of paper; glue sticks and scissors

Ask the children to think about things the world wants us to worship today. Use the magazines to spark ideas, cutting out objects that invite us to worship them: expensive cars, the latest mobile phone, the glossiest hair. Make a collage of these objects in a totem-pole shape to echo the king's gold statue. As you do so, encourage the children to talk about school. Do they and their classmates think the same things are important? Talk about their experience of being a Christian at school.

## 5 PRAYER

Invite the children to stand up and join in with the actions in bold:

"God, sometimes we want to **sit down** and stay quiet about believing in you. Help us **stand up** for what we believe, be strong in our faith and **bow down** only to worship you. Amen."

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SESSION 3 of 4

# The writing on the wall

## MEETING AIM

To remember that God is in charge.

## BIBLE PASSAGE

Daniel 5

## BACKGROUND

Exiled in Babylon, Daniel is about to meet King Belshazzar, the son of King Nebuchadnezzar. Like his father, Belshazzar swaggers about as if his immense power is of his own making, not a gift from God, but Belshazzar doesn't know that this is to be the very last night of his reign and his empire. God intends to snatch away his power, and Babylon is about to be conquered by his enemies, the Persians.

## 5 CIRCLE TIME

As the children arrive, welcome each one by name. Spread out some party food in the middle of your circle and share a small feast together (remembering to be aware of food hygiene and allergy issues). Invite children to chat about their week and talk about other feasts they have enjoyed.

## 5 INTRO ACTIVITY

**You will need:** verbal, logical and visual puzzles (search online for riddles, number puzzles, matchstick puzzles and picture puzzles. CBBC is a good source)

Show the group the puzzles you have brought. Invite them to have a go at solving some of them individually, in pairs or as a group. As you work, chat about which puzzles they like best and how it feels when they solve a puzzle.

## 10 BIBLE STORY

**You will need:** four white cards, each with a word written in white crayon ('MENE' 'MENE' 'TEKEL' 'PARSIN'); newspaper; a paintbrush; watercolour paint; water; a marker pen

Make sure you have your props close at hand and gather the children together for the story:

This story starts with a feast. We've had a small feast today, but this was something else. The host was King Belshazzar of Babylon, and he invited 1,000 lords! Imagine how much they ate and drank!

They drank so much wine that King Belshazzar thought it would be fun to fetch the treasure his father had stolen from the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. He and his 1,000 lords and all their wives guzzled their wine out of God's gold and silver goblets! To make matters worse, they cheered for all their made-up gods!

Suddenly, a ghostly hand appeared! Pale fingers began writing on the wall right behind the king's head. *Spread the four white cards out on the newspaper and invite the children to wash watercolour paint over the surface to reveal the words.*

The king shivered and shook. He turned as pale as the wall and started to sweat. "Help!" he shouted. "Fetch someone who can tell me what these words mean. The reward is a royal cloak, a gold chain and a top job in my kingdom!" All the king's magicians, wise men and fortune tellers tried, but they didn't have a clue. *Guess together what the words might mean.*

Then King Belshazzar's mum said: "I know who you need: Daniel. Your father, King Nebuchadnezzar, thought he was the wisest man in the kingdom. Daniel's God is special and has given him the power to understand dreams, riddles and puzzles of all kinds. He's the only man for the job. Send for Daniel!"

The king sent for Daniel, pointed at the words on the wall and said: "I hear that you have the power to understand dreams, riddles and puzzles of all kinds. I need someone who can tell me what these words mean. The reward is a royal cloak, a gold chain and a top job in my kingdom!"

Daniel said: "You can keep your rewards, they're not for me. But I will tell you what these words mean." Daniel looked hard at the words and prayed for God to reveal their meaning. *Carefully turn over the four cards in turn - 'MENE', 'MENE', 'TEKEL' and 'PARSIN' - and use the marker pen to write a symbol on the back of each: '+', '+', 'kg' and '÷'. Now identify the symbols together and guess what they might mean.*

Daniel said to the king: "You have forgotten who is in charge here. God has given you everything you have: your power, your palace, your lords and even your life! It's all God's, yet you used the goblets from God's temple for your wild party, and you cheered for all your made-up gods instead!"

He continued: "The '+' and '+' symbols mean that God has finished adding up the days of your reign: it's over! 'Kg' means that he's weighed your worth and you're not good

enough! And '÷' means that he's going to divide your kingdom and share it out between your enemies!" *Point to each of the symbols as Daniel explains them.*

King Belshazzar duly gave Daniel his reward: a royal cloak, a gold chain and a top job in the kingdom. But that night Daniel's warning came true. The Persian army took the city of Babylon by storm and killed King Belshazzar. Babylon and its empire fell into enemy hands.

## 5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Chat about the Bible story using these questions. Try to involve all the children in your discussion:

- Which bit of the story did you enjoy imagining?
- How do you think the king felt during these events?
- I wonder how Daniel felt when he realised what the mysterious message meant.
- What questions would you like to ask God about this story?
- How do people get to be powerful today?

## 5 CREATIVE RESPONSE

**You will need:** pictures of people in power today (locally, nationally and internationally); paper and pens

Identify the people in authority and talk about who or what they are in charge of today. Think about the warning God gave King Belshazzar. What warnings would we like to give these leaders? Children can draw or write their messages (in code if they prefer!).

## 5 PRAYER

**You will need:** a cross; pictures from 'Creative response'

Spread out the pictures of people in power and place the cross in the middle. Invite the children to take turns praying for people in power today, aloud if they wish. Then close by saying:

"God, all the greatness, power and glory in the world are yours. We pray for people who hold power today, whether or not we support them and whether or not they honour you. Amen."

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SESSION 4 of 4

# The lions' den

## MEETING AIM

To learn about being faithful in prayer, and about praying in different ways.

## BIBLE PASSAGE

Daniel 6

## BACKGROUND

By now, Daniel is an old man. He is still exiled in Babylon but remains faithful to God. The city has been conquered by the Persians and the new king, Darius, is as impressed by Daniel's wisdom as the old Babylonian kings had been. Once again, this is a story about being true to God even when everyone else is against you. Between them, Daniel and his friends have faced threats of dismemberment, being burned alive and now being eaten by lions, yet they have steadfastly continued to trust in God alone.

## 5 CIRCLE TIME

As the children arrive, chat together about your week. Share about the last time you prayed, giving simple information: where you were, what time of day it was and (briefly) what you said or did to help you talk and listen to God. Invite the children to share their own prayer experiences.

## 10 INTRO ACTIVITY

**You will need:** items to create a lions' den such as curtains, fabric, tables and chairs; props such as bits of tawny fur and bones cut out of white card; sand spread onto a cloth on the floor, into which you have drawn lions' paw prints (like a hand-sized cat's paw, plus claw marks)

Before the session, set up your lions' den and decorate it with the props you have collected together. Make sure it is large enough for the children to go inside.

Invite the children into the space you have created (don't tell them what it is) and ask everyone to be a detective, looking for evidence. What do they notice? Wonder together about what this place might be and what seems to have happened here. Accept everyone's answers.

## 10 BIBLE STORY

**You will need:** your lions' den from 'Intro activity'

Gather the children inside the lions' den and tell this story:

Today's story begins at the end: in this place full of bones! But whose bones are they, and why are they here? Let's find out what happened.

Do you remember Daniel? He was a wise man who loved God, but he was stuck working for the enemies of his people in Babylon. Now Babylon had a new king called Darius, who needed lots of help managing his new kingdom. He planned to give wise Daniel the top job; he was to be boss over everyone apart from the king himself.

The other important people in the kingdom were jealous of Daniel and plotted to get rid of him. They persuaded King Darius to pass an unbreakable new law: "For the next 30 days, it is a crime to pray to anyone except the king. Anyone caught praying will be thrown into the lions' den by order of the king!"

Daniel heard about this law. What do you think he did for the next 30 days? *Invite suggestions.* Daniel kept on praying to God. Three times a day he went home, knelt down, faced toward Jerusalem and prayed out loud.

Daniel's enemies said: "We've got him!" They told the king that Daniel had broken his new law. "He deserves to be thrown into the lions' den!" they said.

King Darius was very sad. He didn't want to have Daniel killed. He tried his best to save Daniel, but the new law was unbreakable. That evening his guards took Daniel to the lions' den. The king said to Daniel: "May your God save you!" And he meant it.

King Darius couldn't eat his supper or get to sleep. All night he thought about Daniel in the den with those hungry lions.

So, whose bones do you think these are? What do you think happened that night? *Invite suggestions.*

The next morning, the king went nervously to the lions' den and called out: "Daniel! Has your God saved you?"

"Yes!" shouted Daniel. "He sent an angel to save me from the lions!" The king was delighted and helped Daniel out of the den. He made a new decree: "Everyone in my kingdom should worship Daniel's God – he's the best! – by order of the king." So who do you think these bones belong to now? *Invite further suggestions.*

The king ordered that Daniel's enemies be thrown to the lions, along with their wives and children! Soon, nothing was left in the lions' den but these bones.

## 5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Chat about the Bible story using these questions. Try to involve all the children in your discussion:

- If you could be part of this story, where would you like to be and why?
- I wonder how Daniel felt when he heard that praying to God was against the law.
- I wonder how the angel stopped the lions eating Daniel. (The children might like to act out their answers.)
- What do you think of King Darius?
- What would you like to ask God about this story?

## 10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

**You will need:** pens; a large sheet of paper; a red felt-tip pen

Before the session, write: "King Darius said NO..." at the top of the sheet of paper.

Explain to the group that even when praying to God became a crime, Daniel prayed. His enemies could tell that he was praying because he went home and did it out loud, three times a day, kneeling down and facing towards Jerusalem. If praying to God were a crime now, in this country, what would give you away?

Talk about the different ways we pray. Is there a particular place, time or physical position? What do we do or say that shows we're praying? Could you pray in secret? Discuss these questions and, if it helps, create a poster together to show different things we do to pray, like the ones you see at swimming pools with a picture of each activity.

## 5 PRAYER

**You will need:** things to help children pray in different ways eg a kneeler or cushion, the Lord's Prayer, a candle or battery-operated tea light, a holding cross or some salt dough

Introduce the different ways to pray and invite the children to choose for themselves. Begin a short time of prayer by saying: "Let us pray." End by saying "Amen" together.

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