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Introduction

Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies

Welcome to the conversation! The Bible study resources you are using are created to support the bold vision of the Book of Faith initiative that calls “the whole church to become more fluent in the first language of faith, the language of Scripture, in order that we might live into our calling as a people renewed, enlivened, empowered, and sent by the Word.”

Simply put, this initiative and these resources invite you to “Open Scripture. Join the Conversation.”

We enter into this conversation based on the promise that exploring the Bible deeply with others opens us to God working in and through us. God’s Word is life changing, church changing, and world changing. Lutheran approaches to Scripture provide a fruitful foundation for connecting Bible, life, and faith.

A Session Overview

Each session is divided into the following four key sections. The amount of time spent in each section may vary based on choices you make. The core Learner Session Guide is designed for 50 minutes. A session can be expanded to as much as 90 minutes by using the Bonus Activities that appear in the Leader Session Guide.

• Gather (10-15 minutes)

Time to check in, make introductions, review homework assignments, share an opening prayer, and use the Focus Activity to introduce learners to the Session Focus.

• Open Scripture (10-15 minutes)

The session Scripture text is read using a variety of methods and activities. Learners are asked to respond to a few general questions. As leader, you may want to capture initial thoughts or questions on paper for later review.

• Join the Conversation (25-55 minutes)

Learners explore the session Scripture text through core questions and activities that cover each of the four perspectives (see diagram on p. 6). The core Learner Session Guide material may be expanded through use of the Bonus Activities provided in the Leader Session Guide. Each session ends with a brief Wrap-up and prayer.

• Extending the Conversation (5 minutes)

Lists homework assignments, including next week’s session Scripture text. The leader may choose one or more items to assign for all. Each session also includes additional Enrichment options and may include For Further Reading suggestions.

A Method to Guide the Conversation

Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies has three primary goals:

- To increase biblical fluency;
- To encourage and facilitate informed small group conversation based on God’s Word; and
- To renew and empower us to carry out God’s mission for the sake of the world.

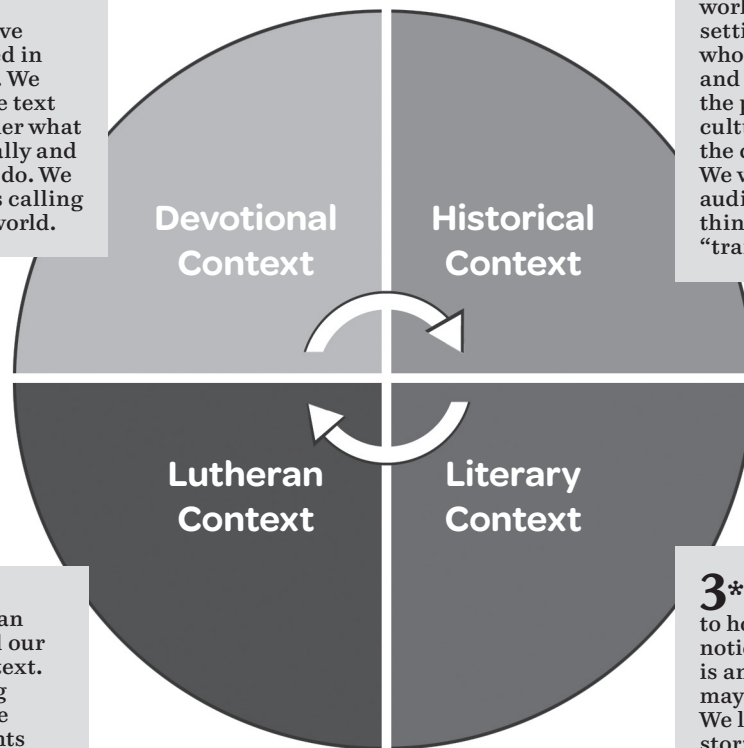
To accomplish these goals, each session will explore one or more primary Bible texts from four different angles and contexts—historical, literary, Lutheran, and devotional. These particular ways of exploring a text are not new, but used in combination they provide a full understanding of and experience with the text.

Complementing this approach is a commitment to engaging participants in active, learner-oriented Bible conversations. The resources call for prepared leaders to facilitate learner discovery, discussion, and activity. Active learning and frequent engagement with Scripture will lead to greater biblical fluency and encourage active faith.

1 We begin by reading the Bible text and reflecting on its meaning. We ask questions and identify items that are unclear. We bring our unique background and experience to the Bible, and the Bible meets us where we are.

5 We return to where we started, but now we have explored and experienced the Bible text from four different dimensions. We are ready to move into the “for” dimension. We have opened Scripture and joined in conversation for a purpose. We consider the meaning of the text for faithful living. We wonder what God is calling us (individually and as communities of faith) to do. We consider how God’s Word is calling us to do God’s work in the world.

2* We seek to understand the world of the Bible and locate the setting of the text. We explore who may have written the text and why. We seek to understand the particular social and cultural contexts that influenced the content and the message. We wonder who the original audience may have been. We think about how these things “translate” to our world today.



4 We consider the Lutheran principles that help ground our interpretation of the Bible text. We ask questions that bring those principles and unique Lutheran theological insights into conversation with the text. We discover how our Lutheran insights can ground and focus our understanding and shape our faithful response to the text.

3* We pay close attention to how the text is written. We notice what kind of literature it is and how this type of literature may function or may be used. We look at the characters, the story line, and the themes. We compare and contrast these with our own understanding and experience of life. In this interchange, we discover meaning.

*** Sessions may begin with either Historical Context or Literary Context.**

The diagram on p. 6 summarizes the general way this method is intended to work. A more detailed introduction to the method used in Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies is available in *Opening the Book of Faith* (Augsburg Fortress, 2008).

The Learner Session Guide

The Learner Session Guide content is built on the four sections (see p. 5). The content included in the main “Join the Conversation” section is considered to be the core material needed to explore the session Scripture text. Each session includes a Focus Image that is used as part of an activity or question somewhere within the core session. Other visuals (maps, charts, photographs, and illustrations) may be included to help enhance the learner’s experience with the text and its key concepts.

The Leader Session Guide

For easy reference, the Leader Session Guide contains all the content included in the Learner Session Guide and more. The elements that are unique to the Leader Session Guide are the following:

- **Before You Begin**—Helpful tips to use as you prepare to lead the session.
- **Session Overview**—Contains detailed description of key themes and content covered in each of the four contexts (Historical, Literary, Lutheran, Devotional). Core questions and activities in the Learner Session Guide are intended to emerge directly from this Session Overview.
- **Key Definitions**—Key terms or concepts that appear in the Session Overview may be illustrated or defined.
- **Facilitator’s Prayer**—To help the leader center on the session theme and leadership task.
- **Bonus Activities**—Optional activities included in each of the four sections of “Join the Conversation” used by the leader to expand the core session.
- **Tips**—A variety of helpful hints, instructions, or background content to aid leadership facilitation.
- **Looking Ahead**—Reminders to the leader about preparation for the upcoming session.

Leader and Learner

In Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies, the leader’s primary task is facilitating small group conversation and activity. These conversations are built around structured learning tasks. What is a structured learning task? It is an open question or activity that engages learners with new content and the resources they need to respond. Underlying this structured dialog approach are three primary assumptions about adult learners:

- Adult learners bring with them varied experiences and the capability to do active learning tasks;
- Adult learners learn best when they are invited to be actively involved in learning; and
- Adults are more accountable and engaged when active learning tasks are used.

Simply put, the goal is fluency in the first language of faith, the language of Scripture. How does one become fluent in a new language, proficient in building houses, or skilled at hitting a baseball? By practicing and doing in a hands-on way. Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies provides the kind of hands-on Bible exploration that will produce Bible-fluent learners equipped to do God’s work in the world.

Books of Faith Series

Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies includes several series and courses. This Daniel unit is part of the Books of Faith Series, which is designed to explore key themes and texts in the books of the Bible. Each book of the Bible reveals a unique story or message of faith. Many core themes and story lines and characters are shared by several books, but each book in its own right is a book of faith. Exploring these books of faith in depth opens us to the variety and richness of God’s written word for us.

Daniel Unit Overview

Welcome to this study of the complex, often confusing, and always intriguing book of Daniel! In our six sessions together, stories of Daniel and his friends will provide us opportunities to ponder in a variety of ways our calling as faithful disciples in troubling times. Each session will begin and end

with a devotional component inviting you to reflect on what you hear in the text and what the message of the text means for your calling to discipleship. To help you move from what you hear to its implications, the text will be explored in its literary and historical contexts and brought into dialogue with basic Lutheran teachings.

Truly, the times in which we live are troubling. As we will see, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the message of Daniel resounds as powerfully for us as for our ancestors before us.

In Session 1—Daunting Dream: What Does It Mean?—the well-known story of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of a crumbling statue (Daniel 2:25-49) provides resources to talk about what it means to live as responsible citizens of our country and faithful disciples of the kingdom of God. How do Lutherans see the relationship between church and state? For what do we pray when we say, “Your kingdom come”?

In Session 2—Feet in the Fire: Taking the Heat for Our Faith—the story of the three men in the fiery furnace (Daniel 3) serves as an empowering example of faithfulness under fire. The story witnesses to God’s presence with us in the “fiery furnace” places our faith journeys may take us. The Lutheran distinction between the theology of the cross and the theology of glory will help us see more clearly the implications of the text for us.

In Session 3—Reading the Signs: Writing on the Wall and in Our Hearts—we will use the contrasting descriptions of King Belshazzar and Daniel (Daniel 5) as a springboard to discuss contrasting ways of living in this world. Freed through baptism to trust that God declares us beloved as we are, we are invited, like Daniel before us, to remain centered in our God and comfortable in our own skins.

In Session 4—Nightmarish Dream: What Does It Mean?—we encounter the perplexing world of apocalyptic literature. Breaking the code to understand Daniel’s nightmare (Daniel 7), we gain strength from the angel’s interpretation to persevere as faithful disciples in troubling times. It is for this strength that we pray in the petition, “Save us from the time of trial.”

In Session 5—Neck in the Noose: Paying the Ultimate Cost of Faith—we see how trust in God’s promised future empowers Daniel’s community to endure martyrdom rather than compromise their faith (Daniel 10:1, 18-21; 11:1-35). Breaking the apocalyptic code to reveal the call for persistent discipleship under pressure, we are challenged to reflect deeply on the kind of courage for which we pray in the petition, “Deliver us from evil.”

In Session 6—Reading the Signs: Written in the Book and on Our Hearts—the apocalyptic message of Daniel 7-12 comes full circle in the vision of the resurrection of the dead at the final judgment (Daniel 12). Confident in our baptismal identity and, like our faith ancestors, trusting in God, we live and die in resurrection hope.

Daniel 2:25-49



Focus Statement

Until the day when God's kingdom will replace all others, God works through human rulers, holding them accountable for their actions. As Lutherans praying, "Your kingdom come," we seek the Spirit's guidance to live as responsible citizens and faithful disciples.

Key Verse

The king said to Daniel, "Truly your God is God of gods and Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery!" Daniel 2:47

Focus Image



Statue of the Prophet Daniel at Sanctuary of Bom Jesus.
Photo: Eric Gaba (Wikimedia Commons user: Sting).

Daunting Dream: What Does It Mean?

Session Preparation

Before You Begin . . .

Reflect for a moment on what it means to you to be a citizen of this country and a disciple in the kingdom of God. Our lesson for today will invite us to ponder this relationship and, in particular, to think about how we as Lutherans understand the relationship between the two "kingdoms," (secular and sacred).

Session Instructions

1. Read this Session Guide completely and highlight or underline any portions you wish to emphasize with the group. Note any Bonus Activities you wish to do.
2. If you plan special activities, check to see what materials you'll need, if any.
3. Have extra Bibles on hand in case a member of the group forgets to bring one.
4. Have copies of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* available for participants. If your congregation has copyright permission, make copies of ELW 887 and 888 for each member of the group.

Session Overview

Today we begin a six-session study of Daniel, a book whose opening chapters invite us to ponder deeply what it means to live as citizens of our nation and of the kingdom of God. We will see that God works through secular rulers, holding them accountable for their actions. One day, God's kingdom will replace all others; until that day, we are called to responsible citizenship and faithful discipleship.

LITERARY CONTEXT

The stories of Daniel 1-6, often called "wisdom tales," examine various issues confronting Jews who lived in the **diaspora**. In Daniel 2, King Nebuchadnezzar's daunting dream sets the stage for explorations of the delicate balancing act these Jews face as they navigate the periodically treacherous waters of two sometimes competing loyalties—allegiance to the foreign culture and government under which they live, and faithfulness to their

SESSION ONE

? **Diaspora:**

This geographic designation refers to all the areas outside Judah in which Jews resided.

? **King Nebuchadnezzar:**

The king of the Babylonian Empire responsible for the defeat of Judah in 587 B.C.E. and the subsequent deportation of many Jews to Babylon. Although Nebuchadnezzar was responsible for Judah's defeat, he is regarded positively in Daniel. We learn from the prophets Jeremiah (for example, 25:1-14) and Ezekiel (for example, 12:1-16) that many Jews regarded the exile as appropriate consequences for the community's repeated faithlessness to God.

? **Belteshazzar:**

The new name given to Daniel by the Babylonians after they deported him to Babylon.

Tip:

Stones and mountains both symbolize stability and power, characteristics often used to describe God.

Tip:

In very general geographic terms, ancient Babylon is modern Iraq and ancient Persia is modern Iran.

God. Chapters 1-2 introduce the explorations; chapters 3-6 develop them.

That the God of the Jews is the sole revealer of all mysteries, including the future **Nebuchadnezzar** has seen but not recognized in his daunting dream, becomes evident in Daniel's (**Belteshazzar's**) offer to recount and interpret the dream (Daniel 2:25-30). God has revealed to Daniel that the metals that make up the statue King Nebuchadnezzar has seen represent kingdoms—superpowers—of increasingly inferior status (represented by the quality of metal). You may want to point out that although the kingdoms are described in terms of declining value, none of them is considered evil. One day God will replace all human kingdoms with an everlasting kingdom (the stone that crushes and becomes a mountain, verses 31-45). Until that day, human rulers govern at God's bidding and are accountable to recognize that God alone is the source of ultimate power.

Nebuchadnezzar is portrayed positively in the dream's interpretation and in his response (verses 37, 47). Nonetheless, the great kingdom given him by God will fall (verse 40). Although Nebuchadnezzar gets the point that God, not he, truly is in charge, he will backslide into overestimating himself in following stories. By imagining how Nebuchadnezzar might have felt, participants will have the opportunity to begin thinking about the relationship between human rule and God's rule.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

By setting a story in an earlier time period than it actually addresses, an author gains freedom to raise issues too controversial to discuss directly. We see this practice in Daniel and in Revelation, where Babylon represents Rome. It is helpful to remember that our faith does not rest on the "historical accuracy" of a story's setting. The Holy Spirit works in many different ways to proclaim God's living Word to us.

The picture of a statue of four metals of declining value was common in ancient Near Eastern thought. Generally, the four metals represented the chronologically successive superpowers of Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece. The author of Daniel 2 uses the picture to proclaim that the God of the Jews alone is sovereign in the universe. The situation will change dramatically in Daniel 7-12, when Persian rule gives way to Greek.

Human superpowers, ruling at God's behest, are accountable to God and have a limited lifespan. One day they will give way to God's everlasting kingdom. This message gave confidence and courage to Diaspora Jews straddling the sometimes competing loyalties of allegiance to their new culture/government and faithfulness to their God.

The concluding question of this section invites participants to list ways their faith comes into tension with cultural expectations, providing them a concrete way to enter the story's dynamics by naming how we too straddle competing loyalties. Examples of potential tensions include debates about whether/where to display the country's flag, the scheduling of youth sporting events on Sunday morning, questions regarding political stances the church should/shouldn't take, and so on.

LUTHERAN CONTEXT

In response to issues of his time, Luther developed the "two kingdoms" teaching to address the relationship between secular (culture/government) and sacred realms. Consistent with Daniel's insistence that human rulers rule at God's bidding, the two kingdoms teaching affirms that God has instituted civil government to maintain peace and administer justice (left-hand kingdom). Because government is ordained by God, Christians are called to take seriously the responsibilities of citizenship within this kingdom (see Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-14).

The stone that becomes a mountain in Daniel 2:34-35, 44-45 anticipates the coming of the right-hand kingdom, the kingdom of God. Breaking into our world through Jesus' death and resurrection, this kingdom will come in its fullness when Jesus returns in glory. Until that time, it breaks in wherever the gospel is proclaimed in word and deed. Incorporated into this kingdom in our baptisms, we are called to live and serve authentically in both kingdoms. Whenever we pray, "Your kingdom come," we are asking to be included in God's mission as responsible citizens and faithful disciples in our time and place.

The United States' constitutional guarantee of separation of church and state resonates well with the two kingdoms teaching. Politicians and pundits who use the language of "Christian America" run the risk of mingling the two kingdoms, either to give sacred mandate to the left-hand kingdom or to secularize the right-hand kingdom. Neither form of mingling serves the gospel well.

SESSION ONE

DEVOTIONAL CONTEXT

In many ways, hymns are a form of biblical interpretation. By reflecting on songs that move us deeply or irritate us mightily, we learn a lot about what we believe and how we see ourselves putting our beliefs into action. Two hymns selected from the “national songs” section of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* provide a helpful resource for learners to prayerfully reflect on implications of today’s lessons.

“O Beautiful for Spacious Skies” (ELW 888) is a favorite hymn of many people. Imagery from the natural world (“amber waves of grain,” “purple mountain majesties,” “fruited plain”) captures the present beauty of the land. Language of “heroes proved in liberating strife” recalls our history and that of “patriot dream beyond the years” points to our future. Each verse concludes with a prayer for “brotherhood,” “nobleness,” or “self-control, liberty in law”—all values central to our forebears’ vision of America. Daniel’s interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream reminds us of the need to keep our national past, present, and future in perspective. Our nation is not God’s kingdom on earth; any nation that assumes that role will be held accountable for its arrogance. It is fitting that we thank God for the beauty in which we live and pray that God guide us to be responsible citizens of our land. This is part of our call to faithful discipleship.

“This Is My Song” (ELW 887) captures well the universal scope of God’s reign. All nations, not just ours, have their rightful place in the kingdom of the left hand. The petition “Thy kingdom come” anticipates the day when God’s right-hand kingdom will replace all earthly kingdoms and, in the hymn’s words, “we will all learn to live as one,” and summons us to faithful discipleship in both kingdoms now.

This section concludes with learners considering the term “God-given wisdom.” Daniel’s wisdom and dream interpretations come from God. Is all wisdom from God? How does the wisdom we exercise as human beings match with God’s wisdom or instruction? It will be interesting to explore what sort of wisdom learners would want to share with leaders in government or in the church.

Facilitator’s Prayer

Ruling God, I thank you for the gifts of government and of the gospel. Send your Holy Spirit in our midst, that in our time together we may faithfully and fruitfully ponder our callings as responsible citizens of our country and faithful disciples of the gospel. May your kingdom come through us this day and always. Amen.

Gather (10-15 minutes)**Check-in**

Take time to greet each person and invite learners to introduce themselves to one another. If everyone in the group already knows each other, you might want to invite them to check-in by sharing what they hope to gain from this study.

Pray

Gracious God, we thank you for our baptismal calling to service in Jesus’ name. As we begin the study of Daniel, open our hearts and minds to ponder deeply your Word as revealed through the stories we will encounter. Trusting in the Holy Spirit’s presence among us, we offer ourselves as your disciples ready to learn and grow and to become ever more equipped for service as citizens of our nation and faithful disciples of the gospel. Amen.

Focus Activity

Write down the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word pair “church and state.”

Open Scripture (10-15 minutes)

Invite volunteers to share strange dreams they’ve had with the group or, looking at the Focus Image, to imagine how they would have reacted if they had dreamt it. Then ask one skilled reader to read the entire text, while the remaining participants feel free to doodle what they hear on scratch paper.

OR

Have learners volunteer to read the parts of the narrator (everything not in quotations), Arioch, the king, and Daniel.

**Tip:**

Invite the group to pray the prayer in unison.

**Tip:**

The purpose of the question is simply to get learners thinking about the kinds of issues discussed in Daniel 2.



Bonus Activity:

To set the story in its larger context, read Daniel 2:1-24. This section heightens the sense of how daunting the dream was and how frustrated Nebuchadnezzar became at his advisors' inability to recount and interpret it. Note that Chaldeans were a professional group of Babylonians.



Bonus Activity:

In many ways, Daniel's adventures parallel those of Joseph. As young adults, both were forcibly removed to foreign cultures where both advanced in foreign courts due to their God-given ability to interpret dreams. Turn to Genesis 41 to see Joseph's initial encounter with Pharaoh and his interpretation of Pharaoh's dream.

Read Daniel 2:25-49.

- What strikes you in this snippet of the Daniel 2 story?
- If this country were part of the statue, which metal do you think it would be? Why?
- What do you suppose Daniel means when he refers to the kingdom that will stand forever?



Join the Conversation (25-55 minutes)

Literary Context

The book of Daniel begins with six stories, all but one of which recount the adventures of young, bright, pious Jews deported to Babylon in the aftermath of Judah's defeat by Babylon in 587 B.C.E. Forcibly removed from home, the young men are given new names and a Babylonian education to prepare them to serve as loyal advisors to King Nebuchadnezzar. Despite their refusal to defile themselves by eating from the royal rations, the young men flourish and advance in the court (Daniel 1).

1. In Chapter 2, King Nebuchadnezzar's rage at his native advisors' inability to recount and interpret his daunting dream (verses 1-11) sets the stage for Daniel's offer to do so. His divinely revealed interpretation lays out a major theme of the book: all human rulers, including great King Nebuchadnezzar, rule only at God's bidding. One by one all human kingdoms will crumble until finally, in God's own time, they all will give way to God's never-ending kingdom (verses 12-45).

- How would you summarize Daniel's response to having the mystery of Nebuchadnezzar's dream revealed to him (2:19-22)?
- Reread Daniel 2:31-45. Having read the explanation of the dream, what do you see differently now?

2. Hearing the interpretation, Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges the power of Daniel's God (verses 46-49). Take a look at the Focus Image. Imagine that you are Nebuchadnezzar looking at Daniel and pondering his interpretation of your dream. How do you feel?

3. Can you recall others in the Bible who interpreted dreams? What dreams did they interpret?

Historical Context

Remember the TV series *M*A*S*H*? By setting the show in the Korean War, its creators were able to address hot button issues of a later time—the turbulent years of the Vietnam War. The Holy Spirit inspired the author of Daniel to use a similar practice. The book of Daniel was probably written sometime after Alexander the Great, the leader of the Greek Empire, died in 323 B.C.E. The Babylonian, Median, and Persian superpowers (gold, silver, and bronze statue layers in today’s text) were long gone, and the Greek Empire had splintered into contentious factions (iron and clay layers).

During the centuries spanning the rise and fall of these empires, Jews had spread throughout the ancient Near Eastern world. Living in foreign cultures, these Jews had to straddle two sometimes competing sets of loyalties—their faithfulness to God’s covenant with them and their allegiance to their new culture and the government under whose rule they lived. The stories of Daniel 1–6 address tensions related to this balancing act. Although they are set mostly during the time of Babylonian rule (587–547 B.C.E.), the stories actually address hot-button balancing act issues of the later times of Persian and Greek rule (547–167 B.C.E.).

1. Locate Jerusalem and Babylon on the map. The Jewish people were defeated by the Babylonians and many were forced to leave their homeland and live in exile in Babylon (see 2 Kings 24:1-25:12).

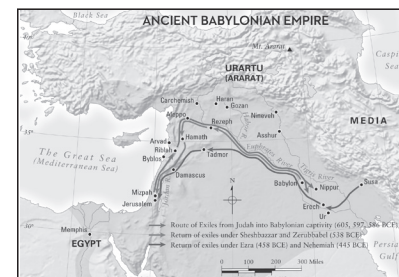
- How do you imagine the Jewish people felt about being forced to live in exile in Babylon?

2. How do you think setting the Daniel stories in the time of the exile might have affected how the original audience read these stories? Notice, for example, what happens in verse 48. How might Jewish readers have reacted to that part of the story?

3. We too sometimes discover that our faith is in tension with the expectations of our culture. What kinds of tensions between faith and culture have you encountered?

+ Bonus Activity:

Many Bibles have chronological charts detailing the rise and fall of ancient superpowers, along with maps showing the extent of their empires. For example, see the time line on pp. 30–32 of Lutheran Study Bible. Suggest that learners check to see if they have access to this information. Your congregation may have some flip chart maps. You also can find them available online by selecting the “images” tab on your search engine.



+ Bonus Activity:

For further background on the Babylonian victory over Judah and the subsequent deportation of Jews to Babylon, read Jeremiah 52. The Persian edict allowing Jews who so desired to return home after the fall of the Babylonian Empire is described in Ezra 1.



Bonus Activity:

Luther wrote the Small Catechism for parents to use in instructing their children in the Christian faith. Invite participants to share memories they may have of studying the catechism in confirmation class. Encourage them to reread it now (ELW, pp. 1160–1167).

Lutheran Context

Luther used the language of “two kingdoms” to describe the themes we see in Daniel 2. God has instituted civil government (the left-hand kingdom) to maintain peace and administer justice. This kingdom is secular and does not have sacred functions. Ruling according to God’s bidding, governments are responsible for how they use their power. Those who misuse it will fall.

The right-hand kingdom, God’s kingdom, encompasses our lives as the baptized people of God. On the day when Jesus returns, this kingdom will come in its fullness. Until that day, it breaks in wherever the gospel is proclaimed in word and deed. As Luther states in his explanation of the petition “Your kingdom come,” God will do God’s saving work with or without us. We pray to be included in God’s mission as faithful disciples in our time and place.

1. Like Daniel’s community, we are called to live as loyal citizens of the left-hand kingdom and faithful disciples of the right-hand kingdom. When these calls become unbalanced, we must be ready to pay the cost.
 - With this in mind, do you think there is any conflict working for or under a ruler like Nebuchadnezzar and being a person of faith? Why or why not?
 - Is it helpful for you to think of both kingdoms (secular and sacred) being under God’s rule? Why or why not?

2. Luther’s explanation of the second petition of the Lord’s Prayer reads as follows:

Your kingdom come.

What is this? OR What does this mean?

In fact, God’s kingdom comes on its own without our prayer, but we ask in this prayer that it may also come to us.

How does this come about?

Whenever our heavenly Father gives us his Holy Spirit, so that through the Holy Spirit’s grace we believe God’s holy word and live godly lives here in time and hereafter in eternity.

(Luther’s Small Catechism with Evangelical Lutheran Worship Texts. Copyright © 2008 Augsburg Fortress, Publishers.)

- How do Luther’s words echo themes of Daniel 2:36-45?
- How do you think Luther would respond to politicians who refer to our country as a “Christian nation”?

Devotional Context

1. Pondering our responses to several hymns in the “national songs” section of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (ELW 888–893) or another hymnal is a helpful way to assess where we are and contemplate who we are called to be as citizens who are also Christ’s disciples.
 - Read or sing “O Beautiful for Spacious Skies” (ELW 888). This beautiful hymn can be sung as praise of God for making this country God’s special agent on earth or as a prayer that God equip all of our citizens to elect leaders who will work for justice and peace in the world. With which interpretation are you most comfortable? How does Daniel 2 confirm or challenge your deepest convictions?
 - Read or sing “This Is My Song” (ELW 887). Ponder how its language and imagery illustrate themes of Daniel 2, Luther’s two kingdoms, and the petition “Your kingdom come.”
2. How would you define the term “God-given wisdom”? How does this apply to Daniel? How would you say this applies to you?
3. If you had one bit of wisdom to share with a leader of this country, what would it be? If you had one bit of wisdom to share with a key leader of the church, what would it be? How would these bits of wisdom differ, if at all?

Wrap-up

1. If there are any questions to explore further, write them on chart paper or a whiteboard. Ask for volunteers to do further research to share with the group at the next session.
2. Ask: What is one new learning or challenging thought you will take with you from our session today?

+ Bonus Activity:

Luther also wrote an expanded version of the catechism called (appropriately!) the Large Catechism. It is included in the collection of Lutheran confessions called *The Book of Concord*. Ask your pastor if you can borrow his/hers to show to the group. The confessional statements lay out our distinctive Lutheran theology identity.

Tip:

If you do not have copies of ELW, these hymns can be found in most any hymnal, or the words may be available on the Internet.

+ Bonus Activity:

Invite learners to read the text of “Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory” (ELW 890). Often used as a song of national triumph, the hymn actually was written during the Civil War as a critique of the violence perpetuated by both North and South. The “truth” of which Julia Ward Howe speaks encompasses the themes of today’s lesson.

SESSION ONE

Pray

Almighty God, we lift up to you all who govern this [nation]/state/city/town_____. May those who hold power understand that it is a trust from you to be used, not for personal glory or profit, but for the service of the people. Drive from us cynicism, selfishness, and corruption; grant in your mercy just and honest government; and give us grace to live together in unity and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (ELW, p. 77)

Extending the Conversation (5 minutes)

Homework

1. Read the next session's Bible text: Daniel 3. As you read, pay particular attention to the dialogue between Nebuchadnezzar and the three men (verses 13-18). Reflect on the price the three young men are prepared to pay for their loyalty to their God.
2. As you read or hear the daily news, take time to pray for the nations and peoples featured in each day's stories.
3. Make a list of major issues confronting our nation this week. Choose a concrete way to respond to one of them as a responsible citizen and faithful disciple.

Enrichment

1. If you wish to read through the entire book of Daniel during this unit, read the following sections this week.

Day 1: Daniel 1:1-14

Day 2: Daniel 1:15-21

Day 3: Daniel 2:1-24

Day 4: Daniel 2:25-49

Day 5: Daniel 3

Day 6: Daniel 4:1-18

Day 7: Daniel 4:19-37

2. If you would like to sample and understand more deeply some of the ways the ELCA seeks to equip its members to be responsible citizens and faithful disciples, go online to the ELCA Web site and click on the “Social Issues” tab or go directly to the following site: <http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues.aspx>. Browse through the Social Statements dealing with the economy, the environment, health and health care, peace, and the statement dealing with the interlocking issues of race, ethnicity and culture. All the Social Statements also are available in print from: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; 8765 W Higgins Rd; Chicago, IL 60631.

3. Listen to radio stations or watch television shows that refer to themselves as “Christian.” Do they use the language of “Christian America”? If so, how?

For Further Reading

Available from augzburgfortress.org/store:

Lutheran Study Bible, “Daniel” introduction and notes (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2009), pp. 1421-1446.

Looking Ahead

1. Read the next session’s Bible text: Daniel 3.
2. Read through the Leader Guide for the next session and mark portions you wish to highlight for the group.
3. Make a checklist of any materials you’ll need to do the Bonus Activities.
4. Pray for members of your group during the week.