LOYALTY TO LORDS OR LOYALTY TO LIONS

It was the moment of truth. The music began to play, and everyone around them bowed down in obedience to King Nebuchadnezzar’s command. But Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stood their ground. They understood that to disobey the most powerful man on earth in this manner meant a forfeiture of their lives. Yet they recognized that they owed allegiance to a power higher than any earthly potentate. They must render ultimate fealty to the God of heaven.

It was their loyalty to God that had resulted in them holding positions of great influence in the most influential nation of its time. When they were first brought to Babylon as slaves, they purposed in their hearts, along with Daniel, not to defile themselves with the king’s food (Dan. 1:8). God had rewarded their faithfulness with physical health (Dan. 1:15) and with wisdom and understanding (Dan. 1:20). Pursuant to their prayers, God revealed Nebuchadnezzar’s forgotten dream and its interpretation, which resulted in their promotion to positions of authority in Babylon.

Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were statesmen, very much engaged in the civic affairs of the greatest nation in their day. Yet they sacrificed not an iota of principle to achieve worldly influence. In fact, the more determined their loyalty to God, the more promotions they received (Dan. 3:30). Their depth of their civic engagement only increased the more decidedly they demonstrated their worship of the one true God.

This week, we explore how faithful observance of the Sabbath commandment undergirds our civic engagement.
Write out Daniel 3 from the translation of your choice. If you’re pressed for time, write out Daniel 3:16–18. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.
BY WHAT RIGHT?

In response to a royal command, Daniel appeared before King Nebuchadnezzar to explain a mysterious dream the king had. The reason for the dream was that God wanted the king to know that “the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will” (Dan. 4:17, 25, 32, KJV). Nebuchadnezzar had also had a prior encounter with the sovereign power of God, which had “changed the king’s word” (Dan. 3:28, KJV). In an expression of praise to God, Daniel also said, “He removeth kings, and setteth up kings” (Dan. 2:21, KJV).

What gives God the right to “interfere” with the plans of earthly rulers, to enthrone or depose them? The Bible leaves none in doubt on this point!

Prior to King Nebuchadnezzar’s destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC, God sent a blunt warning by the prophet Jeremiah to Judah and to the surrounding nations. The prologue to this warning states in part, “I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are upon the ground, by my great power and by my outstretched arm, and have given it unto whom it seemed meet unto me” (Jer. 27:5, KJV). God here uses His office of Creator as the basis for His right to set kings up and to set them down (Acts 17:24, 25).

In his address on Mars Hill to the Athenian intelligentsia, Paul set forth God as Creator and sustainer of creation. On this basis, God “determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation” (Acts 17:26, KJV).

The Sabbath commandment is, among a host of other things, a regular and much needed reminder to finite human beings that because God created, He has the final say in human affairs. This should be a source of comfort to the obedient child of God who lives under the authority of one secular power or another.

The God-fearing citizen of any nation is required by God to “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s” (Mark 12:17). But the things of God always take precedence over the things of Caesar. This is so because Caesar’s right to rule is given to him by God. God’s right to rule is inherent in His creatorship! Jesus told Pilate, “Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above” (John 19:11, KJV). “From above” most certainly refers to the Father who exercises universal authority.

The Psalmist says of God, “But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased” (Ps. 115:3, KJV). This unfettered freedom, this rock-solid right to act as He chooses rests securely on God’s status as Creator. Paul states, “For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist” (Col. 1:16, 17, KJV).

The one who trusts implicitly in God may do his or her civic duty with the liberating awareness that God, the Creator of all things, is in final control. He has a right to overrule human propositions that are contrary to His overarching plan for the restoration of all things.

The Sabbath commandment expresses this right, and Sabbath-keeping acknowledges it.
MAKE IT KNOWN

A relationship with God has both a private and public aspect. The surrender is done privately in the heart; the resulting obedience or changed lifestyle is public. If the private aspect is genuine, the unstoppable result is an outward display of selfless devotion. This display has as its aim the glory of God. Jesus said, “That they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16, KJV). In a similar vein Peter wrote, “They may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Pet. 2:12, KJV).

The public, the onlooker, the bystander must somehow be affected by the lifestyle of the believer. That lifestyle is a form of instruction to the observer. In the Sabbath commandment, this public element is directly stated. The Sabbath text reads, “In it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates” (Exod. 20:10, KJV). It is obvious from this passage that direct communication or instruction must be made to the son, the daughter, the manservant, the maid servant, and the stranger. The “stranger” refers to non-Israelites living within Israelite cities or territories, or to a stranger in an Israelite home. They must know that the household or community honors God’s Sabbath. This is a public declaration!

This requirement applies to the workplace and the classroom. It is unfortunately the case that many Sabbath-keeping young people in their places of study or work try to hide their religion under a bushel. This is almost always done to fit in with their unbelieving friends, who unashamedly make their ungodly lives public! As surely as God is glorified by His people making their Sabbath-keeping known, so surely is He robbed of glory when they conceal it.

The testimony of the three Hebrew men to Nebuchadnezzar is a stirring example of God being glorified by the public faithfulness of His people. They said, “But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up” (Dan. 3:18, KJV). They left the king with no doubt as to where they stood.

How solemn and frightening is this declaration, “But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 10:33, KJV).

Oh, that every Seventh-day Adventist, especially the youth, would live an openly (not ostentatiously) obedient life that quietly shouts to the world, “Be it known unto thee, oh world!”
What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Romans 13:1–7  
Colossians 1:16, 17  
Isaiah 45:7–9  
1 Peter 2:12  
Matthew 5:16  
Matthew 10:33

What other verses come to mind in connection with Daniel 3?

Review your memorized verse from Daniel 3.
REMEMBER WHO YOU ARE

The fourth commandment as articulated in Exodus 20 begins with the word remember. Forgetting the Sabbath day does not change the fact that it is the Sabbath. The commandment continues that we are to “keep it holy.” Remembering the Sabbath is not what makes it holy. It is already holy—all we are to do is acknowledge its sanctity and enter into holiness. Contrary to many a Sabbatarian’s inclination, then, the Sabbath does not need us to protect it. (In fact, the Sabbath protects us, as we shall discuss in lesson 12.)

Just like the Sabbath, Christ, the Author of the Sabbath, needs no external affirmation of His identity. Even when He was receiving positive feedback, He placed no stock in what people thought of Him (John 2:23–25). Philippians 2:6, 7 tells us that when Christ came to earth, though He was “in very nature God” (NIV), He “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped” (ESV), “but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men” (KJV). So secure was Christ in His identity that He was willing to be perceived as the lowliest, that He might secure our salvation.

Perhaps the greatest barrier to us engaging the world is fear. We are afraid that we might be misunderstood. We are afraid of being influenced into worldliness. We are afraid we will be irrelevant. But “God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7). That same confidence we see in Christ may be ours as He dwells within us (cf. John 10:10).

Furthermore, observing the Sabbath is a weekly reminder of who we are in relation to our Creator and His creation. Sabbath worship affirms and anchors our identity in Christ. As we worship the Creator on His appointed day, our lives are infused with confident assurance, which in turn frees us to engage the world around us. Our identity is grounded in our Creator, our moral compass is set. We need not fear that the world will taint us because we are secure in Christ.

Like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, we may engage the politics of our day in whatever capacity God calls us to, with confidence. Moreover, with our identity secure in Christ, it will be clear how we should engage the world around us. As Ellen White writes: “Dear youth, what is the aim and purpose of your life? Are you ambitious for education that you may have a name and position in the world? Have you thoughts that you dare not express, that you may one day stand upon the summit of intellectual greatness; that you may sit in deliberative and legislative councils, and help to enact laws for the nation? There is nothing wrong in these aspirations. You may every one of you make your mark. You should be content with no mean attainments. Aim high, and spare no pains to reach the standard.” (Ellen G. White, Messages to Young People (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1930), 36.)
Review the memory verse. How does it apply to your life this week?

After this week’s study of the chapter, what are personal applications you are convicted of in your life?

What are practical applications you must make in your school, family, workplace, and church?

__DROPPING SEEDS OF TRUTH__

It would be perfectly safe for our youth to enter the colleges of our land if they were converted every day; but if they feel at liberty to be off guard one day, that very day Satan is ready with his snares, and they are overcome and led to walk in false paths—forbidden paths, paths that the Lord has not cast up.

Now, shall professed Christians refuse to associate with the unconverted, and seek to have no communication with them? No, they are to be with them, in the world and not of the world, but not to partake of their ways, not to be impressed by them, not to have a heart open to their customs and practices. Their associations are to be for the purpose of drawing others to Christ.

The Waldensians entered the schools of the world as students. They made no pretensions; apparently they paid no attention to anyone; but they lived out what they believed. They never sacrificed principle, and their principles soon became known. This was different from anything the other students had seen, and they began to ask themselves, What does this all mean? Why cannot these men be induced to swerve from their principles? While they were considering this, they heard them praying in their rooms, not to the virgin Mary, but to the Saviour, whom they addressed as the only mediator between God and man. The worldly students were encouraged to make inquiries, and as the simple story of the truth as it is in Jesus was told, their minds grasped it.

These things I tried to present at Harbor Heights [at an educational convention in 1891]. Those who have the spirit of God, who have the truth wrought into their very being, should be encouraged to enter colleges, and live the truth, as Daniel and Paul did. Each one should study to see what is the best way to get the truth into the school, that the light may shine forth. Let them show that they respect all the rules and regulations of the school. The leaven will begin to work; for we can depend much more upon the power of God manifested in the lives of his children than upon any words that can be spoken. But they should also tell inquirers, in as simple language as they can, of the simple Bible doctrines.

There are those who, after becoming established, rooted and grounded in the truth, should enter these institutions of learning as students. They can keep the living principles of the truth, and observe the Sabbath, and yet they will have opportunity to work for the Master by dropping seeds of truth in minds and hearts. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, these seeds will spring up to bear fruit for the glory of God, and will result in the saving of souls. The students need not go to these institutions of learning in order to become enlightened upon theological subjects; for the teachers of the school need themselves to become Bible students. No open controversies should be started, yet opportunity will be given to ask questions upon Bible doctrines, and light will be flashed into many minds. A spirit of investigation will be aroused. (Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, bk. 3 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1980), 231, 233, 234.)
Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

How is your Sabbath-keeping a public affair?

How is your Sabbath-keeping a private affair?

What are areas of friction between the Sabbath and your civic engagement?

Where are other areas that reveal your loyalty to God?

Which aspect of being in a relationship with God is more difficult—the private or the public?

Where is the source of courage to be faithful?

Why is there fear in engaging the world?

In addition to the keeping of God’s law, how does the Sabbath impact our identity?

Where is more principle needed in your life?

What is the difference between standing up for your faith and being publicly annoying with your life?