

# Stories of the Hebrew Bible

## Lesson 10: Miracles—Fiery Furnace and the Den of Lions

5.02.2021

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**Objectives:** Exploring miracles in the Hebrew Bible through stories in the Book of Daniel.

**Materials:** Teachers should download lesson plan and attachments onto their desktop.

**Time allotments:** Suggested for 60 minute online class.

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### 1. Zoom Welcome (as youth arrive into the breakout classroom)

- Teachers and youth are expected to log on to zoom at 11:15am (15 min before class begins at 11:30am) so that everyone can be organized into correct breakout classrooms. We want to make sure there is an attentive adult in each breakout classroom with youth.
- Greet youth and ask everyone to correct their display name as needed. Ask everyone to select “gallery view” to see everyone else.
- Staff will take attendance.

### 2. Opening Discussion (5 minutes, begin while waiting for everyone to arrive)

- Who was able to attend the Coming of Age (COA) service last Sunday?
- From the service, what is one thing that stood out to you or you found meaningful?
- In your own words, what is COA? Will you be an “ager” next year?
- What is something you look forward to about writing your own credo (statement of belief)?

### 3. Chalice Lighting: Light the chalice, saying these words together: *“We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith; the light of truth and the warmth of love.”*

**Teacher reads:** (from theoretical physicist, Albert Einstein)

*“There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.”*

(from theologian and author of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, C. S. Lewis)

*“Nothing can seem extraordinary until you have discovered what is ordinary. Belief in miracles, far from depending on an ignorance of the laws of nature, is only possible in so far as those laws are known.”*

#### 4. Brief Check-in (5 minutes)

Continue weekly ritual/check-in (e.g. sharing a joy or sorrow so that everyone feels present in class).

#### 5. Discussion about Miracles (15 minutes)

**Teacher introduces:** Consider the range of what people mean by “miracles,” including the following:

- a) phenomenon inexplicable by *known* laws of nature (e.g. walking on water, making time stand still, or supernatural “acts of God”)
- b) event that is not contrary to laws of nature but highly improbable or statistically very unlikely (e.g. surviving a devastating natural disaster or terminal diagnosis, or winning the lottery; rare coincidence of many factors converging just at the right time and place)
- c) not about something supernatural or statistically unlikely but exceedingly wondrous and amazing (e.g. the “miracle” of childbirth, the Rover landing on Mars, or radical forgiveness in response to genocide)

**Teacher asks:** Which description is most similar to your understanding of miracles? Do you have an altogether different definition of miracles?

**Screen share** lesson attachment 10a (Spooky Action at a Distance)

- Invite volunteers to read portions aloud.

#### **Questions for Discussion:**

- Is “quantum connection” miraculous or supernatural or magical or scientific or... what exactly is it?
- How do you understand the fact that religious texts and stories so often contain miracle stories?
- What do you recall as the purpose of miracles in the Hebrew Bible?

**(Reminder from previous classes:** In the ancient world, magic and supernatural powers were familiar aspects of life. Magi(cians) were employed to heal and perform miracles. While our modern, scientific world might question the supernatural, the real question for ancient cultures was WHOSE magic/power prevailed in the end, and by extension, WHOSE god is the true and most powerful god.

Remember that for all the displays of supernatural power, the plagues failed to finally change Pharaoh’s heart! The rabbis understood miracle stories as ultimately NOT about displays of supernatural power but whether people would come to have faith in God. To trust and have faith in one another and God was the real miracle!)

## 6. Stories of the Fiery Furnace and Daniel in the Lions' Den (15 minutes)

**Teacher introduces:** The story of Daniel is set in the year 6 BCE, when leaders of Judah were deported to Babylon. Since the Exile spanned approximately 50 years, those who were exiled needed to find ways of living as strangers in a strange land. Very few of the original exiles returned home, and it was difficult for exiles to practice their religion faithfully when surrounded by foreign gods and forced to obey a foreign king. The stories portray Daniel as an example of courageous commitment to faith.

The stories of Daniel also describe miracles, as understood in their time and worldview as special interventions by God in people's lives. These miraculous "acts of God" served not only to protect Daniel and his friends, but to show divine favor upon their acts of faithfulness and "bear witness" to the wider world. *Again, in the Biblical world, miracles were MUCH LESS about changing the natural world—which is what our modern scientific mindset would assume—and MORE about altering the minds/hearts/faith of people!*

**Screen share** lesson attachment 10b (Fiery Furnaces and Roaring Lions)

- Invite volunteers to read portions aloud.
- Then, zoom-in on the two images (1) The Three Youths (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) in the Furnace and (2) Daniel in the Lion's Den.

### Questions for Discussion:

- What do you notice in the icon? (Icons are images of biblical figures or narrative, often used in worship.)
- What part of the story or narrative is represented in this icon?
- What does this icon make you wonder about, curious about?

## 7. Debate the Question (20 minutes)

**Teacher introduces:** If you remember from earlier in our study of the Hebrew Bible, the rabbis engaged in a kind of interpretation called *midrash*—a way of interpreting and making sense of sacred stories by filling in "gaps" in the story, or making connections to contemporary problems in creative ways. The purpose of *midrash* was to discuss, debate and resolve problems posed by difficult passages of the Hebrew Bible. So let's have a debate about miracles in the story of Daniel!

**Midrash Debate:** As a group, we are going to spend **ten minutes** constructing the following arguments (1) the miracles in the book of Daniel were supernatural "acts of God" and (2) the miracles in the book of Daniel have scientific explanations. Youth should try their best to argue for each side's position, regardless of their personal views. At the end, we will vote to see which argument is more convincing!

- (a) **Screen share** lesson attachment 10c (Faith and Science: A Midrash Debate).
- (b) On the attachment, write down the main argument, textual evidence, and (if time) closing remarks for argument one. After six minutes save and scroll down to repeat process for argument two. *Note: More important than fully flushing out each argument is getting to explore both perspectives.*
- (c) Once time is up, pause for a moment. Invite youth to reflect on which argument they think is more convincing.
- (d) Vote - not for majority opinion but to honestly see how many youths **were persuaded** by one of the arguments. Ask youth to raise their hands if they think the argument that these miracles were acts of God is more convincing. Then ask youth to raise their hands if they think the argument that these miracles have scientific explanations is more convincing.

**Questions for Discussion:**

- Beyond the winning argument, what can we learn from this debate? Is one form of explanation (science versus faith) “better” than the other? (More credible, more provable, more explanatory power to shape our understanding?)
  - Are *science* and *miracles* mutually exclusive, or can they be compatible? Consider an example: Once, a tornado tore through a house, destroying it. But the baby in the crib was lifted into a nearby tree and found unharmed and still asleep. Some people thought this was a miracle and others didn’t. What do you think?
  - Why might Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and Daniel have been chosen for the miracles? What did the miracles accomplish?
  - Do you have a miracle from your own life, or from friends and families? What makes it a miracle for you?
8. **Announcement:** The end of the semester is near. We have two more classes, one regular lesson and one closing celebration.
9. **Extinguish the chalice**, saying together: *“May the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts.”*
10. **Leave zoom breakout classroom:** wait until all youth have left, click “Leave” then “Leave Meeting.”