

## PAGE THREE – WHAT’S THE BIG DEAL?

Note: If you are starting with a new session, remind the group of the agreement to honor one another’s opinions and to keep shared ideas in the group. Check in with group members regarding any conversations they might have had with family or friends regarding their understanding of how powers and forces work in the world.

Preview the article by Rabbi Brad Hirschfield. This article has information that is more complex and it would be good to have an understanding of the material in order to help students interpret its meaning.

Prior to gathering the group to review this third page, preview the slide show at the top of the page and become familiar with the following information:

*The slideshow displayed at the top of this page contains a number of images that represent the subject of God’s power and powers and forces in the natural world. These are images that are among the many available in the media and on the Internet and are only a small representation of what youth might encounter. The group will view these images during this portion of the lesson. From the start of the slide show they appear as follows:*

*A tornado,*

*A sign asking, “Who Knows?”*

*A quote by Carl Sagan: “Science is not perfect. It’s often misused; it’s only a tool, but it’s the best tool we have.”*

*A sign “Beware of God,”*

*A satellite view of a hurricane,*

*A picture stating, “No Matter What Happens.... Trust God!!!”*

To begin this portion of the lesson, have page three visible to the group and together watch the video links on the page.

Discuss the following with the group, encouraging each member to offer a response:

How do you respond to people or situations where people claim to have been kept from harm due to God’s power?

How do you respond to people or situations where people claim that God has created natural disasters to punish people?

Do events such as a tornado, hurricane, or an earthquake change your views on how God might/might not be working? Why or why not?

Does a scientific understanding of how natural forces are at work change or affect your view of how God works?

*Encourage the group to think about both understandings as operating at the same time.*

Next, have the group look at the slideshow at the top of the page, and ask that everyone wait until all pictures are viewed before making comments.

Invite the group to respond to the images and allow time for each member to add to the conversation.

Using the information provided at the beginning of this session, talk about each of the images. (Remind the group to be respectful of each other's response.) The white dots that appear at the lower right of the slideshow can be used to select and navigate through the images.

Ask the group to share what each image might mean to them, or how the image might cause them to respond to the understandings of how powers and forces work in the world. Use the following as prompts for discussion:

A tornado might be an example of weather systems that are affected by global warming, or natural occurrences that can be predicted using scientific methods. Others might have been exposed to opinions that indicate that natural disasters are the result of God's punishment for sin.

The statement "Who Knows?" poses a question that is commonly asked by those with both an only religious viewpoint and those with only a scientific viewpoint. This question points to the ways in which theologians are continuing to ask questions about how God works in the world.

This quote by Carl Sagan claims science is the best tool we have. How does the use of science as a tool compare to the use of faith as a tool for understanding the world?

The "Beware of God" sign might be a result of viewing God as a "mean kid with a magnifying glass." What are viewpoints you have observed in others with regard to God's power?

The satellite view of a hurricane might be seen as a symbol of God's power in nature, or of the natural forces in nature.

The "Trust God" slide is opposite of the "Beware of God" slide. Is one more accurate than the other? Why or why not?

Discuss with the group their experiences in talking to others about a scientific understanding of how forces and powers work in the world and God's power. What is most difficult, or easiest to talk about?

*Help the group understand that a Christian belief in God's active presence in the world, or the power of the Holy Spirit, does not see God as one power along side of other powers. A Christian understanding sees the natural powers and forces as a part of what God has created. Creator and creation are separate, not equals.*

To close the session, talk about what these images might promote that is challenging or helpful to the conversation about scientific and religious views of powers and forces. Ask that they spend time at home looking at the website and researching other information about ideas covered in the lesson. Ask each member to bring a copy of any images that represent their understanding of the material.