

Daniel *and the* End Time



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 16:10; Daniel 1, 2, 3:1–6; Rev. 13:11–15; Dan. 3:13–18; John 3:7; Daniel 4; Daniel 6.*

Memory Text: “The king answered Daniel, and said, ‘Truly your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, since you could reveal this secret’ ” (*Daniel 2:47, NKJV*).

The Lord had great plans for ancient Israel. “And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (*Exod. 19:6*). This holy nation, this kingdom of priests, was to be His witness to the world that Yahweh was the only God (*see Isa. 43:10, 12*). Unfortunately, the nation didn't live up to the holy calling that God had given it. Eventually, its people even went into captivity in Babylon.

Interestingly enough, God still was able to use individual Judeans to be His witnesses, despite the disaster of their captivity. In other words, to some degree God accomplished through Daniel and his three fellow captives what He did not achieve through Israel and Judah. In one sense, these men were examples of what Israel as a nation was to have been and done.

Yes, their stories unfold in a time and place far removed from the last days. But we still can find traits and characteristics in these men that can serve as models for us, a people who not only live in the end time but who are called to be witnesses about God to a world that, like the pagans in the Babylonian court, does not know Him. What can we learn from their stories?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 14.

Faithful in What Is Least

“ ‘He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much’ ” (Luke 16:10, NKJV).

Look at the words of Jesus here. It’s so easy, isn’t it, to compromise, to be “ ‘unjust in what is least.’ ” The problem isn’t so much that “what is least” is important in and of itself; it’s not. That’s why it is “the least.” As most of us know either by personal experience or by the examples of others (or both), the problem is that the first compromise leads to another, and then another, and then another, until we become “ ‘unjust also in much.’ ”

With this thought in mind, we pick up the story in Daniel 1, the first account of the experiences of these four Judeans in Babylonian captivity.

Read Daniel 1. In what ways did the stand that Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah took reflect what ancient Israel was to be to the nations? See also Deut. 4:6–8, Zech. 8:23.

Although the text directly does not link what they ate to their being “ten times better” in “wisdom and understanding” than all others (*Dan. 1:20*), the link is clearly there. The chapter also says that God gave them this knowledge and wisdom. That is, the Lord was able to work with them because of their faithfulness to Him in refusing to eat the unclean food of Babylon. They obeyed, and God blessed their obedience. Would God not have done something just like this for ancient Israel *as a whole* had it adhered to the teaching of the Bible as diligently and faithfully as these four young men did? Of course. And will He not also do that for us today, in the last days, if we are faithful?

Since we have been given so much light and truth, as a church we need to ask ourselves: *Have we been faithful and obedient to what we have been given? At the same time, how can each one of us individually take positions that will enable us to be powerful witnesses for God?*

The Humility of Daniel

All over the world, Daniel 2 has helped untold numbers of people come to believe in the God of the Bible. It provides powerfully *rational* evidence, not only for the existence of God but for His foreknowledge. Indeed, it is the revelation that the chapter provides of God’s foreknowledge that presents evidence for God’s existence.

Read Daniel 2. How does the chapter provide such convincing evidence for the reality of God? Look, too, at Europe today as depicted in the book (*Dan. 2:40–43*). How could a man who lived about twenty-six hundred years ago have described so accurately the situation there, other than through divine revelation?

Daniel openly and unashamedly had given all the credit to God for what had been revealed to him. How easily he could have attributed his ability to know and interpret the king’s dream to his own wisdom and understanding. But Daniel knew better than that. The prayers that he and the others prayed (*Dan. 2:17–23*) showed their knowledge of their utter dependence upon God; they knew that without Him they would have died with the rest of the wise men.

Later Daniel reminded the king that none of his professional wise men, enchanters, or magicians proved able to tell the king his dream. By contrast, the God in heaven can reveal mysteries because He is the only true God.

Thus, in his humility and in his dependence upon God, Daniel was able to be a powerful witness. If Daniel, back then, showed humility, how much more should we reveal our own humility today? After all, we have a revelation of the plan of salvation that Daniel didn’t; and if anything should keep us humble, it should be the knowledge of what Jesus did at the cross.

What should the Cross teach us about humility? What does it say to us, not only about our own sinfulness but also about our utter dependence upon God for salvation? Think about where you would be without the Cross. What, then, do you have to boast about, other than the Cross? See Gal. 6:14.

The Golden Image

Bible students have long noticed the link between Daniel 3, the story of the three Hebrews on the plain of Dura, and Revelation 13, a depiction of the persecution that God's people have faced in the past and will face in the last days.

Compare Daniel 3:1–6 with Revelation 13:11–15. What are the parallels between these two passages?

In both cases, the issue of worship is central, but both talk about a worship that is forced. That is, the political powers in control demand the worship that is due to the Lord alone.

Read Daniel 3:13–18. What can we learn from the story that should help us understand not only what we will face in the last days but also *how* we should face what is coming?

As the most powerful leader on earth, Nebuchadnezzar mocked these men and their God, saying, “Who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?” (*Dan. 3:15*). He was soon to find out for himself just who that God was, for later he declared: “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king’s word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God” (*Dan. 3:28*).

After seeing such a miracle as that, there is no question that the king was convinced there was something special about the God whom these men served.

Suppose, though, that these young men had not been delivered from the flames. This outcome is one the men realized was a distinct possibility (*Dan. 3:18*). Why would they still have done the right thing in not obeying the king’s command even if it meant being burned alive? This story presents a powerful testimony to the men’s faith and their willingness to stand for what they believed, regardless of the consequences.

When the issue of worship arises in the last days, how can we be sure that we will stand as faithfully as these four men did? If we are not faithful now in what is “least,” what makes us think we will be faithful in something as big as the final crisis?

Conversion of the Gentiles

Daniel 3 ends with Nebuchadnezzar acknowledging the existence and power of the true God. But knowledge of God and of His power isn't the same as having the born-again experience that Jesus said was crucial for salvation (*see John 3:7*). Indeed, the man depicted in Daniel 4:30 was anything but a converted soul.

Read Daniel 4:30. What was this man's problem? *See also John 15:5, Acts 17:28, Dan. 5:23.*

By the time that the chapter is done, though, Nebuchadnezzar learns, even if it is the hard way, that all true power exists in God, and without God, he is nothing at all.

“The once proud monarch had become a humble child of God; the tyrannical, overbearing ruler, a wise and compassionate king. He who had defied and blasphemed the God of heaven, now acknowledged the power of the Most High and earnestly sought to promote the fear of Jehovah and the happiness of his subjects. Under the rebuke of Him who is King of kings and Lord of lords, Nebuchadnezzar had learned at last the lesson which all rulers need to learn—that true greatness consists in true goodness. He acknowledged Jehovah as the living God, saying, ‘I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and His ways judgment: and those that walk in pride He is able to abase.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 521.

Read Daniel 4:35. What truths about God did Nebuchadnezzar express here, as well?

Daniel 4 ends with a Gentile acknowledging the authority, dominion, and power of the “Hebrew” God. In a sense, this scene is a precursor to what happened in the early church, when, through the witness of Jews and through the power of God, Gentiles learned the truth about the Lord and began to proclaim that truth to the world.

Read John 3:7. Although we think of last-day events in terms of the death decree, worship, and persecution, what does Jesus say here that, above and beyond everything else, prepares people for the end of time?

The Faithfulness of Daniel

Read Daniel 6 and then answer the following questions:

1. What does Daniel 6:4, 5 reveal about the character of Daniel? What lessons can we take from these verses about how we should be seen?

2. What parallels can we find in this chapter that link it to final events as depicted in the book of Revelation? See *Rev. 13:4, 8, 11–17*.

3. Put yourself in the place of Daniel in this situation. What rationale or argument could he have used in order not to pray? That is, how could he have justified not doing what he did, and, thus, spared himself the ordeal of getting thrown into the lions' den?

4. Why do you think Daniel continued to pray as he always did, even though he necessarily didn't have to do so?

5. What did King Darius say (*Dan. 6:16*) even before Daniel was thrown into the lions' den that showed he knew something about the power of Daniel's God? What in his words showed the witness of Daniel himself to the king concerning the God whom Daniel worshiped and served?

Further Thought: “As we near the close of this world’s history, the prophecies recorded by Daniel demand our special attention, as they relate to the very time in which we are living. With them should be linked the teachings of the last book of the New Testament Scriptures. Satan has led many to believe that the prophetic portions of the writings of Daniel and of John the revelator cannot be understood. But the promise is plain that special blessing will accompany the study of these prophecies. ‘The wise shall understand’ [Dan. 12:10], was spoken of the visions of Daniel that were to be unsealed in the latter days; and of the revelation that Christ gave to His servant John for the guidance of God’s people all through the centuries, the promise is, ‘Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein.’ Revelation 1:3.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 547, 548.

Although we tend to look at the book of Daniel in the context of the rise and fall of nations, the judgment (*Dan. 7:22, 26; 8:14*), and the final deliverance of God’s people in the time of trouble (*Dan. 12:1*), we saw this week that the book of Daniel also can give us examples of what it means for us individually to be prepared for trials and persecution, whenever they come. In this sense, these stories present us with crucially important messages in the last days. After all, however helpful it may be to know about the “mark of the beast,” the “time of trouble,” and the upcoming persecution, if we haven’t had the kind of experience with God that we need, all this knowledge will only condemn us. More than anything else, we need the “born-again” experience that Daniel and the others, including Nebuchadnezzar, had.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Read Daniel’s prayer in chapter 9:3–19. How does this prayer show that Daniel understood grace, and that God loves and redeems us out of His own graciousness as opposed to any merit or goodness on our own part? Why is this so important a truth not just to understand but to experience?
- 2 In class, discuss the challenges that the three Hebrews (*Daniel 3*) and Daniel (*Daniel 6*) faced in regard to standing up when their religious practices were threatened by political authorities. What similarities do you find in the two accounts? What differences? And what can we learn from both accounts about how we can be powerful witnesses by being faithful?
- 3 What does it mean to be “born again”? Why would Jesus say that we “must be born again” (*John 3:7*)?

Hawaiian Wedding: Part 2

by BENJIE LEACH

The bride's father escorted his daughter, now smiling, to the front of the crowd. The groom played a guitar and sang "The Hawaiian Wedding Song."

The Lord gave me a few things to say, and I pronounced the couple husband and wife.

Afterward, the groom's mother said something to me that still sends chills up and down my spine.

"I don't think this was an accident," she said. "I think this was meant to happen. Look at your shirt."

I looked down at my clothing. I was wearing jeans, tennis shoes, and a powder-blue shirt. Stitched over the shirt's pocket was the word, "Hawaii," and a colorful rainbow. I had bought the shirt while vacationing with my wife in Hawaii several years earlier.

When they put the lei around my neck, it was as if my participation in the wedding had been meant to happen.

We gave the newlyweds a wedding gift: a copy of *Steps to Christ*. The couple had never heard of Seventh-day Adventists.

If the story had ended there, I would have been happy. But it didn't.

Two years later, I was living in Texas and received an early Sabbath-morning phone call from a veteran literature evangelist in Colorado.

"Do you remember that couple you married in Rocky Mountain National Park?" he said.

The couple had read *Steps to Christ* and reached out to the Adventist Church for more information. "So, we sent them more literature," he said. "Then they wanted Bible studies, and I've been studying the Bible with them for the last six months. You'll be happy to know that today they are being baptized into the Greeley Seventh-day Adventist Church."

Two more years passed. Campion Academy invited me to return to give a week of prayer. As I stood up to give the Sabbath sermon, I saw the literature evangelist walk in with the married couple and their toddler.

After the church service, they told me the rest of the story.

After being baptized, the couple had invited their friends to evangelistic meetings in the Greeley church, and three of them had been baptized. In addition, the groom's mother had been baptized and was working at an Adventist hospital in Hawaii.

I hadn't wanted to stop that day to argue with the people in white robes. But the Lord was able to use a few academy students and a guy wearing a Hawaiian shirt to witness.



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The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Daniel 1:20*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Recognize his or her responsibility as a witness to God in the world.
Feel: Foster love and respect toward others and inspire the same from them.

Do: Remain faithful to God and to himself or herself without compromise.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: You Shall Be Witnesses to the End of the Earth.

- A** Why was Daniel a witness?
- B** In what ways was Daniel a witness?
- C** How did the chief of the eunuchs respond to Daniel's testimony?

II. Feel: To Love God Is to Love Man.

- A** Explain Jesus' call to hate one's parents (*Luke 14:26*).
- B** How can you show love to your parents or your friends who do not believe in God?
- C** Why is the witness for truth who loves, and is loved, more effective than the witness who is concerned only with the truth?

III. Do: To Be Human and Holy

- A** How can I keep the balance between the duty to be faithful to God's commandments and my relationship with my friends and family who do not share my values?
- B** Why is it not possible to truly love people without being holy?

► **Summary:** The example of Jesus, who became human without making any compromise, is a challenging model for the Christian and especially the Seventh-day Adventist who lives in the world.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Daniel 1:15, 17*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: God wants His people to share with the world the truth of His kingdom. The question that often confronts us in fulfilling that mandate concerns the methods we should use to communicate that truth. In the book of Daniel, we learn that the truth is related to the form that channels it. The literary forms of a given book often express its profoundest and richest message. Daniel himself embodied this principle. His personal relationship with people around him, the way he approached them, the way he ate and drank, even the way he presented himself, was not dissociated from the spiritual message he carried.

Just for Teachers: This week's lesson will teach us how to be witnesses in a world that is far from God and even hostile to Him. Like Daniel, we are in exile, testifying to a kingdom that is not visible and is not popular. We will learn from the examples of Daniel and his three friends, who stood faithful to their God while serving the king. We will learn about the challenges they met in their secular context and their methods of witnessing. We will also learn about their spiritual lives and the way they were able to bring their hope concretely into their daily lives.

Opening Discussion: The book of Daniel is particularly important for Seventh-day Adventists; and yet, this book contains some of the truths that make us different from most people (including other Christians) and, in some respects, make us unique in our society. Unfortunately, this book has attracted extremists on the religious fringe. The paradox is that the book of Daniel is one of the most universal books of the Bible. It brings the only hope that people need, especially in our day.

Questions for Discussion:

- ❶ Why is the book of Daniel often ignored?
- ❷ What is the message of hope that comes from the book of Daniel?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: As Seventh-day Adventists, we often assume we know the book of Daniel well. To avoid repeating old clichés, suggest to the students of this lesson that they approach the book of Daniel

as if for the first time. They should aim to refresh their reading of the book and discover new insights and new paths into its prophecies. Such discovery and rich insight are implicitly promised to those reading it in the last days, because the book is described as remaining sealed until the time of the end (*Dan. 12:9*).

Bible Commentary

I. To Be Loved by the Enemy (*Review Daniel 1:9 with your class.*)

When Daniel determined to remain faithful to God, a miracle took place: “God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs” (*Dan. 1:9, ESV*). It is interesting that God inspired love and respect in the heart of the enemy *immediately* after Daniel decided *not* to compromise.

This verse suggests two lessons. First, God did not make a miracle happen before Daniel and the three Hebrews risked their lives. Thus, Daniel did not suddenly find perfect meals on his table before the test of his loyalty to God. Although God may sometimes facilitate our walk with Him and “guideth [us] in straight paths” (*Ps. 23:3, JPS*), in many cases, the reality is that life, more often than not, confronts us with situations that oppose our principles.

Second, to be faithful to God does not mean treating unkindly the men and women of the world. Although Daniel decided to be different and to refuse the invitation of the king, he remained respectful and pleasant to the chief of the eunuchs, and he approached him with humility (*Dan. 1:8, 12*). It is also intriguing that the verse does not refer to Daniel’s love and respect toward his master. It is not enough to love our enemies; we should also inspire love in their hearts, which is evidence that our love is genuine.

Consider This: Why do our neighbors’ positive feelings toward us often provide the most fertile ground from which to witness to those same neighbors?

II. The Silent Witness (*Review Daniel 3:26–28; 2:11, 21 with your class.*)

The most eloquent testimony of one’s faith in God is the life one leads. The three Hebrews’ only testimony was their survival from the fire of the furnace. Note that they did not draw attention to themselves. They did not even speak. The text simply tells us that they “came from the midst of the fire” (*Dan. 3:26, NKJV*). The focus was on God. This les-

son is the primary one that Nebuchadnezzar retained from that dramatic miracle: “ ‘Blessed be the God . . . who . . . delivered His servants’ ” (*Dan. 3:28, NKJV*). The reference to the witness was secondary: “ ‘who trusted in Him’ ” (*Dan. 3:28, NKJV*). And even then, the stress is on “Him.” This case illustrates the method of witnessing that is promoted in the book of Daniel. It is not about oneself but about God. The three Hebrews did not boast about themselves (“Look what God has done for me!”). God alone received the glory (*1 Cor. 1:31*).

Consider This: Think of a time that you felt frustrated that someone was rewarded for work you had done, or that his or her work, which was less important than yours, received recognition, while yours was ignored. How did that experience make you feel? Meditate and discuss with the class this issue within the framework of Ecclesiastes 9:11.

III. Worship at Stake (*Review Daniel 3:7, 8:11 with your class.*)

Precisely because Daniel lives in exile (far from Jerusalem) and serves in a pagan court, the issue of “worship” is central to the book of Daniel. This issue already is obvious in the first test of faithfulness, which involves eating and drinking. It is highly significant that Daniel alludes to a verse of the biblical text of Creation when he is concerned with his food (*Dan. 1:12; compare with Gen. 1:29*).

The second test of faithfulness takes place when the Israelites are commanded to worship the golden statue that the king has erected. The golden statue that Nebuchadnezzar has “set up” refers back to the statue of his dream, which concluded with the divine promise that God will “set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed” (*Dan. 2:44*). In Nebuchadnezzar’s mind the kingdom of Babylon has thus replaced the kingdom of God. This ideology reminds us of the foolishness of the builders of the Tower of Babel, who wanted to take God’s place (*Gen. 11:4*). Further into the book of Daniel, the “little horn” (*Dan. 8:9*) and the “king of the North” (*Dan. 11:16, NKJV*) will display the same mentality (*Dan. 8:11, 11:31*). In counterpoint to these cases of false worship, the book of Daniel is punctuated with seven prayers by Daniel, the three Hebrews, and King Nebuchadnezzar. The book of Daniel ends with a blessing (*Dan. 12:12*), a feature that is specific to many biblical prayers (*Ps. 1:1, 119:1, Rev. 1:3*).

Consider This: On the basis of the text of Daniel 3, list the characteristics of false worship and true worship. How does music play a role in false worship? How is prayer related to the study of God’s Word (*Dan. 9:2, 3*)?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: It is troubling how our times of advanced knowledge and skepticism have been associated with naïve superstitions and all kinds of strange beliefs. On the other hand, the rise of religious fanaticism has produced violence and generated illusions and entertained false certitudes and hopes. Having rejected the true God of heaven, humans search in themselves for a solution to their tragic conditions.

Application Questions:

Apply the principles we've learned thus far from the book of Daniel to the situation of our times and discuss the following questions:

- ❶ Why is the book of Daniel relevant to our times? Why is the issue of eating and drinking an important issue?
- ❷ What is the prophetic significance of the little horn's claim for worship? How can we communicate this difficult denunciation from the book of Daniel without alienating people?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: There are many common points, as well as differences, between the time of Daniel and our time. In the time of Daniel, people were fundamentally religious; and yet, they were pagans. Today, people are not pagans, but they are not religious. How can we cope with this difference? Why are many people suspicious of churches and the Christian faith? What lessons could we learn from Daniel to help us to deal with these powerful movements?

Activities:

- ❶ Divide your class into seven groups, if possible, and assign one prayer of Daniel to each group. (Where classes are smaller in number, assign multiple prayers to each group.) Instruct each group to note what impressed them the most in that prayer. Then invite these groups to report on and compare reactions.
- ❷ Why is it often difficult to reach powerful, wealthy, or highly educated people? (Focus on the issue of our method of communication rather than on blaming them to justify our inabilities.) Why was Daniel able to reach the powerful and the highly educated? And what can you take away from his methods?