

LESSON 1

*September 25–October 1

“To Eat or Not to Eat— That Is the Question”



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Daniel 1.*

Memory Text: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (*Psalms 119:105, NIV*).

April 1945, the Pacific. In the midst of a fierce battle, about eighty war-hardened American soldiers owed their lives to one man, Private Desmond Doss. They once had ridiculed him for his refusal to carry a gun. However, while enemy crossfire cut down soldier after soldier, the medic, Private Doss, ignoring the danger to his own life, dragged more than seventy-five wounded men to safety. The man who was once a butt of their jokes became their hero.

Doss was not afraid to stand up for what he believed, and he was not afraid to stand up on the battlefield. For his outstanding bravery, Doss was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor by the president of the United States.

This week we'll take a look at another war, another battle, fought in another part of the world in totally different circumstances. Yet whatever the circumstances, some people (often a minority) will like Private Doss stand for what they believe, no matter the personal cost. Who were these people, what did they stand for, and what can we—who, in our own situations, often face similar challenges—learn from their example?

The Week at a Glance: What do Babylon and Jerusalem symbolize? What caused the demise of Jerusalem? Why did innocent people have to suffer in the onslaught? Why didn't Daniel eat the king's food?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 2.*

A Tale of Two Cities: Babylon and Jerusalem (*Dan. 1:1*).

The book of Daniel is the story of two cities, Jerusalem and Babylon. One represents the rule of righteousness, the other of wickedness. One reveals the mystery of godliness, the other the mystery of sin. Thus, the stories and prophecies of the book illustrate the principles of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, often manifested before us as a battle between good and evil, right and wrong, truth and error.

The first time we read of Babylon and Jerusalem in Scripture is implied in the book of Genesis (*11:9, 14:18*); the last time we hear of them is in the book of Revelation (*18:21, 21:10*). And, in one way or another, either literally or figuratively they appear all through the Bible.

What were the historical circumstances under which the two cities (under similar but not exact names) are first mentioned?

① **Babylon** (*Gen. 11:1-9*) _____

② **Jerusalem** (*Gen. 14:17-20*) _____

Babylon: The Babylonians derived the name of their city from *Bab-ilu*, which means “gate of god.” According to Genesis 11:9, however, the name means “confusion,” because there “the Lord confused the language of all the earth” (*NKJV*). There seems to be a play on words, for the two Hebrew words *balal*, “to confuse,” and *babel*, “gate of god,” sound very similar. While the people’s intent at *Babel* was to build a tower that would reach into heaven, God turned it into a symbol of humanity’s folly.

Jerusalem: The Hebrew word *shalem* means “complete” or “peaceful.” In Psalm 76:2, Jerusalem is identified with Salem, the city mentioned in Genesis 14:18. At the time of David’s conquest of the city, Jerusalem was occupied by the Jebusites (*1 Chron. 11:4-7*). From David’s reign on, it had been the capital of the Jewish nation.

What is symbolized by the city of Babylon in the book of Revelation? *Rev. 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21*. What is its ultimate fate?

Jerusalem (“peaceful, complete”), Babylon (“confusion”). You can’t live in two places at once, either physically or spiritually. Where are you living now (spiritually), why are you there, and—if you need to move—how can you?

The Innocent and the Guilty (*Dan. 1:2-7*).

“In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand” (*Dan. 1:1, 2, NIV*).

It’s hard, from our perspective, to realize just how incredible those words in the above two texts are. If written in a newspaper, they would be headlines standing six to ten inches tall. Here was Jerusalem, where the Lord dwelt in His temple, taken over by pagans and its king captured!

What were some reasons why God gave Judah and Jerusalem into the hands of the Babylonians?

① *2 Kings 21:10-16* _____

② *2 Kings 24:18-20* _____

③ *2 Chron. 36:15-17* _____

④ *Jer. 3:13* _____

“It should be remembered that the promises and the threatenings of God are alike conditional.”—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 695. The people of Judah could have avoided the Babylonian exile. Through Jeremiah God pleaded with the people to return to Him. Had they repented, they would not have been punished (*Jer. 4:1-4*). But they refused to listen, and, finally, judgment was poured out upon them.

All this, however, brings up another question: Sure, the leaders rebelled and didn’t obey. But why should the innocent be punished, as well? It hardly seems fair that Daniel and his three friends, godly young men, should suffer for the sins of others. Yet, as we all eventually learn, life in this sinful world isn’t fair. That’s, of course, why we must have the hope of a new one.

Daniel's Determination (*Dan. 1:8*).

Being served the best food that the kingdom of Babylon had to offer, Daniel and his friends refuse to eat it. Why would they not eat the king's food? *Prov. 23:1-3, 29-32*. What principles are being expressed by these texts?

Daniel and his friends refused to be conformed to the world; the will of God, instead, was the all-absorbing purpose of their lives. Hence, they might have refused to eat the king's fare because:

1. Some of the food was unclean meat (*Leviticus 11*).
2. Even the clean meat was not prepared the way Moses had instructed the Israelites (*Lev. 7:22-27*).
3. Eating and drinking involved an act of idol worship because the food was first offered to idols.

When Daniel requested a different menu, he used the word *vegetables* (*zero'im*), which is the same word God used in Genesis 1:29 when He told Adam, "I have given you every herb that yields seed (*zorea*; *zera'*)" (*NKJV*). With this request Daniel affirmed his faith in the Creator who gave us all that is good and healthy to eat.

Read Daniel 1:8. Here they are, captives in a foreign land, at the mercy of heathens who, on a whim, could have them killed. How easy it could have been to have rationalized eating the king's food and drinking his wine. Keeping this background in mind, look up the following texts. What are they saying that relates to what Daniel did here? What lessons are there for us? *Matt. 10:22, Luke 8:11-15, 1 Cor. 10:13, Phil. 3:8, 2 Tim. 2:12.*

Daniel's decision in regard to the king's food showed that he understood the connection between health and holiness. The test over food was one of the means of strengthening his character and fitting him for future greatness. Each right decision carried out in spite of difficulties makes a person stronger. Each resolution broken leaves a person weaker.

The story of Daniel illustrates that a right decision bravely carried out often becomes the turning point in a person's life and a determining factor in that person's destiny. "God gives opportunities; success depends upon the use made of them."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 486.

The Test (*Dan. 1:9-16*).

When Daniel and his three friends arrived in Babylon, they were given new names, had to study the arts and sciences of the Babylonians, and were expected to eat from the king's table. The first few issues presented no great problem for them. The last matter, however, became a challenge to their faith.

The hard question often is, How does one know where to draw the line? After all, in the ancient world, names often came with spiritual significance (Daniel, for instance, means "God is judge"). Couldn't Daniel have refused this name change simply on principle? Or could he have refused to study the Babylonian arts and sciences, because they were filled with divination, paganism, and other things in which he surely didn't believe? There's no record, though, of them refusing anything, at least not at this point, except the food. Here they drew the line.

Read again Daniel 1:8. Why did Daniel believe it would have been wrong for him to have eaten that food?

Who else, besides these Hebrew boys, was facing a risk by their refusal to eat? *Dan. 1:10*. Why would this have given them, if they wanted, a good excuse to back down and do what the king asked?

At first glance, this test over eating and drinking seems fairly insignificant. But then, the test for Adam and Eve, not to eat of the tree of good and evil (*Genesis 3*), also seemed rather trivial. It, too, concerned appetite. But isn't it true that love is often revealed in the little things people do for one another? Perhaps there is a spiritual lesson in the fact that great doors often swing on little hinges. *Genesis 3* and *Daniel 1* illustrate the fact that Satan usually endeavors to reach us through our senses; through what we hear, see, smell, touch, and taste. Successful Christian living, therefore, depends on guarding our senses. Indeed, if God's Spirit reaches us through the nerve cells in our brain, and if these nerve cells are influenced by what we eat and drink, what more important duty could there be than that of preserving our body in the best possible condition?

Put yourself in Daniel's place. Write out a paragraph justifying why you should eat the king's food. Is what you wrote convincing? If so, why should that concern you about how easily we can talk ourselves into compromising our faith?

The Reward *(Dan. 1:17-20)*.

At the end of the three-year period, Ashpenaz brought the young men before the king, who tested them. What were the blessings that came to the four young Hebrews as a result of their decision to remain loyal to their God? *Dan. 1:20*.

Apart from the fact that they were the best in their class, they had clear minds and healthy bodies. Their experience indicates that God will bless all who are not afraid to be considered narrow and overscrupulous when tempted to yield their religious principles. In this instance, in a clear and undeniable way, their faithfulness to the Lord paid off in a manner in which all could see the results of their faithfulness.

Sometimes, however, the immediate endings turn out differently, do they not?

Contrast the fate of the four Hebrew boys to Stephen's. What do these two stories tell us about what can happen when one remains faithful to biblical principles? Why, for Christians, should these endings, happy and tragic, make no real difference regarding the choice of whether or not to stay faithful to religious principles?

On the immediate level, things turned out quite well for Daniel and the three Hebrew boys, certainly better than they did for Stephen.

As Christians, though, we know that whatever happens to us here, bad or good, whether being stoned to death or exalted to the head of the class—these outcomes are not the end. Instead, there's an eternity awaiting us, a whole new life in a new heaven and a new earth where sin, death, suffering, and loss will no longer exist. In contrast to that, it hardly matters what our *end* here is; what matters, instead, is that we stay faithful to God and what He asks of us, regardless of the immediate consequences.

What would you say to someone who has been, all his or her life, compromising Christian principles yet who wants to change? What hope could you offer him or her that all is not lost?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 479–490.

How did Daniel and his three friends manage to study the learning and scientific knowledge of the Babylonians and yet not become influenced by the superstition and sorcery included in this training?

- ① Through the right exercise of the will: “Through the right exercise of the will, an entire change may be made in your life. By yielding up your will to Christ, you ally yourself with the power that is above all principalities and powers. You will have strength from above to hold you steadfast, and thus through constant surrender to God you will be enabled to live the new life, even the life of faith.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 48.
- ② Through the recognition of the influence of the body on the mind: “Daniel’s parents had trained him in his childhood to habits of strict temperance. They had taught him that he must conform to nature’s laws in all his habits; that his eating and drinking had a direct influence upon his physical, mental, and moral nature, and that he was accountable to God for his capabilities; for he held them all as a gift from God, and must not, by any course of action, dwarf or cripple them. As the result of this teaching, the law of God was exalted in his mind, and revered in his heart.”—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 154.
- ③ Through a consistent life of prayerful dependence upon God: Daniel “was surrounded with influences calculated to subvert those who would vacillate between principle and inclination; yet the Word of God presents him as a faultless character. Daniel dared not trust to his own moral power. Prayer was to him a necessity.”—Ellen G. White, *The Sanctified Life*, p. 20.

Discussion Question:

Imagine how easily Daniel and his three friends could have justified not cooperating with their Babylonian captors. After all, these were pagans who had destroyed their city and taken them captive. Wouldn’t death be better than working with these heathen at all, much less becoming important officials in the court of the very king who had destroyed their nation? What can we learn from the answer to this question?

Summary: Daniel and his three friends are pressured to conform to the customs of the Babylonians. But they remain true to their God, and He rewards them with exceptional wisdom and insight. By their commitment to God and faith in Him, they became examples for every Christian tempted to compromise.

The Lucky One

Jim Zachary

George never knew his parents. He lived with his grandmother in Kenya until she died. Then he was taken to his great-aunt's home to live. When life became unbearable, George ran away. He was 9 years old. For five years he lived on the streets of Nairobi, Kenya, begging for money and searching for food in garbage cans.

Then something happened that turned George's life around. A Pathfinder Club was having an outing. Each Pathfinder had brought along three extra lunches, planning to share them with the homeless children of Nairobi.

The club members went into the poorest part of town and invited the street children to join them in a city park for lunch and games. The program included a spiritual talk. This was the first time some of the children had heard about Jesus. Then the children played games together.

George heard shouts and laughter as he sifted through the trash for food. Curious, he went closer. *Wow*, he thought, *those kids look sharp in their uniforms*. Someone invited George to join in the fun. How good it was to enjoy a decent, fresh meal and play games with other children. For a few hours George forgot his troubles.

As the party wound down, George said, "I wish that I could become a Pathfinder." When someone asked why, he answered, "I want to be like them—and I want to go to school." The Pathfinder leader told George, "Meet me here in this park in two days."

When the leader returned two days later, he told George that he had arranged for him to enroll in the Adventist school as a boarding student. George, now 14, could not believe his ears. He had not yet completed the fourth grade, so he had a lot of catching up to do. Life was so different at the school. Good food replaced garbage scraps, and he slept on a mat in a warm room, not on the sidewalk. He no longer had to run away when a police officer came by.

"I am so happy," George said. "Life is good; I can go to school." George has joined the baptismal class. George is studying hard and ranked second in academic standing in his class. He has made friends and recently was elected to a student-body office.

Some 5,000 children live on the streets of Nairobi. George is a lucky one, for he has found his future, and it includes a loving church family.

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