

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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: *Psalm 119:105.*

Teachers Aims:

1. To understand that the battle against sin is a war between Christ and Satan.
2. To recognize the importance of the will, the influence of the body on the mind, and a consistent prayer life.

Lesson Outline:

I. A Tale of Two Cities (*Dan. 1:1*).

- A. Jerusalem represents the rule of righteousness.
- B. Babylon represents the rule of wickedness.
- C. The principles of the great controversy are illustrated in the book of Daniel.

II. The Innocent Suffer With the Guilty (*Dan. 1:2-7*).

- A. God gives the king of Judah into the hand of King Nebuchadnezzar; many innocent young men are taken captive, including Daniel and his three friends.
- B. God loves us and is in control of our destiny.
- C. God turns Daniel's captivity into a blessing that benefits not only Daniel's people but the nation of Babylon, as well.

III. Dare to Be a Daniel (*Dan. 1:9-16*).

- A. Daniel and his friends refuse to compromise on matters of diet.
- B. Daniel understands the connection between health and holiness.
- C. Daniel remains committed to the meaning of his Hebrew name, even though the king renames him after a Babylonian deity.

Summary: "In the history of Joseph, Daniel, and his fellows, we see how the golden chain of truth may bind the youth to the throne of God. They could not be tempted to turn aside from their course of integrity. They valued the favor of God above the favor and praise of princes, and God loved them and spread His shield over them."—Ellen G. White, *Messages to Young People*, p. 27.

COMMENTARY

I. The Remnant.

Seventh-day Adventists are not alone in considering themselves the remnant church, nor are many Adventists alone in finding this classification somewhat embarrassing. If you claim to be part of the remnant, then by definition most other people are not. So you are being exclusive, and exclusivity can be bad. At least most people with an opinion on the topic say it is bad, and they can recite the usual catalog of horrible examples: inquisitions, genocides, com-

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.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

munal warfare—all based on the assumption of one group that it was superior to another group. The Hindu philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti expressed the queasiness many people feel toward what he saw as exclusivism when he wrote: “When you call yourself an Indian or a Muslim or a Christian or a European, or anything else, you are being violent. Do you see why it is violent? Because you are separating yourself from the rest of mankind.”—*Freedom From the Known* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), pp. 51, 52.

Do we as Adventists sometimes consider ourselves separate from, and better than, other people because we are “the remnant”? If we do, we are going against the true meaning of the remnant message.

The remnant message is not primarily about our worthiness as people. In fact, a look at the use of the term in the Bible reveals that it primarily means *survivors*, people who—perhaps through dumb luck or perhaps because someone cared enough to save them—managed not to die in an overwhelming disaster. In this case the someone is God, and the overwhelming disaster is life on earth as we know it.

So, our status as remnant is about God first and foremost and only incidentally about us. To put it grammatically, God is the subject and we are the object. As soon as we forget that and start believing that God is secondary in the equation, we risk becoming separatist and/or “violent,” if only metaphorically.

The example of Daniel in the Bible is an excellent model for anyone who is or wants to be part of God’s remnant today. Daniel did not act or perceive of himself as naturally better than the people surrounding him, even though in some sense that might have been the case. All his greatness and goodness came from God, and he apparently never lost sight of the fact. When his obedience brought him into conflict with prevailing customs, he seized the opportunity to show God’s love and grace. Not even his enemies would have mistaken him for a violent zealot.

II. Useful Quotes About the Remnant.

“The ‘Constantinian era’—when church and society shared similar ideals—has come to an end. As a result Christians find themselves part of a community of believers who, by virtue of a personal, free, and explicit decision of faith, dissociate themselves from the current views of their social environment. The church of the future will have the characteristics of a ‘little flock,’ a true remnant, living in a pluralistic world in which God and the Scriptures will at best be merely one alternative among many others.”—*Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 2000), p. 565.

“It is an established fact that the remnant motif appears at crucial turning points in history when man’s life and existence are threatened with extermination. The lasting contribution of the

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.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

prophetic movement in ancient Israel, which herself faced ruinous disaster, is to have provided a basis for the survival of the remnant in its urgent call to return to God. . . . The urgent prophetic call to turn to God in faith, confidence, and trust is ultimately also the only basis for the survival of modern man whose existence is threatened with global ruin at the present crucial turning point in history.” —Gerhard F. Hasel, *The Remnant* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1980), pp. 402, 403.

“God has His children in all churches; but through the remnant church He proclaims a message that is to restore His true worship by calling His people out of the apostasy and preparing them for

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Genesis 3:1-7; Daniel 1; Romans 12:1, 2; 1 Corinthians 10:31.*

❶ The great controversy between Christ and Satan is not an abstract struggle; it is a conflict in which everyday choices and situations demonstrate either our loyalty or our disloyalty to God’s kingdom and His principles. Yet, as this week’s lesson points out, Daniel and his friends chose to cooperate with their captors as much as their consciences allowed. What does that teach us about choosing our battles with conformity? How did Daniel’s choices demonstrate his loyalty to God?

❷ Daniel 1:8 describes the choice Daniel made to remain loyal to God. But notice this verse: “Now God had caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel” (*vs. 9, NIV*). Was this miracle performed in a vacuum? If not, what part did Daniel and his friends play in winning the official’s favor? *Read Matt. 5:43-48.*

❸ Paraphrase the principle described in 1 Corinthians 10:31 and Philippians 4:8, 9. Short of totally removing oneself from society and its influences, how can we minimize the negative and nurture the positive in our lives?

❹ Read Daniel 1:17-20. Think of the people you know who “stand for principle.” In what ways are they the type of people you would like to emulate? How is their behavior unusual? Reconcile their behavior with the description of Jesus found in Luke 15:1, 2. Into which group would you place Daniel and his friends—the type of people you would like to emulate or the type of people who are unusual? Explain your answer.

❺ At this point in his experience, was Daniel’s primary influence on others religious, practical, or both? Explain your answer.

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 bodies 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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Christ's return. Recognizing that many of God's people have yet to join them, the remnant sense their inadequacies and weaknesses when they try to fulfill this solemn mission. They realize that it is only through God's grace that they can accomplish their momentous task."—*Seventh-day Adventists Believe* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1988), p. 168.

III. What the Bible Says About the Remnant.

"And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall yet again take root downward, and bear fruit upward. For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and they that escape out of mount Zion" (*2 Kings 19:30, 31*).

"And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said, and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call" (*Joel 2:32*).

"And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (*Rev. 12:17*).

Witnessing

Our lesson this week witnesses powerfully to the virtues of embracing and living a healthy, Christian lifestyle—a lifestyle taught early in life by parents who accepted, practiced, and closely adhered to God's design for building strong bodies, superior intellectual capabilities, and loyal hearts. Ellen White tells us "Daniel and his associates had been trained by their parents to habits of strict temperance. They had been taught that God would hold them accountable for their capabilities, and that they must never dwarf or enfeeble their powers."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 482.

No fast-food, carry out, or junk food for Daniel during his growing-up years—he knew that oatmeal was good for you millennia before television commercials proclaimed it to the world. It is doubtful he required calorie-laden dips in order to down his vegetables; no french fries and a soda for lunch; no alarming growth of obesity or sluggishness due to a poor diet. Instead, Daniel adhered to the earliest of diet plans—plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables, nuts, wholesome grains, and pure water. As a reward for his faithful adherence to God's early prescription for healthy living, he grew in mental, emotional, and spiritual stature. Through the grace of God, he excelled in all he did, and he always gave glory to his heavenly Father for his accomplishments.

In a world that desperately needs positive role models, we have found one in Daniel. He is an "action hero" for the ages!

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?

Application

Icebreaker: Have you ever found yourself *directionally challenged*—a time in which you temporarily lost sight of your destination? In other words, lost? It is at this precise moment that we need to have available to us the means to get back on course. This may entail asking directions or using a map to locate where we are and where we want to go.

Our conscience is like that—it's our *directional needle*, so to speak. Is it possible to be going in the wrong direction in life and not even be aware of it? Are you, like Daniel, firmly on course with God? If not, what are you doing to bring about much-needed course correction?

Thought Questions:

- ❶ Henry Louis Mencken has said that conscience is the inner voice that warns us somebody may be looking. Do you agree with this statement? Is fear of getting caught the underlying concept of doing the right thing for the wrong reason?
- ❷ Satan never misses an opportunity to zero in on our weaknesses. He encourages our appetites and addictions to such things as food, stimulants, alcohol, inactive lifestyles, etc. Why is this so? What does he hope to gain by doing this?
- ❸ On New Year's Day each year, millions of people make resolutions that they believe will bring positive changes in their lives during the next 12 months. A relatively small number actually stick to these new goals beyond the first few weeks—even fewer continue these into the next new year. What defeats these attempts to do right? Identify a key component to *staying the course* that Daniel possessed that many may be lacking.

Application Questions:

- ❶ In our lesson this week we learned how Daniel and his friends were faced, time and again, with the pressure to compromise. Yet, each situation resulted in their remaining faithful to God and His teachings. Share an experience of yours in which you were faced with the temptation to compromise, and describe the process you went through to reach your final decision. What would you change, if anything, if you had it to do over?
- ❷ The Bible is full of examples in which conscience and compromise played major roles in the ultimate outcomes. Share a favorite example of yours with the members of your class and help them relate it to a contemporary situation.

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.