

Exiles *as* Missionaries



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Daniel 1–12; Isa. 39:5–7; Dan. 2:44; Matt. 24:14, 15; Genesis 41.*

Memory Text: “‘He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed’” (*Daniel 7:14, NIV*).

As a people of prophecy, Seventh-day Adventists believe in the soon coming of Jesus Christ. His coming will end this world as we know it and ultimately will usher in God’s everlasting kingdom, depicted in the book of Daniel this way: “‘The kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him’” (*Dan. 7:27, NKJV*). This kingdom is the culmination of our faith; it is what the book of Hebrews (*Heb. 11:16*) called the “better country,” the one that all God’s people through the ages have trusted will come, the one whose “builder and maker is God” (*vs. 10*).

But the book of Daniel is also a kind of handbook for missionary activity. From it we can draw lessons on how the Lord was able to use some of His people to witness to those who were steeped in spiritual and theological ignorance. Through their faithfulness and diligence and unwavering faith, these believers revealed the reality of the living God to those who knew only false ones and gave these pagans a chance at a place in this everlasting kingdom, as well.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 1.

The Exile

Read Isaiah 39:5–7 and Daniel 1:1, 2. How are these verses related?

Daniel, whose name means “God is my Judge,” was force-marched from a defeated Jerusalem into the Babylonian capital. The book of Daniel gives glimpses of his life in the courts of Babylon and Persia. After three years of “education” in Babylon, Daniel was employed as a civil servant and royal advisor. Through the power of God, he rose above normal captive status to become a highly placed missionary to two superpowers.

The book of Daniel is more than a treasure of prophetic literature. The reader encounters some of the challenges facing Hebrews living in an alien culture that provided no apparent support for their loyalty to the God of Israel and, at times, was openly hostile. It also paints a beautiful picture of men who learned to live out their commitment to truth in the absence of the temple, the priesthood, and sacrifices.

Read Daniel 1:8–13, 5:12, 6:4, 9:3–19. What do these texts tell us about Daniel’s character that made him the great missionary he was?

“Every institution that bears the name of Seventh-day Adventist is to be to the world as was Joseph in Egypt, and as were Daniel and his fellows in Babylon. In the providence of God these men were taken captive, that they might carry to heathen nations the knowledge of the true God. They were to be representatives of God in our world. They were to make no compromise with the idolatrous nations with which they were brought in contact, but were to stand loyal to their faith, bearing as a special honor the name of worshipers of the God who created the heavens and the earth.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 153.

Think how easy it would have been for Daniel to have compromised, especially given his circumstances. What does his example teach us about how lame our excuses for compromise often really are?

Witnesses *(Daniel 2–5)*

In Daniel 2, Daniel had an opportunity, born out of necessity, to witness to the power of the true God, as opposed to the false ones of Babylon. After singing a hymn of praise with his Jewish compatriots and thanking God for answering their prayers (*Dan. 2:20–23*), he interpreted the king’s dream and testified to God’s greatness and dominion over all earthly kingdoms.

What does the king say that shows he learned something about the true God? *See Dan. 2:47.*

In Daniel 2, Daniel didn’t have a choice: either give the king what he wanted or face death. In contrast, in chapter 3, his three friends could have spared themselves the fiery furnace if they simply had obeyed the king’s command. Instead, by their faithful witness, they were able to testify to the power of the true God.

“How did Nebuchadnezzar know that the form of the fourth was like the Son of God? He had heard of the Son of God from the Hebrew captives that were in his kingdom. They had brought the knowledge of the living God who ruleth all things.”—Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, May 3, 1892.

In Daniel 4, what confession did King Nebuchadnezzar again make regarding the true God, all thanks to the witness of Daniel? *See Dan. 4:37.*

In Daniel 5, we have Daniel’s last appearance at the Babylonian court, where he is called upon to explain the extraordinary writing upon the wall of Belshazzar’s palace, foretelling the overthrow of the Babylonian Empire at the hands of the Medes and Persians. Though no doubt Belshazzar had been impressed by what Daniel did, it was too late: the king’s fate was all but sealed. The sad thing is that according to the Bible (*see Dan. 5:17–23*), Belshazzar had had opportunity to learn truth and to be humbled by it. As we know, he didn’t take advantage of those opportunities.

How important that we look at our own lives and ask ourselves, What kind of witness does my life represent to the world? What does your answer tell you?

Daniel in Persia

“And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: and the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?” (*Dan. 6:20*). The king called Daniel the “servant of the living God.” What is implied in those words?

In Daniel 6, with the change of empire and king, Daniel still kept his position and was even promoted, becoming one of three presidents to whom 120 satraps were to report. King Darius even considered appointing him vizier over his whole kingdom, arousing the antipathy of the other presidents and satraps. They induced the king to make an empire-wide decree that really was aimed at Daniel alone. He was thrown into a den of lions, but God dramatically intervened in a situation that even the sympathetic king could not reverse. Daniel’s deliverance so pleased the king that he issued an empire-wide royal decree exalting the God of Daniel.

“Then King Darius wrote to all the nations and peoples of every language in all the earth: ‘May you prosper greatly! I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end. He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions’ ” (*Dan. 6:25–27, NIV*).

Read Daniel 6. What in the chapter indicates that Daniel had already been a great witness to the king? Also, what in the king’s decree indicates that he knew more about Daniel’s God than he could have learned merely from the dramatic rescue? What does this tell us about Daniel’s witness to him?

Daniel and God’s Eternal Kingdom

Daniel was not merely an interpreter of other men’s dreams, significant as that was in this context. In Daniel 7–12, he had his own visions, which revealed the future of great world superpowers. Daniel’s visions especially emphasized that, despite earthly rulers and their plans and machinations, God retains final control of nations. In the end, He and His final kingdom will triumph, and that triumph will be complete (*see Dan. 2:44*).

Read Daniel 7:13, 14. What is being described in these texts, and how does it relate to the idea of Christians taking the gospel to the world?

Whatever else those verses are talking about, the central issue is the establishment of God’s eternal kingdom, which doesn’t come until after the return of Jesus. And what factor did Jesus Himself say was important in regard to His return?

“ ‘And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains’ ” (*Matt. 24:14–16, NIV*).

Jesus’ prophecies of the end of the world in Matthew 24 are linked to Daniel’s prophecies. The “abomination of desolation” predicted by Daniel (*Dan. 11:31, 12:11*) was further explained and applied by Jesus to His own day and beyond. The point is that Jesus closely linked the book of Daniel to the end times, which, of course, isn’t surprising, because Daniel in many places does indeed point to the end times (*Dan. 8:17, 19; 11:35; 12:4, 13*). And, according to Jesus, the end doesn’t come until “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world” (*Matt. 24:14, NKJV*).

The gospel is to be preached unto “all the world,” and only then will Jesus return. And we are the ones called to preach it. Some then argue that Jesus can’t return until we do our work. How are we to understand our role in the timing of Jesus’ return? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

More Exiles as Missionaries

Daniel was an Israelite in involuntary banishment from Israel, as were Joseph and Moses in Egypt, Nehemiah in Babylon, and Esther in Persia. Their lives reveal that it is possible to live faithfully to God in spiritually and culturally unsupportive environments. With God’s direction, it was even possible to attain prominent administrative positions in these alien settings. Each lived a creative and rich life, skillfully negotiating complex religious, social, political, and economic dynamics far different from those of their home culture. They not only were loyal members of exiled Hebrew communities—they were also in their own ways effective missionaries for the God of Israel.

Witness while in exile included both passive presence and active proclamation.

Esther	Daniel
1. Did not identify as a Hebrew until called to reveal it.	1. Identified as a Hebrew.
2. Kept her religion to herself until called to reveal it.	2. Made known his religious convictions.
3. God protected her and her family.	3. God protected him and his friends.
4. Witnessed in high places to save her life along with her people’s.	4. Witnessed in high places to save his life along with other people’s.
5. Helped establish religious freedom and the right to self-defense of a religious minority.	5. Indirectly influenced King Cyrus to allow exiled Hebrews to rebuild the Jerusalem temple.

Read through Genesis 41. In what ways was Joseph able to witness to the Egyptians? How does his story parallel that of Daniel and his companions in Babylon?

In what situations in which you find yourself can you witness for your faith? Are you giving a passive or active witness, or both? What are things you can either say or do that would make a more powerful impression on others about the goodness and love of our God?

Further Study: “Multitudes will be called to a wider ministry. The whole world is opening to the gospel. . . . From every quarter of this world of ours comes the cry of sin-stricken hearts for a knowledge of the God of love. . . . It rests with us who have received the knowledge, with our children to whom we may impart it, to answer their cry. To every household and every school, to every parent, teacher, and child upon whom has shone the light of the gospel, comes at this crisis the question put to Esther the queen at that momentous crisis in Israel’s history, ‘Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, pp. 484, 485.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Discuss the prophecies in the book of Daniel, especially Daniel 2, 7, and 8. In what ways are these such a powerful testimony, not only to the prophetic reliability of the Bible but to God’s foreknowledge? For instance, notice how, between Daniel 2, 7, and 8, three of the four main kingdoms are named for us. How should this help us to learn to trust in the Word of God and His promises to us?
- 2 In these accounts in the book of Daniel and some of the other stories (such as that of Joseph), there were some miracles that, of course, greatly added to the credibility of their witness to the pagans around them. At the same time, too, what aspects of their character lend even more credibility to their witness? That is, in what way can character and faithfulness, even more than signs and wonders, be a more powerful witness to others about the reality of God and what He can do in our lives?
- 3 As we saw in Wednesday’s study, Matthew 24:14 says that the gospel needs to go to the ends of the earth, and then the end will come. Does this mean that Jesus will not come back until we do the work that He has called us to do? Discuss.

A Gift From the River: Part 1

by DONESHOR TRIPURA, BANGLADESH

Doneshor was glad to be home, watching his father's water buffalo. He had been away at school and had just completed his high school graduation exams. The day grew hotter, and Doneshor decided to go for a swim in the nearby river while the buffalo grazed nearby. He waded into the cool water, looking for a place that was deep enough to swim. It was the dry season, and the river was much shallower than usual.

Doneshor stood in the waist-deep water and looked upstream. He saw something floating in the water. It wasn't unusual to find debris in the river, so he wasn't sure why this object caught his eye. He waited as it bobbed closer to him, then he reached down and picked it out of the water. It was a Bible. He had never seen a Bible before, but instinctively he knew that this was a holy Book. He waded ashore and carefully laid the wet book in the sun to dry. As a few pages dried, he then turned to other wet pages and allowed the sun's hot rays to dry them.

Doneshor came from a religious family. Every day they worshiped their gods, laying gifts of rice and incense on the altar in their home. Doneshor's parents had taught him to respect all things holy, and that included the Book he had found in the river.

The Book wasn't yet dry when evening came, so Doneshor took it home. The next morning he carried it back to the field and laid it open in the sun. After three days, the Bible was dry enough for him to read it. Curious, he turned to the first pages and began reading, "In the beginning God created . . ."

Doneshor was fascinated by the account of Creation and the first man and woman. He remembered reading about the first humans in the Bhagavad Gita, the Hindu holy book. An idea struck him, and he began comparing the Bhagavad Gita with the Bible.

One day he read the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples and contrasted that to his own prayers. *I have done nothing but ask and ask, wanting something for myself or my family. Now I understand that Christians pray for others.*

As Doneshor continued reading, he discovered a God who searches out and invites people to accept His gift of salvation. This God is patient, and He loves to forgive. Doneshor thought how his entire life had been an effort to earn the favor of the gods by giving them expensive gifts and by making long and tiring pilgrimages to appease them.

To be continued in next week's Inside Story.

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Daniel 1:3, 4, 8, 19*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Identify key lessons from the experience of biblical exiles about living faithfully for God in less-than-ideal circumstances.

Feel: Be inspired by the spiritual courage of characters such as Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Do: Determine not to withdraw from culture but to engage it in ways that draw attention to the values of God's kingdom.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: The Anchor of Identity

A In order to function as members of the Babylonian court, Daniel and the other exiles must have shed some of their Jewish cultural practices. What is the significance of the issues the exiles choose as nonnegotiables?

B What are some historic markers of Seventh-day Adventist identity, and how do these serve to keep us anchored in our faith and mission?

II. Feel: Becoming Spiritually Flabby

A How could feeling safe in the practice of our faith actually inflict harm on our spiritual health?

B How do we feel when we exercise spiritual courage in a difficult situation? What emotions do we experience when we choose the easy way out?

III. Do: Exercising Our Spiritual Muscles

A When was the last time you put God to the test in a way similar to Daniel's ten-day diet experiment (*Dan. 1:12–15*)? How did it impact your faith?

B Even if you don't pray by an open window like Daniel did, can others tell that you are a person of prayer? If so, how?

C How does Jesus' prayer recorded in John 17:15–18 help us face with courage the everyday challenges of "living in exile"?

► **Summary:** Feeling too at home in this world should serve as a warning sign for followers of Christ. But even though we long for our eternal home, this week's lesson reminds us that we also have a mission to engage creatively with society and to demonstrate the transformative power of faith within our culture.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Daniel 3:17, 18*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Like Daniel and the other faithful exiles of Babylon, we have the opportunity to authentically represent God and His mission no matter where we live or the challenges we face.

Just for Teachers: Christian thinkers have debated for centuries how Christians should best relate to the culture around them. The easiest approach is to just assimilate. The book of Daniel doesn't tell us how many Jewish exiles took this option. No doubt many chose the "safer" path of not making a fuss and just eating from the king's table and bowing before the idol on the Plain of Dura. However, the Bible holds up for our example Daniel and his three friends, who took another approach. As you teach the lesson this week, explore how these faithful exiles found a balance between active engagement with Babylonian culture and principled refusal to compromise.

Opening Discussion: In 2007, the *Washington Post* newspaper conducted an experiment. They arranged for Joshua Bell, one of the world's leading classical violinists, to play just outside the L'Enfant Plaza Metro station in Washington, D.C. They wanted to gauge the reaction of passing commuters. It was early morning rush hour on a cold winter's day. Holding his \$3.5 million Stradivarius violin, he played six pieces for about half an hour. During that time, only 7 people stopped to listen at least for a minute; another 1,097 walked by. People tossed loose change into his violin case, totaling \$32.17—this to a world-famous genius who can earn \$1,000 a minute playing in the great concert halls of the world. (For the full story see Gene Weingarten, "Pearls Before Breakfast," *Washington Post Magazine*, April 8, 2007.) As Seventh-day Adventists seeking to play the "old, old melody" to the world, sometimes it can be discouraging. It's like playing the violin to people who won't stop to listen. We may be playing the most beautiful melody in the universe, but most people just walk on by.

Consider This: What lessons does this story teach? In what ways is living in a secular culture, or a culture dominated by another religion, like living in exile in a foreign country? How can we find better ways to play the "old melody" of salvation?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Daniel and his fellow exiles succeeded in their mission for several reasons—identity and integrity, engagement, and prayer. Explore with your class how we can exercise these principles today.

Bible Commentary

I. Identity and Integrity *(Review with your class Daniel 3:17–19, 6:10.)*

Exile is a painful theme weaving its way through the history of Israel.

In the New Testament, Christian believers are pictured as strangers in a strange land or, in the words of Peter, “aliens and strangers” in the world (*1 Pet. 2:11, NASB*). The apostle John warns us not to love the world or the things of the world (*1 John 2:15*), and James likens friendship with the world as hatred toward God. Paul quotes Isaiah, “ ‘Come out from among them and be separate’ ” (*2 Cor. 6:17, NKJV*).

And yet, Jesus said that even though we are not of the world, we must be in it. And that means guarding carefully our spiritual heritage and the truth God has given us (*1 Tim. 3:14, 6:20*).

Consider This: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego literally stood out from the crowd on the Plain of Dura; Daniel broadcast his faith by praying by an open window. Today, in what ways do we either stand out or blend into the general community? What are the outward characteristics that Seventh-day Adventists should display to identify us as people in exile?

II. Engagement *(Review Daniel 6:3 with your class.)*

Just how were the Jewish people supposed to behave in exile? Maintaining their Jewish identity was crucial, but it was not to be maintained through exclusivity. Speaking to the Jews about to be exiled to Babylon, God tells them not to set up a separate Jewish enclave hidden away from the rest of the Babylonian community: “But seek the welfare [*shalom*] of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare [*shalom*] you will find your welfare [*shalom*]” (*Jer. 29:7, ESV*).

The Hebrew word *shalom* is a beautiful, multidimensional word meaning “welfare, peace, prosperity.” God is telling the exiles to work and pray for the *shalom* of Babylon. We see this in action in the lives of Daniel and his

three friends. While remaining true to their beliefs and heritage, they become involved in the civic and political affairs of Babylon. Daniel ministers to the *shalom* of various Babylonian kings, interpreting their dreams and bringing them messages from God.

Consider This: Daniel’s example is often cited today as a model for how Christians can safely engage with the political or civic world. Do you think leadership in the public sphere—in politics, business, or the media—will always lead toward compromise? Why, or why not? What are the spiritual safeguards that can help us navigate these challenges?

III. Prayer (*Review Daniel 6:4, 5, 10, 11 with your class.*)

Throughout the book of Daniel, prayer is an indispensable part of Daniel’s identity and ministry, whether it be giving thanks (6:10), asking God for help (vs. 11), confessing (9:5–11), pleading for his land (vss. 16–19), or asking God for the key to the dreams of kings.

And yet, Jesus’ counsel to pray in private—in a closet, if necessary—could have been very appealing to Daniel in view of the death penalty for praying to anyone other than the king. It would have been so easy to rationalize—“I’ll still be praying, just not publicly”; “I can’t continue as a missionary for God here in Babylon if I’m dead”; “Nowhere do the Scriptures say I have to pray where I can be seen.”

But, of course, Jesus’ counsel was directed at those praying publicly to parade their good works. And for Daniel, such a man of integrity, it would have seemed like compromise to change his prayer habits. So, he stood firm.

Consider This: Daniel’s prayer life seems to have been marked by consistency—of time of day, posture, and place. What role do you think daily habits can play in either enhancing or disrupting your prayer connection with God?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Sociologist Rodney Stark argues that the key to the rapid growth of the early church was its wholistic community ministry. Although exiles in a pagan culture, they didn’t just keep to themselves: “Christianity served as a revitalization movement that arose in response to the misery, chaos, fear, and brutality of life in the urban Greco-Roman world.”—Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton

University Press, 1996), p. 161. So, for example, in times of plague and sickness, pagan priests fled the cities while Christians remained to help the sick and suffering. In an oft-quoted statement, the theologian Tertullian, a pagan convert, said, “It is our care of the helpless, our practice of loving kindness that brands us in the eyes of many of our opponents. “Only look,” they say, “look how they love one another!” ’ ”—Page 87. The Emperor Julian wrote, “The impious Galileans support not only their poor, but ours as well; everyone can see that our people lack aid from us.’ ”—Page 84.

Consider This: How does your community view Seventh-day Adventists?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Remind your class that we are not just talking about something that “happened back then” or something that’s an interesting theological discussion point. We’re talking about how we can faithfully apply biblical principles to our daily lives—sometimes in difficult situations. As a class, explore the difference between just talking about our beliefs and living them faithfully, even as we feel the heat from the fiery furnace.

Activity: Depending on the size of your class, break into smaller groups or remain together for this activity. Consider the following situations that a Seventh-day Adventist might face (or come up with different scenarios that are more relevant to your local culture). Advise these individuals on how they can be faithful missionaries in spite of challenges they face.

1. An Adventist laborer in a developing country earns a couple of dollars a day cleaning streets—barely enough to support his family of four children. He is told that he must work Sabbaths. If he says No, he knows there will be several hundred people lined up to take his job, and he will have no source of income.

2. A young Adventist starts classes in a public university and for the first time is confronted with atheistic, materialistic worldviews that are presented in a compelling, attractive way. Her classmates all seem to just accept it. She has a crisis of faith, wondering how she will cope.

3. A young Adventist college graduate finds a job in a country town with no Seventh-day Adventist church. His only friends are at his workplace, and their gatherings always involve drinking and smoking. Should the young man resign himself to having no social life? Or can he attend these parties? Give reasons for your answers.

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