

# Mission<sup>1</sup> in a Pagan<sup>2</sup> Land: Daniel and Company



## SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 6

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Daniel 1–3; Daniel 6.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “Daniel decided not to make himself ‘unclean’ by eating the king’s food and drinking his wine. So he asked the chief official for a favor. He wanted permission not to make himself ‘unclean’ with the king’s food and wine” (Daniel 1:8, NIV).

**KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT:** The stories of Daniel and his friends in Babylon help us understand the importance of faithfulness<sup>3</sup> and mission to our work for Jesus. How true this is today 2,600 years after the story of Daniel takes place.

**“WE KNOW THAT IN ALL THINGS GOD WORKS FOR THE GOOD** of those who love him. He appointed them to be saved in keeping with his purpose” (Romans 8:28, NIV).

In dark situations, we can comfort ourselves and know that all things will work together for good in the end. All things are not always good. But with God, they can work together for good. We are not guaranteed things will be the way we want. And we may never witness the good that results. But the promise remains.

This week we will focus on God turning bad into good in the experience of four young Jewish men who were taken by force to a foreign country. But because of their full loyalty, God was able to use them as witnesses for His purposes and power. Through different tests, such as a fiery furnace and a den of lions, God both showed His care for Daniel and his friends and His power before pagans who knew only their idols (false gods). Only God knows the eternal (forever) results of the faithfulness shown by these young Hebrews.

1. mission—the special duty (work) for Jesus that a church sends a person or a group out to do.

2. pagan—having to do with the worship of idols (false gods) or nature instead of God.

3. faithfulness—the act of being true and loyal; the act of being someone that others can believe in, count on, and trust.

**SUNDAY—SEPTEMBER 7****A SPIRITUAL (HOLY) FOUNDATION (BASIS) (Deuteronomy 6:6, 7)**

Most of us know the simple story of Daniel and his friends. They were taken as slaves by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, about 600 years before Christ. Through their faithfulness, God used these young men to further His plans and mission in Babylon. At that time Babylon was the world's most powerful nation. But the stories of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah are a tribute (honor) to the faithful training by their parents.



**Daniel and his friends were taken as slaves to Babylon.**

Jewish families took seriously the duty of instructing their children. Much of this took place through storytelling, an important part of family life. Parents were to tell and retell the stories of God's leading in the history

of their nation. Children were to learn how following God's commandments leads to life, while disobeying them leads to death.

**In Deuteronomy 6:6, 7 (and Deuteronomy 4:9) what spiritual principle is important for both children and all of us? In what ways are daily, personal devotions<sup>4</sup> a way of using this principle in our own lives?**

The parents of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah could not have foreseen what would happen to their children. But they taught the Bible faithfully to their boys. In this way the parents gave their children a strong spiritual foundation (training) for the rest of their lives. How important that parents try to do the same for their own children today. But at the same time, parents also profit from talking to their children about God and telling them about His miracles, goodness, and love. Even for those who do not have children or for those whose children are gone, how important for us to remember the goodness and power of God at all times. After all, how can we share with others what we, ourselves, have not experienced?

**How faithful are you in your personal devotions? How can our devotions help strengthen faith and make us better witnesses?**

4. devotions—periods of time during each day that are set aside for studying and thinking about God's Word and for prayer.

**MONDAY—SEPTEMBER 8****THE EARLY TESTS (Daniel 1:4)**

After the boys arrived in Babylon, it was clear that Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah would face many temptations<sup>5</sup> and negative influences.<sup>6</sup>

**In Daniel 1:4, what is the first attack on their faith? Why could it be so deadly?**

What we read and see influences our thoughts. Perhaps for the first time in their lives, Daniel and his friends were exposed to literature (writings) that taught beliefs opposed to what they had learned. In Babylonian literature the young men were exposed to astrology,<sup>7</sup> false gods, and myths.<sup>8</sup> The battle for their minds and souls had begun (read Philippians 4:8) and for their bodies too. Modern science has shown clearly that our bodies are closely connected with our minds.

**What key word in Daniel 1:8 shows why Daniel and his friends (read verses 12–14) did not want to eat the king’s food?**

The key word is *defile*, which in Hebrew means just that, to “pollute,



**In Babylon, Daniel and his friends were exposed to the worship of false gods.**

to make something foul or bad.” For these young men, the issue was not just healthful living or a personal choice. It was a religious issue.

**What kind of excuses could Daniel and his friends have made to themselves to eat the food anyway?**

From the beginning of their time in Babylon, the four young men decided to stand for principle,<sup>9</sup> no matter what the cost. This set the pattern for the rest of their time in Babylon. There they were tested more than once for their faith. Through their faithfulness, they gave a strong witness to the God of heaven.

5. temptations—things that can turn us away from God and try to get us to do, think, feel, or say what is wrong.

6. influences—the power to affect or change persons or things.

7. astrology—the study of the influence (power) that stars and planets are believed by some to have on the events of our earth and on what happens in our lives.

8. myths—stories that are not true about events that took place a very long time ago; imaginary (make-believe) people or things that happened.

9. principle—laws or rules upon which other laws are based; the Ten Commandments.

**It is a human weakness to make excuses for bad choices or wrong behavior. In what areas of your life do you make “excuses” for what you do? What steps can you take to deal with this spiritually dangerous weakness?**

## **TUESDAY—SEPTEMBER 9**

### **NO COMPROMISE<sup>10</sup> (Isaiah 56:1–8)**

The Bible story clearly shows how God was involved in the life of the Babylonians—under King Nebuchadnezzar and later under King Cyrus. God is pictured as the God of both the children of Israel and of all nations.

**Think of the time when Isaiah 56:1–8 was written. What is the important point made there?**

**Read Daniel 1:6, 7. Why did the Babylonians do this?**

The meaning of names was important to Jewish families. According to their custom, children were named carefully. The names Daniel (God is my judge), Hananiah (God has favored), Mishael (who is what God is?), and Azariah (Jehovah has helped) show how important parents felt their children’s names were to their children’s spiritual lives.

Nebuchadnezzar’s top official, Ashpenaz, gives the four young Jewish men new Babylonian names—

Beltshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These names were tributes to Babylonian gods.

But that is the closest these four men would get to idolatry (worshiping false gods). Stuck with the new names, the young men had no choice but to go by them. Under God’s blessing they soon moved into important positions in the court and government of Babylon.

After their period of preparation, Ashpenaz presents the four young men to the king. The king talks with them and “found none equal” to them (Daniel 1:19, NIV). “He [Nebuchadnezzar] asked them for advice in matters that required wisdom and understanding. He always found their answers to be the best. In fact, the men [Daniel and his friends] were ten times better than anyone in his kingdom who claimed to get knowledge by using magic” (Daniel 1:20, NIV).



**King Nebuchadnezzar found Daniel and his friends wiser than all the wise men in his kingdom.**

10. compromise—keeping something and giving up something to reach an agreement; giving up several principles (beliefs; standards) to gain a favor or to make an agreement work. Christians should not compromise their beliefs to gain something else.

What a powerful story. Clearly it shows what God could do through four faithful young men. Taken from Jerusalem to the court of the most powerful person in the world, they rose to important positions. They stood before the king as witnesses to the power of God.

**Why was it acceptable for the four Jewish young men to take pagan names but not acceptable for them to eat pagan food? How do we know the difference between what are just cultural<sup>11</sup> issues and what are religious ones? Be prepared to discuss your answer in class.**

### **WEDNESDAY—SEPTEMBER 10**

#### **INTERPRETER<sup>12</sup> OF DREAMS (Daniel 2:1–13)**

Daniel and his companions had made it to the highest levels of the court in Babylon, the greatest empire in the world at that time. However, as in most of the courts of power, dangers awaited them.

**Read Daniel 2:1–13 and answer the following questions:**

- ❶ How were the wise men trying to fool the king?**
- ❷ How did the king make sure that their tricks would not work?**

11. cultural—having to do with the ideas, skills, arts, tools, and way of life of a certain people at a certain time.

12. interpreter—someone whose job it is to explain the meaning of something so that others can understand it.

13. interpreting—to explain the meaning of something so that others can understand it.

14. visions—special messages from God that are seen in the mind or in a dream or in a trance to help a person know God's will (plan).

- ❸ What words of the wise men showed that what the king asked was impossible? Why would those words later help witness to the power of God?**

God had earlier given Daniel the gift of interpreting<sup>13</sup> dreams and visions<sup>14</sup> (Daniel 1:17). But Daniel was not going to act on his own. He gathered together his three friends and urged them to pray (Daniel 2:18). Clearly, without God's help, Daniel and his friends would meet the same fate as the magicians and frauds in the king's court.

**Read Daniel's prayer of thanksgiving (Daniel 2:20–23). What is the most important point of his prayer? What hope and encouragement can you get from this point for yourself?**

Most of us know the rest of the story. (If not, then read the chapter.) Think about what it meant for the king of the greatest empire in the world to bow down and worship a foreign slave in his court (verses 46–48)! The king was very impressed, no matter how much more he had to learn.

Through Daniel, God saves the lives of the wise men throughout Babylon. God leads a pagan king to at least the beginnings of belief in the true God. And He advances Daniel and his friends to positions of author-

ity (power), where they can be a greater witness to Him.

### THURSDAY—SEPTEMBER 11

#### TWO LIFE-OR-DEATH TESTS (Daniel 3:16–18)

Two more big tests give Daniel and his three friends opportunity (a chance) to witness to the true God.

As much as your time lets you, read through Daniel 3 and the test of faith the three Hebrew boys faced there.

**What is the most important point of Daniel 3:16–18? How is the principle (rule) still important for all believers today? Read also Matthew 10:28.**

Read Daniel 3:28–30 to learn just how impressed the king was about what he had seen. The king still had a lot to learn. But these faithful young men gave a powerful witness for the living God that spread through the pagan world.

Again, read through the story of Daniel in the lions' den (Daniel 6) about another test of faith. But notice that this time the story took place in a new kingdom.

**What proof can you find in the chapter that shows that the king already knew something about the power of Daniel's God?**

**What kind of testimony<sup>15</sup> does**



God protects Daniel from the hungry lions.

**Darius give about Daniel's God? How correct is this testimony? What does this teach us about God's power to reach pagans without the Written Word (the Bible)?**

Imagine if in both stories these Jews would have given up in order to save their own lives. Again, how easy in both situations it would have been to make "excuses" for doing the easy thing. Instead, Daniel and his friends remained faithful. So, as a result, they helped spread a knowledge of the true God.

**In times in the past, have you**

15. testimony—the many good things a person tells to others about what God has done for him or her.

tried to find an easy way out of what you knew was right? How did you feel? How can you make yourself stronger in faith so that whenever the next test comes, you do what you know is right?

### FRIDAY—SEPTEMBER 12

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** Read Ellen G. White, “In the Court of Babylon,” pages 479–490; “Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream,” pages 491–502; and “The Fiery Furnace,”<sup>16</sup> pages 503–513, in *Prophets*<sup>17</sup> and *Kings*.

“God called Daniel to witness for Him in Babylon. In the same way He calls us to be His witnesses in the world today. In the smallest and in the largest affairs of life, God wants us to show the principles of His kingdom to other people. Many are waiting for some great work to be brought to them. But daily they lose opportunities [chances] for showing faithfulness to God. Daily they fail to do the little duties of life faithfully. They probably wait for some large work in which they may hope to show great talents that will satisfy their great ambitions. But while they wait, their days pass by.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pages 487, 488.

“The news of how God rescued Daniel’s friends was carried to many countries by members of the different nations, who had been invited by Nebuchadnezzar to the dedication

[Daniel 3]. Through the faithfulness of His children, the witness of God’s glory was spread all over the earth.” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 512.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ As a class, talk about your answers to the question at the end of Tuesday’s study.
- ❷ The stories in Daniel are powerful lessons. They show how Daniel and his friends were able to witness to others about the Lord. How? By staying faithful to Him in very difficult situations. At the same time, how many of us have heard stories of people doing crazy things in the name of God, even to the point of losing their lives? When faced with a difficult situation, how can we know the difference? Should we stand firm? Or could we be a better witness for God by showing our willingness to compromise?
- ❸ For every Daniel in the lions’ den story, there is a story of John the Baptist. How are we to understand these different endings?

**SUMMARY:** The book of Daniel describes the experience of four young men who faithfully remain true to their principle and to their God. Their faithfulness is a powerful witness to both the rulers and people of Babylon and to the people of neighboring nations.

16. furnace—a closed structure inside of which heat is created.

17. prophets—men or women sent by God to warn us about what will happen in the future.