

Daniel

From Jerusalem to Babylon

Lesson #2 for January 11, 2020

Scriptures: 2 Kings 21:10-16; Daniel 1; Galatians 2:19-20; Matthew 16:24-26; 2 Corinthians 4:17; James 1:5.

1. This lesson will focus on Daniel 1 and the implications of what we learn there for the rest of the book of Daniel. Try to imagine the circumstances under which Daniel and his three friends grew up. They grew up following the very, very wicked and evil reigns of Manasseh and Amon, his son. Admittedly, Manasseh did try to straighten out his life during those last five years; however, it was too little, too late. There was a brief period when Josiah tried to do what was right. Daniel and his three friends were almost certainly born during the reign of Josiah. But, like their ancestor, the kings who followed Josiah were totally wicked.
2. At the time of the first conquest of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar in 606-605 B.C., these four young men were taken out of their home territory, as wicked as it was, to Babylon, the capital of the empire that ruled the world at that point in time. To get a feel for how bad things were, consider the following.

2 Kings 21:10-16: ¹⁰ Through his servants the prophets the LORD said, ¹¹ **“King Manasseh has done these disgusting things, things far worse than what the Canaanites did; and with his idols he has led the people of Judah into sin.** ¹² So I, the LORD God of Israel, will bring such a disaster on Jerusalem and Judah that everyone who hears about it will be stunned. ¹³ I will punish Jerusalem as I did Samaria, as I did King Ahab of Israel and his descendants. I will wipe Jerusalem clean of its people, as clean as a plate that has been wiped and turned upside down. ¹⁴ I will abandon the people who survive, and will hand them over to their enemies, who will conquer them and plunder their land. ¹⁵ I will do this to my people because they have sinned against me and have stirred up my anger from the time their ancestors came out of Egypt to this day.”

¹⁶ Manasseh killed so many innocent people that the streets of Jerusalem were flowing with blood; he did this in addition to leading the people of Judah into idolatry, causing them to sin against the LORD.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., 2 Kings 21:10–16). New York: American Bible Society.† [See also 2 Kings 17.]‡

2 Kings 24:18-20: ¹⁸ Zedekiah was 21 years old when he became king of Judah, and he ruled in Jerusalem for eleven years. His mother was Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah from the city of Libnah. ¹⁹ King Zedekiah sinned against the LORD, just as King Jehoiakim had done. ²⁰ **The LORD became so angry with the people of Jerusalem and Judah that he banished them from his sight.**—*Good News Bible.**†

Jeremiah 3:13: “Only admit that you are guilty and that you have rebelled against the LORD, your God. Confess that under every green tree you have given your love to foreign gods and that you have not obeyed my commands. I, the LORD, have spoken.”—*Good News Bible.**

3. Very few Christians, including very few Seventh-day Adventists, realize that, according to God’s statement in these passages and despite their superior blessings from God, the children of Israel had deteriorated so badly that they were worse than the Canaanites that God had allowed Israel to conquer in the days of Joshua! Satan had been working very hard!
4. If God knew that things were going to become so bad, why did He allow the children of Israel

to enter the land of Canaan? Why did He even take them out of Egypt?

5. Maybe the most incredible thing of all is that these four young men had apparently been educated so well by their parents and perhaps by some other teachers that they remained faithful to God no matter what happened. Remember that all four of these young men belonged to the tribe of Judah and were considered to be among the elite of the nation and even the royalty in Jerusalem. Don't you wish that Daniel had been the new king of Israel?
6. So, what do we know about the history of Babylon? Babylon had been a very powerful nation in the days of Abraham. Then, it had lost much of its power, having fallen under the control of the Assyrians ruling from Nineveh. Later, under the powerful leadership of Nabopolassar, Nebuchadnezzar's father, Babylon rose to world domination status in the days of Daniel. We need to remember also that Babylon was located at the place which Genesis 11 talks about as Babel. It was there that the tower of Babel had been constructed.
7. We do not know exactly when the book of Daniel was written. With the exception of chapters 10-12, each chapter occurred at a different time; the chapters were probably written down as individual stories before the book was put together. It is interesting to note that at the end of Daniel 1 (Daniel 1:21), Cyrus and the Persians are mentioned, thus suggesting that when Daniel finished his book, he went back and may have edited portions including this which happened about 50-70 years later.
8. Read Daniel 1. Based on this chapter, what is the explanation for the demise of not only the southern kingdom of Judah but also the northern kingdom of Israel? Was it because, as the ancients believed, the gods of the Assyrians and Babylonians were greater and more powerful than the God of Israel and Judah? Of course, as faithful followers of *Yahweh*, we should never agree to that premise. Why was God having so much trouble with the Israelites?
9. In 2020, do we face any of the challenges that Daniel and his friends faced in Babylon? How many pressures are brought upon us today through our friends? Our fellow workers? Television and radio? Or, even the Internet? How would you compare these pressures with the pressures that Daniel and his friends withstood? What should we learn from their experiences? Is Satan relaxing in his temptations in our day?
10. The Jewish captives walked hundreds of miles to get to Babylon. Almost immediately upon arriving there, Daniel and his three friends were offered a royal upgrade. They were to eat of the food offered to the king on his own table, and they were given names honoring the Babylonian gods. It was expected that they would adopt the Babylonian culture, customs, and religion and would serve as ambassadors from Babylon back to their own people in Judah. It was assumed that they would consider it a great privilege to be offered the food prepared for the king himself. It was also assumed that they would offer him their undivided allegiance and recognize their dependence upon him for everything.
11. To the Jewish youth, this presented two major challenges: (1) Most of the food offered on the king's table had first been offered as a sacrifice to one of the Babylonian gods. It would thus be assumed that by eating that food, they were recognizing those gods as being superior to their own God. (2) We also recognize that the diet was full of foods forbidden to the Jewish youth. It also included a considerable amount of alcohol which was also forbidden. What would you have done under those circumstances? Would you risk your life? There was no way to deny the fact that the city of Babylon was a magnificent monument to the works of human beings. Nebuchadnezzar himself was soon to say: "Look how great Babylon is! I built it as my capital city to display my power and might, my glory and majesty." (Daniel 4:30, *GNB**)
12. There is another issue about which we should ask ourselves. Daniel and his three friends were under the control and guidance of the prince of the eunuchs. Is it possible that they had also been made eunuchs? There is no discussion in any part of Daniel that any of them ever married or had children, but such things were often not mentioned in Scripture.

13. In order to better understand the conditions they were facing in Daniel 1, we need to consider some issues. What was the context that led up to the conquest of Judah and the exile of these four young men? As faithful students of the biblical records, Daniel and his friends knew that this was not an unexpected event. Multiple prophets, in fact, seven in total, had warned that unless there were drastic changes in the behavior of the Jewish people, this would be the result.
14. We do not know how many Jewish people were exiled and taken to Babylon at the same time Daniel and his friends were exiled. We do know that the people taken were chosen from among the higher classes consisting of the nobles, the leaders, and the thinkers of Jerusalem.
15. The Bible records three significant invasions by Babylon over about 20 years. The first one took place in 606-605 B.C. after Nebuchadnezzar had defeated the Egyptians at Carchemesh; he then marched into Judah. It was his hope that by taking a relatively small group of the best of the young people to Babylon, they would become ambassadors for him and prevent any further uprisings. In 597 B.C., Jehoiakim, the king in Jerusalem, having grown weary of paying taxes to Babylon decided to shift his loyalty to Egypt and asked Egypt to protect him against Babylon. That was a fatal mistake. Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah for a second time; this time he deporting many of the people of Judah, leaving only a relatively small number to live there. It was during that deportation that Ezekiel and the brand-new king Jehoiachin, the son of Jehoiakim, were taken captive. Jehoiakim had died shortly before the invasion. Nebuchadnezzar was hoping for a better outcome when he next placed Zedekiah (Jehoiachin's uncle and the brother of Jehoiakim) on the throne. Unfortunately, and very sadly, Zedekiah made the same mistake that his brother had made and, once again, sought the help of Egypt against Babylon. In 586 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar's army returned and totally destroyed Judah and Jerusalem, tearing down Solomon's Temple, taking everything of value, and leaving nothing in and around Jerusalem except a pile of rubble.
16. What do we know about the education of Daniel and his friends?

The first stage of Babylonian education involved the learning of the two major languages common to the Babylonians: Aramaic, which was becoming an international language at that time, and Akkadian, which was the literary language used to convey the religious and cultural traditions of the empire. Akkadian required the mastery of a complex cuneiform writing system with hundreds of characters. In this first stage, the students would study texts recounting stories to which Babylonian youths were exposed since childhood, such as the legends of Gilgamesh, Sargon, and Nāram-Sîn.

In the second stage, students were introduced to many more texts, which were intended to hone their literary skills and help them develop a Babylonian worldview. One author thus described this second stage:

“Its purpose, then, was twofold: to fill the student's mind with the theological and political ideology current in the capital and to prepare him for an apprenticeship as a junior *āšīpu*, a position that we know from colophons was held by many novice scribes. As far as exposure to literature goes, the storytelling that characterized the first phase has given way to more serious matters, the inculcation of a world-view and the acquisition of practical expertise.”—A. R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1:36.

We do not know the details of the specific curriculum assigned to Daniel and his friends. But the description above gives an idea of how education was carried out in Babylon during that time. The academic program imposed upon Daniel

and his companions may have been as demanding as the one described above. But Daniel and his friends excelled in all the wisdom and knowledge promoted by the University of Babylon!—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 28.[§] [Daniel and his friends became experts in Babylonian religion!][†]

17. Where did Daniel and his three friends get their wisdom? Was it really possible for them to be 10 times wiser than all the other sages of Babylon? How would that have been measured? It is interesting to note in Daniel 11:33,35 and in Daniel 12:3 that wise leaders will not only share their wisdom with others but also will shine with all the brightness of the sky!
18. The Old Testament includes a significant portion of writings that are called *wisdom literature*. Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, along with the Song of Songs (Song of Solomon) and many of the Psalms have been counted as wisdom texts. What do we mean by a *wisdom text*? These texts, often written in poetic form, emphasize obedience to the law of God and the fact that this usually results in a good life. These texts do not tend to talk about the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt, but rather reach back to talk about creation. The emphasis is on God who established certain laws that are supposed to govern society and the world in which we live. But, not everyone has been continuously blessed by doing God's will. Think of the story of Job. Wisdom literature talks more about one's relationship with God than about national history.
19. Daniel and his friends were regarded as wise, not only because they did well on the examinations in Babylon but also because they were loyal to the Lord. Was it a wise thing to choose the diet which they chose? Was it a wise thing to worship exclusively the God of heaven? Absolutely!
20. Read Daniel 1:7-20. We do not know exactly what all was included in the king's diet. But, clearly, there were meats and other items which were forbidden by the rules of God in Leviticus 11. Of course, as mentioned earlier, especially the meat and the wine had been offered to the Babylonian gods. Those who ate the meat and wine were considered to be their servants. Daniel and his friends refused to participate in that. They considered it to be defiling.
21. The *King James Version* says that Daniel and his friends ate "pulse." What is *pulse*? Consider some possible explanations:

Daniel 1:16: So the overseer continued to withhold their choice food and the wine they were to drink, and kept giving them **vegetables**.—*New American Standard Bible: 1995 update*.^{*} (1995). (Daniel 1:16). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.[†]

Daniel 1:16: So from then on the guard let them continue to eat **vegetables** instead of what the king provided.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

Genesis 1:29: "I have provided **all kinds of grain** and all kinds of fruit for you to eat."—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

Genesis 1:29: Then God said, "Behold, I have given you **every plant yielding seed** that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree."—*New American Standard Bible: 1995 update*.^{*†}

These highlighted terms all come from the same Hebrew root word! Daniel was asking for an Edenic diet! The literal meaning of the Hebrew words used in both Daniel 1 and Genesis 1 is "plants yielding seed."

Pulse. Heb. *zero'im*, "food derived from plants," such as cereals and vegetables. According to Jewish tradition, berries and dates were also comprehended in the term. Since dates are a part of the staple food of Mesopotamia, they seem likely to have been included here.—Nichol, F. D. (Ed.). (1977). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*,^{*} vol. 4, 761. Review and Herald Publishing

Association. [Their diet was certainly more than boiled vegetables and water!][‡]

22. If we take literally what we read in the book of Daniel, it is very clear that God was actively involved in the lives of these four young men. What reasons can you think of for this special relationship? It is very likely that a number of other young people from Jerusalem and from Judah were also taken into captivity along with Daniel and his three friends. But, we hear nothing about them. Why do you think that is? Did those young people eat “from the king’s table” and bow down to the golden idol on the plain of Dura while Daniel’s three friends stood up straight? We do not know.
23. We are told that God granted wisdom to Daniel and his three friends. What do you think that means? Was it because they were good-looking and had no blemishes on them? (Daniel 1:4) Remember that when one, including Daniel before his captivity, offered a sacrifice at the temple in Jerusalem, that sacrifice was to have no blemish; (Leviticus 22:17-25; 21:16-24) and the person who took the sacrifice ate some of the meat of that sacrifice.
24. I am sure that Daniel and his three friends were not honored primarily because they had no physical blemish! They were honored because of their loyalty to God and their unblemished record of faithfully following His will for their lives.
25. Read Galatians 2:19-20; Matthew 16:24-26; and 2 Corinthians 4:17. Paul, especially, certainly recognized that living a Christian life in this world would not be easy. Nevertheless, he lived the life of Christ every day. Wasn’t that true about Daniel? And his friends also?
26. In what ways could God give us wisdom? Daniel and his three friends were not given the privilege of isolating themselves from the cultural and religious environment in Babylon. We do not know if they were forced to attend religious services in honor of the Babylonian gods; however, it is likely they were. They were, no doubt, taught all about the Babylonian gods and how to worship them. Yet, they remained faithful to the true God.
27. How well are we doing at rising above the influences around us in our world that would lead us away from the worship of the true God?
28. No doubt, every Christian who has been educated in the things of the Bible knows about the final examination that Nebuchadnezzar gave to Daniel and his three friends. Were they the only ones who got A’s? In what ways did God help them to reach that goal? Did they study harder than their friends? By avoiding the drinking of alcohol, were their minds clearer in the classes and during study? What does it mean when it says: “These four knew ten times more than any fortuneteller or magician in his whole kingdom”—Daniel 1:20, *Good News Bible*.*
29. Read Daniel 1:17-21; Job 38:36; Proverbs 2:6; and James 1:5. These verses make it very clear that it is God who gives wisdom. He not only gives us brains and minds capable of comprehending what we need to know, but also He helps us to use those brains and minds in the most appropriate ways. More than that, He tells us to ask Him if we believe that we are lacking in wisdom. Do you think God would give us wisdom as He gave wisdom to Daniel and his friends in the “Babylonian University”?
30. Clearly, Daniel and his three friends were immediately given top positions in the kingdom of Babylon. Try to imagine how the previous officials serving Nebuchadnezzar must have felt when those positions were given to youthful foreigners!
31. On their final examinations, do you think Daniel and his friends were asked any questions about pagan beliefs? Did they also understand those pagan beliefs better than any of the other students? Did Nebuchadnezzar ever find out that they had refused his diet?
32. There are at least three important lessons that we should gain from Daniel. (1) God is clearly in control of history. (2) He gives wisdom to those who trust in Him to navigate the hostile environment in which they live. (3) God honors those who trust Him, giving them better and longer lives and inner convictions to follow the truth.

33. Consider the following from Ellen White.

Daniel and his companions in Babylon were, in their youth, apparently more favored of fortune than was Joseph in the earlier years of his life in Egypt; yet they were subjected to tests of character scarcely less severe. From the comparative simplicity of their Judean home these **youth of royal line** were transported to the most magnificent of cities, to the court of its greatest monarch, and were singled out to be trained for the king's special service. Strong were the temptations surrounding them in that corrupt and luxurious court. The fact that they, the worshipers of Jehovah, were captives to Babylon; that the vessels of God's house had been placed in the temple of the gods of Babylon; that the king of Israel was himself a prisoner in the hands of the Babylonians, was boastfully cited by the victors as evidence that their religion and customs were superior to the religion and customs of the Hebrews. **Under such circumstances, through the very humiliations that Israel's departure from His commandments had invited, God gave to Babylon evidence of His supremacy, of the holiness of His requirements, and of the sure result of obedience. And this testimony He gave, as alone it could be given, through those who still held fast their loyalty.**—Ellen G. White, *Education** 54.3.[†]

34. If you were asked by God to write out an inspired record of your life and how you deal with the cultural and religious forces that you live among, what would you say?
35. The ancient peoples believed that if a certain nation was able to conquer another nation, it was because their god was more powerful and better than the god of the conquered nation. Were Daniel and his three friends ever tempted to believe that? Did they ever try to argue with others who did believe it?
36. Read Jeremiah 5:19 and Jeremiah 7:22-34. These passages make it quite clear that there was no such thing as a superiority of Babylonian gods! The problem was that Israel had turned away from their loyalty to the true God and had become worse than the Canaanites who were driven out ahead of them back in the days of Joshua! If you had been in God's place, what would you have done at that point?
37. Review Daniel 1, Genesis 39, and Esther 4&5. How do you suppose Daniel, Joseph, and Esther were regarded in the mind of God? How did they manage to stand straight, tall, and firm for the truth, even under incredible circumstances? How would you compare their experiences?
38. All of Scripture is given primarily to teach us about God. What are we to learn about God from the fact that He allowed His faithful people to be conquered by the Assyrians and the Babylonians? Who do you think had a rougher time in his or her youth: Daniel? Joseph? Or, Esther? Each of these young people rose to a very high position in his/her respective government. Might happen to some of God's faithful young people in our day?
39. One of the questions that Adventist youth face today is the following: Is it easier to stand up for what you believe is right if you attend a worldly university or if you attend an Adventist university?
40. If everyone around you understands that you are "different," does that make it easier for you to stand up for what you believe? Is it harder to stand for the truth living among others who are supposed to think like you do when they tempt you to do evil? What kind of Sabbath challenges do you expect to face in the future? Will you one day be honored in heaven as someone who was faithful like Daniel, Joseph, or Esther?

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