

Daniel

From Furnace to Palace

Lesson #4 for January 25, 2020

Scriptures: Daniel 3; Revelation 13:11-18; 14:9-11; Exodus 20:3-6; Deuteronomy 6:4; 1 Corinthians 15:12-26; Hebrews 11.

1. Why do you think the king constructed that golden image? When do you think this story took place? Zedekiah, as ruler of Judea, was summoned to Babylon (Jeremiah 51:59) in 594 B.C.; it is possible it was in connection with the dedication of that golden statue. What do you think the statue looked like? Was it a statue of Nebuchadnezzar himself? Was Nebuchadnezzar seeking to establish a new form of worship? What was the ultimate conclusion to this whole story?

Thus these youth, imbued with the Holy Spirit, declared to the whole nation their faith, that He whom they worshiped was the only true and living God. This demonstration of their own faith was the most eloquent presentation of their principles. In order to impress idolaters with the power and greatness of the living God, His servants must reveal their own reverence for God. They must make it manifest that He is the only object of their honor and worship, and that no consideration, not even the preservation of life itself, can induce them to make the least concession to idolatry. **These lessons have a direct and vital bearing upon our experience in these last days.**—Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places** 149.4; *Special Testimonies on Education** (1897) 210.1-2; *Pamphlet 154** 57.1; *19 Manuscript Releases** 120.2-3 (1896).[†]

2. Do you believe that part of the conflict at the end of time will be over worship? Will it be a question of how we worship? Or, who we worship? Or, why? Or, all of these? Probably!
3. Today, does it seem almost impossible that the question of worship could take center stage in our humanistic world?
4. Under communism, parents faced a problem at times: Either send their children to the government schools on Sabbath, or have them removed from their home and placed elsewhere! What would you have done?
5. Read Daniel 3:1-7. There is no question about the fact that the idea that his kingdom would later be replaced by others was an annoyance to Nebuchadnezzar. He wanted his descendants to rule forever! Was Nebuchadnezzar trying to set himself up as the ultimate king? Or, was he trying to claim to be a deity?
6. Clearly, Nebuchadnezzar was fully aware of the fact that Daniel and his three friends had excelled on their examinations at the end of their university course. He was also very aware of his dream and Daniel's interpretation as recorded in Daniel 2.
7. Do we ever act like "little Nebuchadnezzars"? Look at the world around us. Self-exaltation seems to be the theme song of almost everyone!
8. Read Daniel 3:8-15; compare Revelation 13:11-18. How would you compare Revelation 14:9-11?
9. Try to imagine yourself on the scene on the plain of Dura. The name *Dura* means *walled place* in the Akkadian language. Remember that the furnace in front was a kind of altar. Seven types of musical instruments were listed. The number seven is intended to invoke completeness and effectiveness. This whole scene was set up like a place of worship!
10. How often today are we encouraged to adopt new lifestyles and new ideologies and to

abandon the commitment we have to the authority of God and His Word?

11. Are you convinced that we live in the last days of this earth's history? The Babylonians used a hexadecimal number system, not a decimal system like the Egyptians did and like we do. Thus, their numbers focused on the number *six* instead of *ten*. So, there are six categories of people in this story. The number of the beast in Revelation 13 is 666. The statue was 60 cubits high and 6 cubits wide. What is that implying?
12. Did bowing down to that idol on the plain of Dura really mean anything? What does *worship* mean? *To worship* someone or something means to regard that person or that thing as of great value. So, what is regarded as of great value to us in our day? Houses? Land? Cars? Retirement plans? Fame?
13. Nebuchadnezzar was demanding that everyone bow down to his idol. The three Hebrew young men knew about Exodus 20:3-6 and Deuteronomy 6:4. It was stated that anyone not bowing down to the image would be thrown into the blazing furnace.
14. Many people are not aware that Nebuchadnezzar on other occasions had literally burned people who did not follow his will.

Jeremiah 29:21-22: ²¹ “The LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, has spoken about Ahab son of Kolaiah and Zedekiah son of Maaseiah, who are telling you lies in his name. He has said that he will hand them over to the power of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia, who will put them to death before your eyes. ²²When the people who were taken away as prisoners from Jerusalem to Babylonia want to bring a curse on someone, they will say, ‘May the LORD treat you like Zedekiah and Ahab, whom the king of Babylonia roasted alive!’”—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Jeremiah 29:21–22). New York: American Bible Society.

15. While the Babylonian gods and the gods of other ancient nations surrounding Israel did not demand exclusive worship, the God of the Hebrews did. “For I the LORD thy God am a jealous God,” (Exodus 20:5, *KJV**) or “I am the LORD your God and I tolerate no rivals.” (*GNB**) See also Deuteronomy 6:4. Is our God just being picky? It is for our best good!
16. Those who reported on the fact that the three young Hebrew leaders did not bow down must have been excited about this opportunity to accuse them. After all, they had been placed in positions of responsibility over all of Babylon!
17. The way they reported to the king (See Daniel 3:12.) was intentionally designed to inflame his passions: They reminded him that he himself had set up this statue and that he was the one who had placed these three young men over the province of Babylon. More than that, these young men had refused to worship the gods that he wanted to promote. And now, they had refused to worship the image the king had set up.
18. Clearly, Nebuchadnezzar was furious. He said: “Who is that god that shall deliver you from my hands?” (Daniel 3:15. *NKJV**) How do you feel about the response of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?

Daniel 3:17-18: “If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.”—*New King James Version.*†*

19. So, where did that commitment to God and that faith come from?

Romans 10:17: ¹⁷So then, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message

comes through preaching Christ.—*Good News Bible*.*

20. A trusting relationship with God can only come from learning about Him and becoming His friend.

John 15:15: [Jesus said:] “I do not call you servants [slaves] any longer, because servants do not know what their master is doing. Instead, I call you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father.”—*Good News Bible*.*†

21. How do you feel about the statement: “God wants love and friends, but the Devil wants obedience and slaves!” Can you believe that the Devil would actually ask Jesus to bow down and worship him? (Matthew 4:9) Does that remind you of Nebuchadnezzar?

22. How do you feel about King Nebuchadnezzar in this story? Does he sound friendly? Would you be comfortable with him? What about the third angel’s message in Revelation 14:9-11? As a church, we have claimed that the three angels’ messages are our end-time message for the world. Is our God nothing more than a heavenly Nebuchadnezzar? How could Ellen White have suggested that the third angel’s message is righteousness by faith “in verity”? Does God say to the wicked at the end: “Worship Me or into the burning fiery furnace”?

23. There are a lot of bumper stickers and one-liners about “hell”! What do you think of these?
“Frequent exposure to the Son can prevent burning!”

“Welcome to Eternity: Would you like smoking? Or, non-smoking?”

24. How should we relate to the fact that there are large nations today with laws against changing religions? What do we learn in this lesson that might be relevant to that question? How many other people in Babylon and in those other national groups present there knew about the previous dream of Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel and/or the interpretation?

25. Would it be a form of worship to work 60 hours a week in order to purchase the latest gadgets? Or, a new car? Or, a new house so that we could impress our associates or our neighbors? Does rigid adherence to principles seem like an old-fashioned value?

26. Adlai Stevenson once said that it is often easier to fight for one’s principles than to live up to them. Does being rigidly uncompromising when it comes to principles make one more savable? Or, a better neighbor in heaven?

27. Read Daniel 3:19-27. Is it possible to make a fire seven times hotter? Why do you think Nebuchadnezzar was so angry? Shortly after the three young Hebrew men were thrown into the fire, Nebuchadnezzar saw something that shocked him.

Daniel 3:25: “Then why do I see four men walking about in the fire?” he asked. “They are not tied up, and they show no sign of being hurt—and the fourth one looks like an angel.” [Footnote: *angel; or a son of the gods; or a son of God.*]*‡§—*Good News Bible*.

28. The Hebrew expression, *Son of God*, means literally “a divine Being.”

But the Lord did not forget His own. As His witnesses were cast into the furnace, the Saviour revealed Himself to them in person, and together they walked in the midst of the fire. In the presence of the Lord of heat and cold, the flames lost their power to consume.—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings** 508.3-509.0.

29. Why does God act so dramatically in some stories like this one and at other times seem to do nothing?

30. How would you feel if you had been an observer of this whole process? What was God's primary role in this story? Was He trying to reward the faith of these three young friends? Was He trying to reach out to Nebuchadnezzar? Was He trying to say something of significance to the entire group looking on? What do you think they learned? Is there evidence that any further attempts were made to worship this image?
31. We need to remember, of course, that all of us sinners are looking for a rescue that is beyond belief and way more than the one in this story. See 1 Corinthians 15:12-26.
32. How many of your Christian beliefs are so important to you that you would die for them? Or, would you find some way to rationalize saving your life?
33. Read Hebrews 11, the faith chapter. In fact, this chapter does not tell us what faith is; it tells us what faith does!
34. **Based on all of Scripture, a biblical definition of *faith* stated so well so many times by one of God's best modern friends, Dr. A. Graham Maxwell, is as follows:**

***Faith* is just a word we use to describe a relationship with God as with a Person well-known. The better we know Him, the better the relationship may be. [We cannot say, "will be" because we remember the story of Lucifer!]**

***Faith* implies an attitude toward God of love, trust, and deepest admiration. It means having enough confidence in God based on the more-than-adequate evidence revealed to be willing to believe what He says as soon as we are sure He is the One saying it, to accept what He offers as soon as we are sure He is the One offering it, and to do what He wishes as soon as we are sure He is the One wishing it, without reservation, for the rest of eternity. Anyone who has such faith would be perfectly safe to save. This is why faith is the only requirement for heaven. (See Acts 16:31.)**

***Faith* also means that, like Abraham, [Genesis 18:22-33] Job, [Job 42:7-8] and Moses, [Exodus 32:5-14; Numbers 14:11-25] God's friends, we know God well enough to reverently ask Him, "Why?" [Sentence in brackets was also stated parenthetically many times by Dr. Maxwell. Bible texts in brackets are added.][‡]**

35. Some people have a quantitative view of faith. If they pray for some immediate need and God answers their prayers by meeting that need, they feel that their faith is enhanced. What happens if God chooses not to reward their request right at that moment?
36. God is much more concerned about the quality of our faith than He is about the quantity.

Important are the lessons to be learned from the experience of the Hebrew youth on the plain of Dura. In this our day, many of God's servants, though innocent of wrongdoing, will be given over to suffer humiliation and abuse at the hands of those who, inspired by Satan, are filled with envy and religious bigotry. Especially will the wrath of man be aroused against those who hallow the Sabbath of the fourth commandment; and at last a universal decree will denounce these as deserving of death.

The season of distress before God's people will call for a faith that will not falter. His children must make it manifest that He is the only object of their worship, and that no consideration, not even that of life itself, can induce them to make the least concession to false worship. To the loyal heart the

commands of sinful, finite men will sink into insignificance beside the word of the eternal God. Truth will be obeyed though the result be imprisonment or exile or death.—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings** 512.1-513.0.

37. Read 1 Peter 1:3-9. Why do you think God rescued some people and not others? Is there any way to determine before we get to the kingdom of heaven why God rescues some and allows others to die? Compare John the Baptist, the three Hebrew young men, Daniel in the lions' den, Peter and Paul, the apostle John, Job's children, and Job.
38. If this story had ended with the death of the Hebrew men in the fiery furnace, what lessons could we still take away? God's faithful children were loyal to God even despite troubles. They had already been taken from their homes as slaves and forced to walk to Babylon.
39. We are told that in the final events of this world's history, Sabbath worship will be the outward sign of a belief in God and a trust in His Word above and beyond our trust in any worldly entity. So, why is the observance of the Sabbath so important? Is it that it represents an entire paradigm—a whole set of beliefs that go together including our trust in God's Word?
40. Like so many other times in the Bible (See, for example, Exodus 12:12 and 1 Kings 18.) when Satan directly challenges God or God's people, God often acts and proves who is the real God. Repeatedly, God turned the Egyptian "gods" into plagues.
41. Do we learn anything of significance about God or about the great controversy in this story? Or, is this just a power struggle between the forces of good and the forces of evil? What do you think was the collective impact of this story in Nebuchadnezzar's day? Did it help to advertise the truth about God? Were any of the observers converted by this experience?
42. It seems there are at least three major things that we need to learn from this lesson: (1) The truth about worship, (2) Faithfulness, and (3) Deliverance.
43. What do you think these three young men had to say to each other when they were alone and able to talk freely? Did they ever forget what had happened to them?
44. If you face a very difficult situation and you see that God's hand helps you through it, how does that affect your faith?
45. When Nebuchadnezzar insisted that all the government leaders at almost every level come to the plain of Dura and bow down to this idol, was he thinking more of politics or religion? In ancient times, there was often a blurring of the line between the two.
46. Where was Daniel during these proceedings? Was he back taking care of things in Babylon? Did he have a special one-time exemption? Did Nebuchadnezzar, realizing how he would respond, assign him other duties? Did the other three young men recognize that this image was a direct challenge to Daniel's dream and interpretation? Is it possible that some people encouraged Nebuchadnezzar to do this to challenge the leadership of these three and Daniel?
47. Is it even possible that Nebuchadnezzar remembered back to the time when he bowed down to Daniel and he thought: "I must not call Daniel to be present because how foolish I would look calling all these people to worship my image and then I end up bowing down to Daniel himself again!?" (See Daniel 2:46.) As Nebuchadnezzar looked back on that previous experience, did he think of it as a terrible political and social blunder?
48. Shouldn't the three Hebrews have found some excuse to avoid going to the plain of Dura? Didn't they know what would happen when they got there? Aren't we told to try to avoid evil as much as possible?
49. With the thousands of people out there on that plain, is it possible that there was not another Hebrew person there? What about King Zedekiah? Was he there? (See Jeremiah 51:59 and

SDA Bible Commentary on that verse.) Or, Jehoiachin who had been taken into Babylonian captivity? Did he/they bow down? Did any other Hebrews refuse to bow down?

50. Do you think Nebuchadnezzar was specifically trying to test these other three youth from Judea apart from their champion Daniel? Or, is it possible that he had overlooked them since they were not in direct contact with him on a daily basis?
51. How many of the people who bowed down to Nebuchadnezzar's image were saying in their minds: "OK, we'll bow down; but, you know we don't believe in it"? Would that be OK?

One point that deserves a comment is the conspicuous absence of Daniel. Christian commentators and the Talmud have advanced several hypotheses as to the reason for his absence: (1) Daniel was away on business; (2) he had permission from the king to withdraw; (3) he stood so high with Nebuchadnezzar that no one dared to complain about him; (4) his presence may not have been required; (5) he may have been sick; (6) Daniel was no longer involved in government; (7) Daniel was present, and he briefly bowed before the image, but the Lord does not let his name occur here because of his later faithfulness; (8) God kept Daniel away so that people would not say "that they were delivered through his merit"; (9) Daniel avoided the scene to keep from fulfilling the prophecy that "the graven images of their gods shall ye burn with fire" (*Deut. 7:25*); (10) Nebuchadnezzar "let Daniel depart, lest people say he has burnt his god in fire." This summary is from Peter A. Steveson, *Daniel* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 2008), p. 56.—[as quoted in *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 54-55].[§]

52. Truthfully, we do not know why Daniel was not there or is not mentioned. As you can see, a number of suggestions have been made.
53. Can you think of other examples in the Bible that are similar in some ways to this story of the three Hebrew worthies? What about the confrontation between Mordecai and Haman recorded in the book of Esther? What was Satan trying to accomplish at that time?
54. Do we have it so easy in our day and in our country (USA) that we do not really know what it means to stand up for God? Ask yourself these questions:

What are some things that now, today, we are tempted to worship? In what ways are we, even as Christians, slowly but surely getting caught up in worshiping something other than God?

Where do you draw the line between unswerving commitment to the Lord and fanaticism?

When it comes to your relationship with those who still do not know the Lord, is there a place for compromise? If so, in what way and under what circumstances? What things, if any, can we or should we compromise? How can we tell if we are compromising or simply being prudent?

Would you jeopardize your life for refusing to do a very simple act? If not, why couldn't you conform outwardly while inwardly feeling moral reservations?

Which is better, to die for truth, or to avoid crises and live to continue our witness? Explain.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 56.

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