

From Jerusalem to Babylon

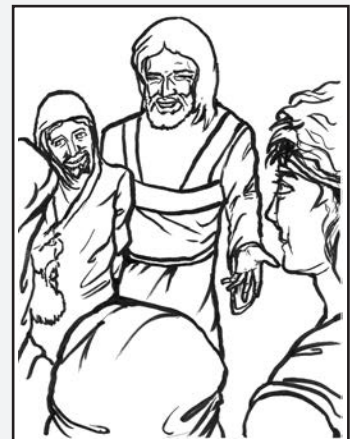


SABBATH—JANUARY 4

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: 2 Kings 21:10–16; 2 Kings 24:18–20; Jeremiah 3:13; Daniel 1:7–21; Galatians 2:19, 20; Matthew 16:24–26; 2 Corinthians 4:17; Job 38:36; Proverbs 2:6; James 1:5.

MEMORY VERSE: “God gave these four young men the wisdom and ability [skill] to learn many different kinds [types] of writing and science. Daniel could also understand all kinds [types] of visions and dreams” (Daniel 1:17, ERV).

THE TRUE HERO of the book of Daniel is God. Be sure to remember that truth as we continue our study of Daniel. It is easy to think that the stories in Daniel are all about Daniel and his three friends. But God helps these four young men. He keeps them safe from the power of evil in Babylon. It is hard to stay loyal to God in our own land, right? But Daniel and his friends stay loyal to God in a foreign land. In Babylon, Daniel and his friends live with people who follow a different religion and a different way of life. Yes, these things make it hard, at times, for Daniel and his friends to follow God. But these things are a test of their faith. Daniel and his friends pass this test. They show to everyone that they “know Jesus” (2 Timothy 1:12, ICB). Jesus is the One they “have put [their] trust in” (2 Timothy 1:12, ERV).

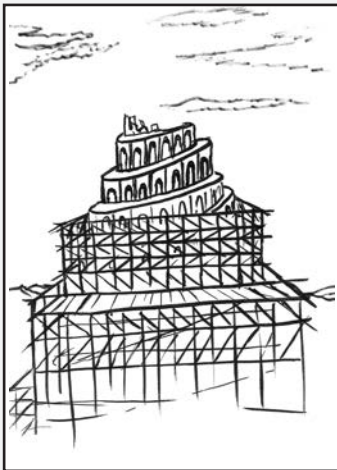


Daniel and his friends show everyone that they know Jesus.

GOD IS IN CONTROL (2 Kings 21:10–16)

How does the book of Daniel start? Not so good. Things look bad for God's people. The kingdom of Judah loses the war against King Nebuchadnezzar. Then Nebuchadnezzar steals the holy treasures from God's temple. Nebuchadnezzar takes the treasures back to the land of Shinar. Where have we seen the word "Shinar" before? In Genesis 11:2. This verse shows us that the tower of Babel is in Shinar. The men in Shinar turned against God. Then they tried to build a tower that reaches heaven. They failed. Now King Nebuchadnezzar comes from Shinar many hundreds of years later. He beats God's people in war. So, it looks as if Nebuchadnezzar and his gods are stronger than the God of Israel.

But is Nebuchadnezzar's god stronger than our God? Look closely at the opening verses of the book of Daniel. You will see the real reason that Nebuchadnezzar wins. Yes, God's people lose the war to Nebuchadnezzar. But Nebuchadnezzar does not win because he is stronger. He wins only because "the Lord allowed Nebuchadnezzar to defeat [beat] Jehoiakim king of Judah" (Daniel 1:2, ERV). Why does God let Nebuchadnezzar win? Many years earlier, God warned His people. He told them what would happen if they break His Special Agreement. His people would become prisoners. Now Daniel sees God's Word coming true. So, Daniel knows that God is in control of everything. God is in charge of Babylon's army and all history. This understanding gives Daniel and his friends courage. It helps their faith stay strong in Babylon.



The men in Shinar try to build a tower that reaches heaven.

Why does God put Judah and Jerusalem under Babylon's control? For the answer, read 2 Kings 21:10–16; 2 Kings 24:18–20; and Jeremiah 3:13.

The book of Daniel shows us a powerful picture of God. The God we serve controls history. He is very strong. But He also loves to show His people mercy. He helps us in times of need. As we will see, evil men try to hurt Daniel and his friends. Why? Because Daniel and his friends obey God. So, God saves Daniel and his friends. God will do the same thing for His people in the end times.

Why can we trust God to save us when we are in need?

FAITH THAT DOES NOT BREAK (Daniel 1)

Read about the experience of Daniel and his friends in Daniel 1. What trouble are they in? What makes it hard for them to stay loyal to God at this time?

Daniel and his friends arrive in Babylon. Soon after the young men arrive, God gives them a big test. This test shows what is in the young men's hearts. The Babylonians give Daniel and his friends special training. Then the young men will be able to serve the king. In those days, kings often chose some of their best prisoners to serve in the royal palace. The kings wanted their prisoners to become loyal to them and worship their gods. As part of that plan, the Babylonians give Daniel and his friends new names. The new names show that Daniel and his friends now belong to Babylon. The Hebrew names of Daniel and his friends show their faith in the God of Israel. The Babylonians want to change that. So, they give Daniel and his friends new names that honor their gods. Then, the king orders the young men to eat the food served at his table. When a person eats from a king's table, it shows he is loyal to the king. Often, the food is offered to gods first. So, what happens if Daniel and his friends eat that same food? They show that they worship the king's gods and accept his religion.

So, Daniel and his friends are in big trouble. How can they stay loyal to God and serve the king at the same time? Only a miracle can save these young men. What makes this problem worse? Babylon is a picture of human power and glory. It is filled with beautiful temples and famous gardens. The Euphrates River flows down the middle of the city. The king offers Daniel and his friends the chance to live good lives if they do what he wants. Then the young men can stop being Hebrew slaves. They can become royal leaders. Will the young men give up their beliefs? Will they choose to walk on the easy road to success?

What reasons do you think these young men have for giving up their beliefs? In what way do you find yourself in this same experience?



The king orders Daniel and his three friends to eat the food served at his table.

A FIRM DECISION (Daniel 1:7–21)

Read Daniel 1:7–21. What happens in these verses? What important rule do we see here?

The four young Hebrew prisoners do not refuse their new Babylonian names. Really, what can they do about that? Not much. But they can do something about the food and the wine from the king's table. The four young men have free choice. They can decide what they will eat or drink. Their free choice is a very important part of the story.

The man in charge of the four young men changes their names. So, he can change the menu too. Daniel and his friends hope that he will change their meals for two reasons. (1) The meals from the king's table may include food that is not clean (read Leviticus 11). (2) The holy leaders in Babylon offer the food to statues of their gods. Then the holy leaders send the food to the king to eat. So, Daniel tells the man in charge why he and his friends do not want to eat the king's food. Daniel is very brave. He does not lie about his reasons. He clearly says that he and his friends want to honor the God of Israel (Daniel 1:8).

Let us look at some more important parts of this story. (1) We see that Daniel understands the danger. The man in charge will be in danger if he helps Daniel and his friends. So, Daniel comes up with a test. Daniel and his friends will eat healthy food for ten days. Then the officer can see if the food Daniel and his friends eat harms them or is safe. (2) Daniel is very sure that his plan will work. Ten days is a short time. But Daniel trusts in God. So, Daniel knows his plan will be a success. (3) Daniel chooses to eat fruit and vegetables. This food plan matches the diet God gave Adam and Eve (read Genesis 1:29). What diet could be better than that?

Daniel has free choice. How does his choice open the way for God to help him (read Daniel 1:9)? What does Daniel teach us about why we need to make good choices? How does our trust in God help us to make good choices?



Daniel chooses to eat only fruit and vegetables for ten days.

PERFECT AND WISE (Galatians 2:19, 20)

King Nebuchadnezzar chooses Daniel and his friends to serve in the royal palace. The king has strict rules about who can work for him. His servants must be “healthy” (Daniel 1:4, NIV). They also must be “good-looking” (Daniel 1:4, NIV). God made these same rules about offerings and workers in His temple. There must not be anything wrong with them (Leviticus 22:17–25; Leviticus 21:16–24). This information helps us to understand an important idea. Daniel and his friends are the same as living gifts to God in Babylon.

Is it possible for us to stay loyal to God at all times? For the answer, read Galatians 2:19, 20; Matthew 16:24–26; and 2 Corinthians 4:17.

God honors Daniel and his friends. At the end of their ten-day test, how do they look? They look a lot better than the students who eat the king’s food! So, God rewards Daniel and his friends. “God gave these four young men the wisdom and ability [skill] to learn many different kinds [types] of writing and science. Daniel could also understand all kinds [types] of visions and dreams” (Daniel 1:17, ERV). Later on, Daniel’s gift will be an important part of his work as God’s special messenger.

God gives us wisdom too. He helps us solve life’s problems. The experience of Daniel and his friends teaches us that we can stay holy and true to God in this life. Daniel’s story shows us we do not need to run away from life to serve God better. Daniel and his friends live in a land filled with lies. People all around Daniel believe in those lies. But Daniel and his friends stay loyal to God.

We meet with trouble in life the same as Daniel and his friends did. All around us are people who do not believe Bible truth. What are some of the lies and bad things you see in the way of life around you? Do you fight against these things? Or do you go along with them?



Daniel and his friends look a lot better than the students who eat the king’s food.

FINAL EXAM (Daniel 1:17–21)

Read about Daniel and his friends in Daniel 1:17–21. What is the reason for their success? (For the answer, read also Job 38:36; Proverbs 2:6; and James 1:5.)

Daniel and his friends study at the “University of Babylon” for three years. Then they meet with the king for their final exam. Daniel and his friends look very healthy. They look much better than the other students. Daniel and his friends are smarter too. They have more knowledge and wisdom. Of course, they must study Babylon’s ideas and religion. Daniel and his friends learn this knowledge well, too, even if they do not believe it.

The king may think that his food and training are the reasons for the success of Daniel and his friends. But Daniel and his friends know the truth. Their success comes from God. The experience of Daniel and his friends is a powerful example. Their story shows us what God can do for His people when they trust Him. So, we should not fear anyone. People may try to hurt us because of our faith. Yes, government leaders, TV, newspapers, and other groups have a lot of power. They may try to destroy us because of our beliefs. But we are God’s children. We have put our trust in Him. So, we can be sure that God will take care of us in times of trouble. The important thing to remember is for us to make good choices during those hard times.

Daniel 1 teaches us some very important lessons about God. (1) God controls history. (2) God gives us wisdom. He helps us make the right choices in times of trouble. (3) God honors the people who trust Him.

Daniel 1 ends with this verse: “So Daniel served the king until the first year that Cyrus was king” (Daniel 1:21, ERV). Cyrus is the king of Persia. God chooses Cyrus to free the Jews from Babylon. Cyrus allows God’s people to go back home to Jerusalem. Yes, things do not look so good for the Jews at the beginning of Daniel chapter 1. But by the end of the chapter, we see hope. Yes, we will have hard times in life. We will suffer and feel pain. But God always brings hope to our lives. He helps us to see the joy and glory that wait for us when our suffering is over.



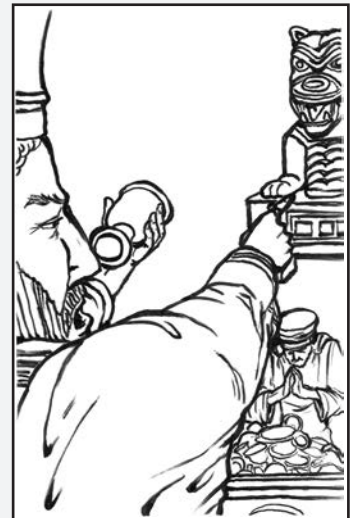
After three years, Daniel and his friends stand in front of the king for their final exam.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “Daniel and his friends are young. They are prisoners. They are forced to go to Babylon. There, they have many hard experiences. These experiences are tests that show what is in their hearts and minds. You may think that Daniel and his friends have an easier life than Joseph had during his early years in Egypt. But Daniel and his friends have tests and experiences that are just as difficult as Joseph’s. Daniel and his friends come from the royal family in Judah. The Babylonians take Daniel and his friends to the most powerful city on earth. There they serve in the court of its king. The king chooses them to serve him. He gives them special training.

“The king’s court is filled with riches and beauty. It also is full of sin. The chance to sin is all around Daniel and his friends. On top of that, the Babylonians make life hard for Daniel and his friends. They brag about winning the war against the Jews. The Jews are their prisoners in Babylon, right? King Nebuchadnezzar took the treasures from God’s temple too. He put them in the temple of his gods. The king of Israel is a prisoner in Babylon too. The Babylonians brag about all these things. They say that these things are proof that shows their religion and way of life are better. Daniel and his friends must live with this shame. Yes, God’s people cause their own suffering and shame. At the same time, God uses this awful experience to teach Babylon a lesson. God alone is in control. His law is holy. His commandments must be obeyed. God shows the Babylonians what will happen when people obey His law. God gives this message to Daniel and his friends. They are God’s loyal servants. God chooses them to speak for Him because they are loyal. It is the only way God works.”
—Ellen G. White, *Education*, page 54, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① What are some of the ways of life around us that make our church weak? What should we do to stay strong?
- ② The Babylonians feel that their gods are stronger than the God of Israel. What truth do you think helps Daniel and his friends stay strong at this time? Why is it so important to know Bible truth?
- ③ Why do we need to show our faith to the people we serve and wish to save? How does our faith show other people who God is?



“King Nebuchadnezzar took the treasures from God’s temple. . . . He put them in the temple of his gods.”