

Exiles As Missionaries

Memory Text: “Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.” (Daniel 7:14)

Setting The Stage: The book of Daniel (and we know it was written by Daniel if we trust the words of Jesus – see Matt. 24:15) is a book that is filled with stories and prophecies. As Seventh-day Adventist we are a people who believe in the imminent return of Christ and the prophecies outlined in Daniel’s book point in that direction. While it is important that we know the times, it is equally important to know how to live during these times. That’s what the stories in Daniel teach us. One thing is clear, just as God used Daniel to witness to those steeped in ignorance, He wants to use you and me in the same way today.

Sunday – The Exile

Isaiah 39:5-7; Daniel 1

Isa. 39:5-7. Babylon was a conquering nation. Through His prophets God had warned His people that if they didn’t turn from their idols and turn their hearts toward God they would forfeit the Divine protection and become subject to Babylon. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and others warned of impending doom. Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah, the last kings of Judah, were all to become vassals of Nebuchadnezzar.

Insisting on doing things their own way, the words of Isaiah were fulfilled. “And he carried out from there all the treasures of the house of the Lord and the treasures of the king’s house, and he cut in pieces all the articles of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the Lord, as the Lord had said.” (2 Kings 24:13) Three times Nebuchadnezzar came up against Judah, and in the first besieging Daniel and his three friends were carried away captive, beginning the seventy-year captivity spoken by Jeremiah the prophet (Jer. 25:11).

Daniel 1:1, 2. *“Among the children of Israel who were carried captive to Babylon at the beginning of the seventy years’ captivity were Christian patriots, men who were as true as steel to principle, who would not be corrupted by selfishness, but who would honor God at the loss of all things. In the land of their captivity these men were to carry out God’s purpose by giving to heathen nations the blessings that come through a knowledge of Jehovah. They were to be His representatives. Never were they to compromise with idolaters; their faith and their name as worshipers of the living God they were to bear as a high honor. And this they did. In prosperity and adversity they honored God, and God honored them.”* (Prophets & Kings, p. 479)

What do these verses tell us about the type of man Daniel was that made him an exemplar witness for God? (Read Daniel 1:8-13; 5:12; 6:4; 9:3-19). Daniel was a man of principle, a man of renown, and a man of impeccable character. *“True success in any line of work is not the result of chance or accident or destiny. It is the outworking of God’s providences, the reward of faith and discretion, of virtue and perseverance. Fine mental qualities and a high moral tone are not the result of accident. God gives opportunities; success depends upon the use made of them.”* (Ibid, p. 486)

Monday – Witnesses

Daniel 2-5

Daniel 2:1-4, 14-16. Bypassing the kings of Judah God gave Nebuchadnezzar, a pagan king, a dream forecasting the future – the metallic image. His purpose was to reach his heart, and through him reach his people. Did it work? **Daniel 2:47.** God moved on him gradually. The king’s attention was arrested. Conversion was soon to come. God used the telling of the dream and its interpretation, and Daniel’s character and courage to turn the king toward the God of heaven. *“There is need of men who like Daniel will do and dare for the cause of right. Pure hearts, strong hands, fearless courage, are needed.”* (Ibid. p. 488) This life must be predicated on a firm trust in the God and His word.

Daniel 3:1, 4-6, 12, 16-18, 24, 25, 28. In defiance to the dream Nebuchadnezzar set up a golden image in the plain of Dura, which he commanded his realm should bow before. All, except Daniel’s three friends, paid homage to the statue. They stood erect, not in defiance of the king’s command, but out of love and loyalty to God and His commands (Ex. 20:3-6).

“How did that heathen king know what the Son of God was like? The Hebrew captives filling positions of trust in Babylon had in life and character represented before him the truth. When asked for a reason of their faith, they had given it without hesitation. Plainly and simply they had presented the principles of righteousness, thus teaching those around them of the God whom they worshiped. They had told of Christ, the Redeemer to come; and in the form of the fourth in the midst of the fire the king recognized the Son of God.” (Ibid. p. 509)

Ultimately the king was convicted of the power and might of the Hebrew God, but he was not converted yet. God was working on him, leading him on step by step.

Daniel 4:28-33, 34. At the height of his stubborn pride God humbled Nebuchadnezzar to teach him once and for all that God rules in the kingdom of men. Nebuchadnezzar had moved from being impressed and convicted to becoming converted. *“The once proud monarch had become a humble child of God; the tyrannical, overbearing ruler, a wise and compassionate king.”* (Ibid. p. 521) It took

time but eventually the king was one over. Through it all Daniel and his friends remained steadfast and faithful to their allegiance to the God of heaven.

Daniel 5:1-6. Over sixty years from the time Daniel had been taken away from his homeland, Daniel's ministry to Babylon wasn't over. God would use him one more time, but this time to pronounce judgment on Belshazzar, the stubborn grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, and Babylon. Besieged by Cyrus, the nephew of Darius the Mede, Belshazzar wasted his final days in partying. The night he called for the all the sacred vessels from Jerusalem's temple to be used in his defiance of the God of heaven, the curtain came down on Babylon. Babylon fell. Opportunities came to Belshazzar through the witness of God's faithful servant, but he spurned them.

Tuesday – Daniel In Persia

Daniel 6

Daniel 6:1-4. Through the transition of powers, Daniel was immediately seen as valuable to Darius and was promoted in his realm - an act that fueled jealousy among some of his governors and satraps (highest official position over a division of the realm). A new law was proposed to Darius that no one should petition any god except the king or else he would be thrown to the lions. This law flattered the king's pride, and so he immediately signed it, not taking into account the unintended consequences.

Daniel 6:10. Daniel's habits of prayer didn't change. His custom of praying in the direction of the presence of God was firmly established and despite the new law Daniel would not be swayed. Why would he cease to pray now, when what he needed to do was pray? He would be willing to give up His life than in the hope of help in God.

“God did not prevent Daniel's enemies from casting him into the lions' den; He permitted evil angels and wicked men thus far to accomplish their purpose; but it was that He might make the deliverance of His servant more marked, and the defeat of the enemies of truth and righteousness more complete. “Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee” (Psalm 76:10), the psalmist has testified. Through the courage of this one man who chose to follow right rather than policy, Satan was to be defeated, and the name of God was to be exalted and honored.” (Ibid. 543)

Daniel 6:21-23. God delivered Daniel in the midst of trouble. God sent His angel to shut the lion's mouth. And He can do the same for you if you find yourself in a “lion's den” because you are following the path of integrity.

Psalm 37:4: “The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them.”

Psalm 91:11: “For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways.”

Psalm 104:4: “Who makes His angels spirits, His ministers a flame of fire.”

2 Kings 6:17: “And Elisha prayed, and said, “Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.” Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.”

Daniel 6:25-27. This event more than impressed Darius. It is very likely that through the witness of Daniel and others that the decree to release the Jews in order that they could go home was made. These were pagan kings who became acquainted with the will and purposes of the God of heaven through God’s faithful witnesses.

Wednesday – Daniel & God’s Eternal Kingdom

Daniel 7

“In the annals of human history, the growth of nations, the rise and fall of empires, appear as if dependent on the will and prowess of man; the shaping of events seems, to a great degree, to be determined by his power, ambition, or caprice. But in the word of God the curtain is drawn aside, and we behold, above, behind, and through all the play and counterplay of human interest and power and passions, the agencies of the All-merciful One, silently, patiently working out the counsels of His own will... Here it is shown that the strength of nations, as of individuals, is not found in the opportunities or facilities that appear to make them invincible; it is not found in their boasted greatness. It is measured by the fidelity with which they fulfill God’s purpose,” (Ibid. p. 499, 502)

This is what we see in the prophecies outlined in Daniel 2 and 7-12. **Daniel 7:13, 14.** What do these words tell us about God’s church taking the gospel to the world? Eventually Jesus is going to establish His everlasting kingdom, but that won’t happen until after He returns, after the millennium (**Matt. 24:14, 15**).

Jesus links the prophecies of the end in Matthew 24 to Daniel’s prophecies. This isn’t surprising seeing Daniel’s prophecies point to the last days (Dan. 8:17, 19; 11:35; 12:4, 13). Specifically Jesus mentions the “abomination of desolation” which is referred to by Daniel in 11:31 and 12:11. He links it to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in His day and beyond. The point is that Jesus kingdom won’t come until the everlasting gospel is taken to all the world (Rev. 14:6, 14).

Thursday – More Exiles As Missionaries

Esther 1-10; Genesis 41

Daniel wasn’t the only one who witnessed for God away from home. Joseph and Moses lived 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 to 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 communities – they were also in their own ways effective missionaries for the God of Israel.”

Through both the silent testimony of a faithful life and the sharing of important truths, these individual’s made an important difference in the lives of those who did not know about the true God.

Appeal: 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 a 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 classical 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 open 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.

It may seem like as Seventh-day Adventists we’re playing a tune that is outdated and unpopular and it can be discouraging at times. We might be playing the most beautiful melody in the universe and people keep walking by. But we are encouraged to keep playing, to not give up. Whether our setting is dominated by secularists or another religion, as we adapt our methods (not message) to reaching people with the everlasting gospel we will continue to see results.