

HOME STUDY



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FALL QUARTER

September, October, November 2024

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Two Prophets to the Nations

TOM GREENE

This quarter we look at two prophets: Daniel and Jonah. As our society increasingly rejects God, these men are helpful examples for us—Daniel showing us how to live while surrounded by a hostile culture, and Jonah showing us how not to. They also provide us with important timeless truths about who God is—the King who reigns over everything and who has mercy on His enemies.

Daniel is a remarkable example of steadfast faithfulness in the face of persecution. Despite living in exile, in the midst of a pagan culture and surrounded by false gods, Daniel and his friends did not abandon God or compromise. In lesson 1, we see them holding firm on what could easily have seemed like a small matter, as they refused to eat food that would have defiled them.

That obedience, when the stakes were seemingly low, no doubt prepared them for the fiercer testing of lessons 2 and 3, when the king of Babylon threatened Daniel's friends with death for refusing to worship a golden image he set up. They calmly refused, confident that God could deliver them—but even if He would not, they would obey God, not the king. Miraculously, God delivered them from the fiery furnace.

The book of Daniel repeatedly reveals that God is in control, even of pagan nations. In lesson 4, Daniel saw a vision of the Son of Man riding on the clouds and receiving an everlasting kingdom, which, unlike the fleeting, localized,

earthly kingdoms of the world, would fill the entire earth and never fade. Today, we have the benefit of knowing the identity of this glorious Son of Man, as that title was Jesus' most frequent designation for Himself, and He promised that He would return, coming in the clouds.

In lesson 5, Daniel saw visions of future kingdoms. Truths about Persia and Greece that Daniel could not possibly have deduced were laid out centuries in advance. God is in complete control of all nations and has laid out His plans well in advance of the events that occur. This has not changed today, and we can be thankful for this truth. No matter what happens in the upcoming election, we can be confident God is in control, even though we often do not understand His plans.

In lesson 6, Daniel realized after reading Jeremiah that deliverance from exile would come soon, and he prayed fervently to God. This teaches us that God uses means, including prayer, to accomplish His ends. We should not stop praying, because God has a plan! Daniel began by confessing both personal and national sins. He did not rush past this, but spent the majority of his prayer in confession, before finally getting to His petition. An angel came in response to Daniel's prayer and strengthened him.

Daniel received further visions, including the contents of lesson 7. Some of Daniel's visions have already been

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fulfilled, but others are still future and pertain to the end times. Some of them are straightforward, since we can look back at how they were fulfilled. Others are more difficult for us to understand. But the repeated theme of God's protection of His people and control over the nations is plain. Daniel's example also proves that even if we are surrounded by God's enemies, we can avoid compromise and can faithfully serve Him.

In lesson 8, we see Jesus clearly referring to Daniel's vision of the Son of Man coming in the clouds, and applying it to Himself. By doing so, Jesus made His divine identity absolutely clear. He is already ruling over the chaotic nations of the earth, but one day His kingdom will come in glory and unending power. Every eye will see Him, every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that He is Lord.

While Daniel is an exemplary model for us, Jonah is quite the opposite. When God called him to preach to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrians—one of Israel's chief enemies, he ran away instead (lesson 9). God caused a violent storm, and Jonah was thrown into the sea and swallowed by a giant fish. But this was not the end of his story, for God miraculously preserved him. In lesson 10 we read his prayer from the belly of the giant fish. He acknowledged his terrible surroundings but was also confident that he would one day again pray in the temple, which was the special place of the Lord's presence on earth at that time. After the fish vomited him out and the Lord called him again, he went to Nineveh.

It was not a picturesque storybook ending, however. Jonah did preach to Nineveh about coming wrath in lesson 11, but he was probably the least enthusiastic evangelist of all time. The king heard and proclaimed public repentance, and the people complied. In response, God mercifully averted His judgment. Jonah was furious with God, saying that this was why he didn't want



to preach in the first place—he knew that God was forgiving and merciful!

Even then, however, God did not give up on His reluctant, angry prophet. God reached out to Jonah yet again, causing a vine to grow, which provided shade. When the vine withered, however, Jonah expressed his anger to God, who responded graciously but questioned Jonah (lesson 12). The book ends on a question, perhaps to pose the same issue to us today. Do we wish God would simply judge our enemies, or are we ready to be merciful to them, as God is?

Together, these prophets help us consider how to live today. Daniel worked for Babylon and later for Persia's royal court. Likewise, we can work for the good of society around us, even as we reject its false gods. Like Daniel and his friends, we must never conform to the false worship that surrounds us, but faithfulness to God does not need to mean isolation from the world.

Jonah ran from God's calling and wished God's wrath upon his enemies, but we should be compassionate and merciful to them. Like Jonah, we know that God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. This should spur us to proclaim the good news, not hide it. Rather than avoiding the wicked, we can declare His grace, knowing that no one is beyond His mercy.

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

DAN. 1:8 But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.

9 Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs.

10 And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which *are* of your sort? then shall ye make *me* endanger my head to the king.

11 Then said Daniel to Melzar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah,

12 Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink.

13 Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants.

14 So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days.

15 And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat.

16 Thus Melzar took away the portion of their meat, and the wine that they should drink; and gave them pulse.

17 As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

18 Now at the end of the days that the king had said he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar.

19 And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king.

20 And in all matters of wisdom *and* understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians *and* astrologers that *were* in all his realm.

21 And Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus.

NOTES

Daniel Honors God's Law

Lesson Text: Daniel 1:8-21

Related Scriptures: II Chronicles 36:5-8; Psalm 119:105-112; Daniel 1:1-7

TIME: 605 B.C.

PLACE: Babylon

GOLDEN TEXT—"But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat" (Daniel 1:8).

Lesson Exposition

Living by faith means standing apart from the world. It means being different and resisting the constant pressure to make small compromises in order to get along and be accepted by others.

Young Daniel and three of his friends were among those in Judah taken captive by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, who had subjugated Judah's king Jehoiakim and then punished his rebellion (II Kgs. 24:1; Dan. 1:1-4). The Babylonian king's plan was to educate these Jewish boys in the ways of the Chaldeans, or Babylonians, so that they could effectively serve the king. Part of their training involved a diet of the king's food (Dan. 1:5).

THE FAITH OF DANIEL—Dan. 1:8

While many young men of Judah were taken to Babylon, only four are mentioned by name in the book of Daniel. Daniel, the most prominent, was joined by three other godly young men: Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. We more commonly remember them by the Babylonian names that were given to them: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (vs. 7).

Though Daniel was under the authority of Nebuchadnezzar now, his loyalty

was first and foremost to the Lord God, and he saw something in the proposed diet that challenged that loyalty. Daniel thus "purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself" by eating the king's food and drinking his wine (vs. 8).

While it is possible the food was "unclean" according to the Mosaic Law, it is also possible it was in some way connected with the worship of the Babylonian gods, and partaking of it could be equated with "serving other gods" (Culver, *The Histories and Prophecies of Daniel*, BMH).

Whatever the specifics of Daniel's concern, his priority clearly was obeying the Lord. He therefore requested that he be allowed not to partake of the king's food and drink (vs. 8). This request was made to Ashpenaz, the "prince of the eunuchs," or commander of the king's servants (cf. vs. 3); Daniel asked him on behalf of his three friends as well (cf. vs. 10).

THE PROPOSAL OF DANIEL—Dan. 1:9-14

God's preparation (Dan. 1:9-10). The Bible says that God had brought Daniel into the "favour and tender love" of Ashpenaz. No doubt the Lord used