



SUNDAY
SCHOOL *Superintendent*

Fall Quarter
September | October
November 2024

Sunday School Superintendent

FALL QUARTER

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Editor in Chief: James M. Leonard, Ph.D.

Managing Editor: Michelle Birtasevic

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Editorials

BY TOM GREENE

Relating to the World: The Example of Two Prophets

This quarter, we look at two prophets: Daniel and Jonah. As we live in a society that increasingly disregards and rejects God, these men are increasingly relevant—Daniel showing us how to live while surrounded by a hostile culture, and Jonah showing us how not to.

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. Throughout the book, we see time and time again that God is in complete control of all nations, even ones that do not acknowledge Him and actively oppose His people. 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 will still be in control, even though we may not always understand what He is doing.

Daniel and his friends were repeatedly tempted to compromise in both big and small ways. But they refused to compromise both when the stakes were low (when they were told to eat the king's food) and when the stakes were high (when they were told to worship an idol on threat of death). Perhaps it was their faithfulness in the

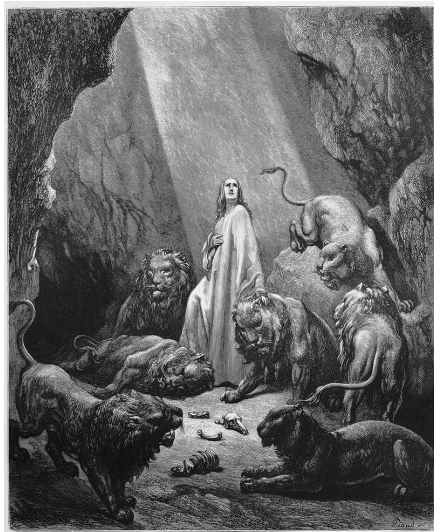
smaller, seemingly unimportant moments that prepared them for obedience in the climactic times when they were threatened with death.

The Lord blessed Daniel with prophetic visions and an angelic visitor. He saw future events ranging from wars between ancient Greece and Persia to God's judgment at the end of time. Some of these prophecies have already been fulfilled, but some still remain to be fulfilled, such as Daniel's vision of Jesus' glorious rule over all the earth. Although Jesus already reigns over the nations, one day every eye will see Him and acknowledge Him as Lord, and His rule will be clearly seen and undisputed.

Daniel is a tremendous model, not only for his obedience despite persecution but also for his prayer for others. Daniel earnestly confessed both his personal sins and the sins of the whole nation. His prophetic wisdom and his strength to endure difficulty came directly from God.

Jesus referenced Daniel's glorious vision of the Son of Man coming in the clouds, and in doing so, He made His divine identity absolutely clear. Daniel shows us that even when we are surrounded by God's enemies, we can avoid compromise and faithfully serve God. Even more important, this book

PLEASE NOTE: Fundamental, sound doctrine is the objective of LifeStone Ministries, Union Gospel Press Division. The writers are prayerfully selected for their Bible knowledge and yieldedness to the Spirit of Truth, each writing in his own style as enlightened by the Holy Spirit. At best we know in part only. "They received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11).



against God's goodness and mercy to Israel's enemies. It would be comical if it didn't point so clearly to our own attitudes toward our enemies. The book ends on a cliffhanger, with a question directed to Jonah, and we don't know what answer he gave. Perhaps this ending is intended to force us to ask ourselves how we would respond in his position. How do we act toward our enemies? Do we love them, pray for them, and reach out to them? Or like Jonah, do we want to avoid dealing with them and simply wait for their destruction?

Despite the book's cliffhanger ending, there is some reason to think that the heartless (and seemingly prejudiced) prophet may have repented—after all, who else could have written this book? Have you been more interested in judging your enemies than loving them? If so, Jonah's story is for you. We can be confident that if we repent, God will forgive us.

Together, these prophets help us consider how to live today. Like Daniel, we may faithfully work and serve in the midst of a society that rejects God. As Daniel worked for Babylon's and, later, Persia's good, so we can work for the good of society around us, even as we reject its false gods. At the same time, like Daniel and his friends, we must never conform to the false worship of our culture. We must steadfastly obey God, even if that means disobeying customs and laws that disregard God's standards.

Unlike Jonah, we should be compassionate and merciful even to our enemies. Because we know that God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, we should hold on to hope that God may save them. Rather than isolating ourselves and avoiding the wicked, we can hold out His promises to them, knowing that no one is beyond His mercy and grace.

reminds us that even when we cannot understand what is happening around us, God is in control, and one day we will see this clearly when Jesus returns on the clouds.

While Daniel is an exemplary model for us to follow, Jonah shows us what we ought not to do. When God called him to preach to Israel's enemies, he ran away instead. Only after God caused a violent storm and he was thrown into the sea and swallowed by a giant fish was Jonah ready to repent and go to Nineveh. When he did, he was probably the least enthusiastic evangelist of all time, and he became angry with God when the people repented and were forgiven. Throughout the entire book, the pagans seem to respond to God better than Jonah does. After God sent the storm to discipline Jonah, the sailors who had been with Jonah feared the Lord, prayed, and offered sacrifices. Later, the terrible Ninevites repented as well.

Depending on one's perspective, Jonah is either a comical figure or a terribly sad one. He went from hopelessly trying to hide from God to railing

Daniel Honors God's Law

Lesson Text: Daniel 1:8-21

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).

OPENING MOMENTS

Suggested Song (Adults)

"Take My Life and Let It Be"
(Havergal)

Suggested Song (Children)

"Happiness Is to Know the Savior"
(Stanphill)

Icebreaker

What are seemingly small ways that we are tempted to compromise today?

LESSON OUTLINE

1. The resolve (Dan. 1:8-10)
2. The test (Dan. 1:11-16)
3. The honor (Dan. 1:17-21)

KEY ISSUES

One of the most amazing aspects of American culture is how people from diverse cultural backgrounds are able to be part of the same national identity. One neighborhood I lived in had a Hispanic church, Korean church, African-American church, and Burmese church all within a few miles of one another! What is truly exceptional about this is that while each church stood on solid tenets of biblical doctrine, each maintained its own cultural identity. Perhaps each congregation reasoned that certain elements of its culture could not be

removed without losing the essence of the culture itself.

This is also true of the Christian faith. There are a number of ways we can join together with others, even non-Christians. However, some aspects of who we are cannot be compromised for the sake of unity, lest we lose the essence of our identity as believers. What cannot be compromised? First and foremost is the truth that Jesus Christ is the living Son of God, who died for our sin and rose again for our eternal life.

Throughout biblical history, foreign kings and rulers tried to assimilate the Israelites into their culture. Antiochus Epiphanes, a Greek king of the Seleucid Empire (second century B.C.), was infamous for his attempt to conform the Jews to Greek culture by forcing them to sacrifice to heathen deities and partake of unclean food. This lesson provides a noble example of how faithfulness to God can be applied even to the smallest details of our everyday lives. We will also see how God often crowns sincere faith and conscientious self-restraint with success.

Daniel was probably a teen at the time he was taken captive and brought to Babylon. The Jews attached great importance to the di-