

## 11. Mission in a Pagan Land: Daniel and Company (3Q 2008—Agents of Hope)

**Biblical material:** Daniel 1–3, 6.

### Quotes

- It gives me great pleasure indeed to see the stubbornness of an incorrigible nonconformist warmly acclaimed. *Albert Einstein*
- He who joyfully marches in rank and file has already earned my contempt. He has been given a large brain by mistake, since for him the spinal cord would suffice. *Albert Einstein*
- The average man is a conformist, accepting miseries and disasters with the stoicism of a cow standing in the rain. *Colin Wilson*
- Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it's time to pause and reflect. *Mark Twain*
- I say don't conform, don't allow yourself to be pigeon-holed. It's no good for the soul, and the pigeon doesn't enjoy it either. *Danny McCrossan - Northern Irish Comedian.*

### Questions

How would you react to being placed in a situation like Daniel? Since Daniel's country had been conquered by the Babylonians, how would each side see the merits of their particular gods? What would this mean for evangelism? What kind of God did Daniel and his friends describe? Why is this so important?

### Discussion/Comment

Daniel and his friends well illustrate the basics of witness. They are “strangers in a strange land,” they are there as captives, their country has been defeated, and therefore by implication, their God (in the minds of the Babylonians, at least). How hard it must have been to sing the songs of Zion in a strange land!

Yet they all see their role as representatives of the true God in this land of many other gods. They are even given new names, ones that identify these pagan gods. They are required to learn many things they do not believe. They are required to comply with the demands of this pagan society in many ways. Yet they draw the line where they believe they should, while still wishing to represent the God they know and love in the best way they can.

Not so terribly unlike the present day! The challenges of a society that believes very differently, the demand to conform, the mocking of minority religious beliefs—very much aspects of our times as well.

Notice the way in which they reflect all their positive contributions back to God. When all the astrologers and practitioners of the magic arts were unable to fulfill King Nebuchadnezzar's request to tell his dream, the king said to Daniel, after he revealed the king's dream, “Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery.” Daniel 2:47 NIV. In this great test case, those who claimed to be able to interpret dreams and foretell the future were shown to be completely false. The only One who knows the future is God himself, only he could give such wisdom and understanding.

Daniel does not take credit for the interpretation of the king's dream, but rather points to the God of heaven. As a result Nebuchadnezzar identifies Daniel's God as the greatest God since he has been able to answer his question.

Similarly the three (and why don't we use their Hebrew names rather than the Babylonian ones: Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah?) refuse to bow down and worship Nebuchadnezzar's image in Daniel 3, boldly affirming that their God can protect them from the flames of the king's punishment for disobedience. But also notice that they continue, "even if he does not," demonstrating that their faith is not presumption. They give God the chance to choose his course of action too! (Daniel 3:17, 18).

Daniel has demonstrated his concepts of God to so many that even when the dynasty changes, he is kept on as an advisor. When his enemies conspire against him for his devotion to God, even Darius the king, while sadly executing the sentence, tells Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve so faithfully, rescue you." Daniel 6:16 NLT).

The result is that with Daniel's deliverance, King Darius sends out a decree identifying "the living God." (Daniel 6:27). Through the actions of these faithful friends of God, many Babylonians had opportunity to question their beliefs and see something of the nature of the true God.

That's the take-home message for us. That whatever our situation, we can always speak well of God, demonstrate through our actions what we truly believe, and share the great good news of God's salvation provided to us, and the complete vindication of God before the whole on-looking universe.

### **Ellen White Comments**

God brought Daniel and his fellows into connection with the great men of Babylon, that these heathen men might become acquainted with the principles of true religion. In the midst of a nation of idolaters, Daniel was to represent the character of God. How did he become fitted for a position of so great trust and honor? It was his faithfulness in the little things that gave complexion to his whole life. He honored God in the smallest duties, and the Lord co-operated with him. To Daniel and his companions God gave "knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams." Dan. 1:17. {COL 356-7}

The Christian is in the world, but not of the world. He is to represent the character of God in obedience to His holy, just, and good law. Daniel was a noble statesman; but his best service to Babylon was his unswerving integrity in the worship of God. In spite of the king's decree, he prayed three times a day with his window open towards Jerusalem, and made no compromise with an idolatrous nation. {BEcho, August 5, 1895}

When men are willing to become intelligent in regard to the cause of God because they have invested faith and means in it, God will help them to understand, and they will be steadfast in the faith; but when they have merely a theory, a shallow faith they cannot explain, a sudden temptation will cause them to drift away with the current bearing toward the world...In order to be firmly anchored, there must be something firm to hold us; and nothing will avail until Christ takes possession of the soul, until the cause becomes our property, and is made a part of ourselves. {RH, April 29, 1884}