

WINTER 2025–2026

Daniel and His Friends

LESSON 08

JANUARY 25, 2026

LESSON TEXT

Daniel 1; 3; 6

FOCUS VERSE

Daniel 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.

TRUTH ABOUT COVENANT

God will stand with us as we stand for Him.

MY RESPONSE TO COVENANT

I will endeavor to live in covenant in community with my fellow believers.

COVENANT CONTEXT

While in Babylon, four of the young Hebrew exiles were tested to see if they would remain true to their covenant with God. Daniel and his three friends stood up for their faith and God stood with them. Through His faithfulness and power, God showed His people and the rest of the world that He alone is God.

TEACHING OUTLINE

Icebreaker: What one decision, big or small, has had a lasting impact on your life in some way?

Teacher Tip: Connect the group's answers to the decision Daniel and his friends made to stand for God in the face of persecution.

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

I. **FOUR FRIENDS IN BABYLON**

A. **The Pressures of Palace Life**

DISCUSS: *If you were Daniel or one of his friends, what would you be thinking if your captors were asking you to live as they did?*

B. **The Friends' Decision to Resist the King's Meat**

C. **My decisions will be guided by God's purpose in my life.**

II. **THREE FRIENDS STOOD TOGETHER**

A. **The Pressure Increased**

DISCUSS: How do you think the three Hebrews' earlier decision around the king's meat influenced their decision to bow or be burned alive?

- B. Their Resolve Increased

DISCUSS: What does "but if not" mean to you? How do you reconcile living for God and worshiping Him even if He does not answer your prayers the way you expect?

- C. I will bow in worship to God alone.

III. DANIEL STOOD ALONE

- A. Daniel Did Not Escape the Pressure

DISCUSS: How do you think Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah's experience refusing to bow impacted Daniel's decision to pray in the face of a death sentence?

- B. Daniel Followed His Friends' Example

- C. I will endeavor to live in covenant in community with fellow believers.

DISCUSS: How can we foster closer community within our church and in the surrounding area we minister to?

Internalizing the Message

PRAYER FOCUS

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to help us stand for Him, no matter the pressure we face
- For God to use us to inspire faith in others to stand for Him

LESSON CONNECTION

In 2009 most of the world knew her as Asia Bibi, but her real name is Aasiya Noreen. She was a Christian woman in her mid-forties living in Pakistan. She and a group of Muslim women were in the fields picking fruit when a fight broke out over drinking water. Some of the ladies offered her a drink of water, and when she drank, Bibi testified that they urged her to convert to Islam.

She refused, and they claimed that she had contaminated the water and the glass since she was a Christian. Immediately claims flew that she had dishonored their faith and insulted their leaders. Bibi was arrested and tried for blasphemy against Islam: a capital offense. A three-judge panel found her guilty and sentenced her to death by hanging. During the eight years she waited on death row, she faced immense pressure to convert to Islam to save her life.

Her case drew international attention and pressure, and in 2018 the Pakistani Supreme Court overturned her conviction, citing a lack of evidence and other issues with the case. Extremist groups protested and called for her execution anyway. Amid the chaos and danger, Asia Bibi escaped Pakistan with her family and flew to Canada where she continues to advocate for the rights of persecuted minorities. She valued her faith, even above her life, and refused to turn her back on Jesus Christ.

A man who had once been a Muslim and converted to Christianity was speaking with a Christian author and scholar. This man drew two circles and then drew a tiny dot inside each circle. He pointed to one and said, "For Muslims, the big circle is their faith, and the tiny dot inside it is their life. For Christians in Western society, the big circle is their life, and their faith in Jesus is just the tiny dot inside it." Although that may be true of some Christians, as Asia Bibi and others prove, we understand that the covenant we have made to follow Jesus is more valuable, even than our lives.

BIBLE LESSON

I. FOUR FRIENDS IN BABYLON

A. The Pressures of Palace Life

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had established the greatest empire in the world through a mix of shrewd diplomacy and military conquest. This man was capable of the cruelest psychological warfare. When King Zedekiah rebelled against him and tried to escape, Nebuchadnezzar caught him, killed Zedekiah's sons right in front of him, and then had Zedekiah's eyes put out so the last thing he would see was the death of his children.

For those who surrendered, like King Jehoiakim in the time of Daniel and his friends, Nebuchadnezzar employed a more political agenda to assimilate them into Babylonian culture. His plan was to bring some of the best and brightest young nobles into his palace, change their names, feed them from his own table, and turn them into loyal little Babylonians who would help him administer his empire.

The king was clever in his choices of name changes. Daniel meant "God is my judge," but the king changed it to Belteshazzar: "Bel protects him." Nebuchadnezzar may have hoped this young man would welcome the Babylonian god Bel as his new judge since the Babylonians appeared to be greater than the Hebrews. The pattern continued with Daniel's friends. Hananiah meant "God's gift," but Shadrach meant "Aku's command," referencing another Babylonian god. For Mishael, whose name meant "Who is like God?" the king chose Meshach, which meant "Who is like Aku?" Finally, for Azariah, meaning "whom the Lord helps," Nebuchadnezzar substituted Abednego, or "servant of Nego," another Babylonian deity. After all, how had the Lord helped them? Wouldn't it be wise to look for new, more powerful gods to serve?

To all this, Nebuchadnezzar added the apparent honor and kindness of offering these young exiles food from his own table. Surely it would be extremely rude to refuse the king's gracious offer. Nebuchadnezzar aimed to systematically erase their covenant identity and then inscribe the identity that best suited his purposes on the blank tablets they would become. The most cunning and powerful empire builder in the world was setting his will against that of mere teenagers. Could the result even be in question?

DISCUSS: *If you were Daniel or one of his friends, what would you be thinking if your captors were asking you to live as they did?*

B. The Friends' Decision to Resist the King's Meat

Daniel asked if he, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah would be allowed to eat a plain diet of vegetables instead of the rich food from the king. Even the young man in charge of the captives said he was in danger of beheading if the king knew he rejected his gracious offer. But Daniel proposed a simple, ten-day test, and at the end of that test, he and his friends looked and fared better than those who ate the king's meat and drank his wine.

Never in their lives had a single meal meant so much. What if Daniel and his friends had simply ducked their heads and eaten what was put before them? They could have blended in rather than standing out. It would have been the safer road. "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" (Daniel 1:8).

Daniel could have rationalized picking through the different dishes, avoiding the forbidden foods and eating the rest. He could have taken a full plate and scraped out part of it when no one was looking. But he decided he would not defile himself, publicly or privately. Daniel exercised godly leadership in that moment, and his three friends supported him and followed his example. They stood together and the course of their lives was changed forever. They drew their line, ready to face consequences to not conform. From that moment, their four lives and destinies were irreversibly entwined.

C. My decisions will be guided by God's purpose in my life.

Even in captivity, God was standing with Daniel and his friends when they stood for God. As He graciously does, God rewarded these four who were bold and brave enough to stand up and stand out as God's covenant people. (Read Daniel 1:17.) None of the other promising young Hebrew captives were ever mentioned again, but we are still telling these young men's stories thousands of years later.

God is still looking for people who are unashamed to stand up and be identified as Jesus followers. Those content to blend in and be assimilated will not be able to fulfill their Kingdom purpose. But we must make our decisions based on the will of God we learn in the Word of God. Then we will find out what Daniel and his three friends found out: God will stand with those who stand for Him.

II. THREE FRIENDS STOOD TOGETHER

A. The Pressure Increased

They passed their first test, but it was not their final test. The pressure increased. Nebuchadnezzar was determined to unify his far-flung empire by imposing a single religion on every nation, regardless of their native gods or goddesses. The king ordered construction of a ninety-feet tall golden statue to tower over the plains of Babylon. He summoned every ruler, nobleman, and government official from every province of the empire to the dedication of this idol. Then the royal proclamation went out. At the sound of the orchestra's music, everyone from the least to the greatest was to bow down and worship the king's image. By royal edict, anyone who refused to bow would be bound and cast alive into the burning fiery furnace.

DISCUSS: How do you think the three Hebrews' earlier decision around the king's meat influenced their decision to bow or be burned alive?

B. Their Resolve Increased

Nebuchadnezzar's demand to bow to the idol directly violated the Lord's first commandment: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3). No doubt any true believer in Jehovah must stand, even if everyone else bowed. It may have been harder to stand if they had bowed to the king's demands about the meat. Compromise is a slippery slope.

Since Daniel is not mentioned in this story, he may have been absent from this assembly of Babylonian elites. But Daniel's three friends followed his previous example and once again stood up for God. As the music swelled across the plain of Dura, the assembled masses all fell to their knees, bowing like mown hay before a scythe—all except three young men. Imagine Hananiah looking at Mishael and Mishael looking to Azariah, each of them gaining courage just by seeing the others standing.

Those who were jealous of these three Hebrews' position in the kingdom had them dragged in front of the king by armed guards, but their resolve never wavered. Even when King Nebuchadnezzar offered to have the music played again so this time they could bow, they refused to even consider it. They boldly replied to the most powerful man in the world: "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not...we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up" (Daniel 3:17–18).

Nebuchadnezzar ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter, and he ordered his best and bravest to throw the three Hebrew rebels into it. When they found themselves inside, God met them there, and all that burned were the ropes that used to bind them. King Nebuchadnezzar, who thought of himself as the king of kings, looked in the furnace and saw a fourth figure in the fire. He was watching the very work of the true King of kings; the covenant God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was also the God of Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

DISCUSS: What does "but if not" mean to you? How do you reconcile living for God and worshiping Him even if He does not answer your prayers the way you expect?

C. I will bow in worship to God alone.

For these three, their faith in Jehovah was all-encompassing, and their lives were negligible by comparison. Shouldn't it be the same for us? Should we not throw our lives wholeheartedly into living for our God? What is our life on earth after all? The Bible likens it to a vapor, a morning mist, the first dew on the grass, or the grass itself that grows and is clipped and dies. What is that compared with eternity?

III. DANIEL STOOD ALONE

A. Daniel Did Not Escape the Pressure

A regime change came years later, and King Darius of the Medes and Persians came to power in Babylon. Jealousy once again took aim at the Hebrews who had become promoted in the empire. They tricked Darius into decreeing that anyone who worshiped or prayed to any man or deity besides the king himself for thirty days would be thrown into the den of lions.

Daniel was blameless and full of integrity, so this attack on his devotion to God was the only means his enemies saw of accusing him. What a testimony that the only area they could attack Daniel was his faith! They knew that Daniel prayed to Jehovah three times a day, bowing toward Jerusalem. So his enemies watched and waited to see if he

would compromise or be condemned.

DISCUSS: *How do you think Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah's experience refusing to bow impacted Daniel's decision to pray in the face of a death sentence?*

B. Daniel Followed His Friends' Example

No doubt Daniel thought of his friends' courage and faith when they faced down the king and the fiery furnace as he himself contemplated how to respond to Darius's edict and the danger of the den of hungry lions. Daniel refused to compromise and worship the king; he was willing to trust in God. God had never let him down, and Daniel was confident God would meet him in the den of lions like He met Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah in the furnace. And God did. He saved Daniel's life and proved to Darius and the entire Persian kingdom that there is no God but Jehovah.

We may never know how much our decisions impact the lives of those around us, and it is not all one directional. A leader may influence those he or she serves while present, and those people may continue to follow that pattern when the leader is no longer around. But in the end, the leader too may be encouraged, strengthened, and emboldened by the actions of others. No man is an island. No one is always strong. We all need one another.

C. I will endeavor to live in covenant in community with fellow believers.

For these reasons it is crucial we live in community with fellow believers. Even when they are not physically present, the power of unity can still straighten our spine and stiffen our resolve. Knowing we are compassed about by a cloud of witnesses, both past and present, can give us the courage and fortitude to run the race set before us with patience and faith. Daniel and his friends inspired and strengthened one another when their faith was tested; let's do the same for each other.

DISCUSS: *How can we foster closer community within our church and in the surrounding area we minister to?*

Teacher Option: Tell the story below or share one of your own to illustrate how our faith in God must remain firm, no matter the outcome.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

In the summer of 1940, more than 350,000 soldiers—most of them British—were trapped at Dunkirk, on the European side of the English Channel. German forces were on their way, and they had the capacity to wipe out the British Expeditionary Force. When it seemed certain the Allied forces at Dunkirk were about to be massacred, a British naval officer cabled just three words back to London: "But if not."

"But if not." These words were instantly recognizable to the people who were accustomed to hearing the Scriptures read in church. They knew the story told in the Book of Daniel. The message in those three little words was clear: The situation was desperate. The Allied forces were trapped. It would take a miracle to save them, but they were determined not to give in. One simple three-word phrase communicated all that.

For some reason—we are still not sure why—the Axis powers hesitated. They backed off, briefly, and what is known as the Miracle of Dunkirk took place. British families and fishermen heard about the poignant telegraphed cry for help and they answered. They answered with merchant marine boats, with pleasure cruisers, and even with small fishing boats. By a miracle, as German dive bombers and fighters screamed down metallic death, they evacuated more than 338,000 soldiers to safety.

When you pray, God is able to heal you. But if not, will you still serve Him despite the pain or sickness in your body? When you give your problem to Him, God is able to solve it today. But if not, will you still trust He will turn it around in His time? If you give, God may well bless you in return monetarily. But if not, will you keep on giving, knowing that not all blessings are financial?

If you witness, maybe others will believe right away. But if not, will you keep on being a witness, an example, a light, and a prayer warrior for their souls? If you put your life on the line, God may save you. But if not, are you willing to even die for Him if that is what it takes?

May we live with that resolve in our hearts and resolution in our mouths: Our God will...but even if He doesn't, we will still not bow.

