

Daniel 1

Aim of lesson

To show how, in captivity, the young Daniel steadfastly trusted and obeyed God, and resisted temptation.

Background study

2 Kings 24 and 25; Psalm 137. Investigate the background of the downfall of Judah, and the might and wealth of Babylon in the days of Nebuchadnezzar. Look at the Mosaic food laws (Leviticus 11).

Suggested outline of lesson

Introduce the theme of the captivity by discussing with the children what it feels like to be lonely, sad and homesick. Some may have experienced these feelings in hospital, or in having to move to another town or country. Go on to explain the traumatic circumstances of the Babylonian invasion and captivity, when the Jews were taken by force from their homes and country and transported as prisoners to a strange environment in a distant land. Describe the contrast of the two cultures; the differences in religion, ethics, language, laws, customs, etc.

Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah

Among the unfortunate prisoners were Daniel and his three friends; four fine, strong, intelligent youths, far from home and all that was familiar, without rights or possessions, and made to serve in the king's palace. Because the king recognized their potential, they were singled out to be educated in the ways of the Babylonian court. They had no choice in the matter. What were they to do? Ask the children to suggest possible ways in which the young men might have responded. They might have given in to their unhappiness and become more and more miserable and depressed, so that they lost hope and gave up trying; they might have become rebellious and angry, actually resisting the authority of their captors and making trouble for them whenever possible; worst of all, they might have been tempted to make the most of the opportunity given to them and adapt themselves to the Babylonian way of life. But not so these faithful young Jews. Not only were they handsome and clever, they were also firm in their conviction that obedience to God was what mattered most.

A greater law

During the three years' training there must have been occasions when their faith was put to the test in such a pagan land. What was expected of them would often conflict with their conscience, forcing them to make a choice. The incident of the food, which should be fully developed, is an example of this sort of dilemma, and illustrates the way in which they dealt with it. When they heard the king's command they knew they could not obey. They had

been brought up to observe the law that God had given to Moses, under which certain kinds of meat were forbidden. Daniel was not afraid to refuse the king's food and wine, and firmly explained the reason why. The steward, impressed by the young man's courteous behaviour, was willing to let them have their own diet. The outcome provided visual proof that their faith had been rewarded. Their adherence to God's laws and their dependence on his providence were such that God blessed them further with wisdom and understanding, so that the king came to rely on their knowledge and integrity.

Relevance to the children's lives

Daniel refused to do what he knew was wrong, because he listened to his conscience. What is a conscience? How do we feel when we obey what our conscience is telling us? How do we feel when we have refused to listen to it?

Worksheets

YES: Beans, Lentils, Peas, Carrots;

NO: Bacon, Chicken, Lamb, Beef.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, when we are sure of the right thing to do, help us to do it bravely, no matter how difficult. Amen.

Memory verse

"Turn away from evil and do right and keep your conscience clear" (1 Peter 3:11 and 16, RSV).