

❖ CHAPTER ONE ❖

The Assault on Jerusalem

verses 1-7

1 In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem, and besieged it.
2 And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God: which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his god.
3 And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring *certain* of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes;
4 Children in whom *was* no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as *had* ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans.
5 And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank: so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king.
6 Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah:
7 Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel *the name* of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abed-nego.

Aftermath of Carchemish

The critics allege that the opening statement of the Book of Daniel—that Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem in Jehoiakim's third year—is pure fiction. The date is much too early, they say. The precise span of Jehoiakim's third year is uncertain, but the end of it could not have fallen later than October 605.¹ The critics insist that although Nebuchadnezzar may have exacted tribute from Judah as early as 604, the first actual Babylonian siege of Jerusalem did not occur until 597.

Yet the account in Daniel 1 is consistent with other ancient sources. The most important of these is the *Babylonian Chronicle*, a contemporary listing of important events during the reigns of the Babylonian kings. The *Chronicle* reports that in the early summer of 605, the Babylonians and Egyptians fought a major battle at Carchemish, a city in northern Syria. The Babylonians, under the leadership of their crown prince, Nebuchadnezzar, crushed the Egyptians and pursued fleeing

enemy soldiers all the way to Hamath, far to the southwest. Not one Egyptian survived to return home.² The Book of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 46:2) and other sources indicate that Pharaoh Necho was himself present at the battle.³ If he was, he was undoubtedly among the casualties. The *Chronicle* continues with the claim that Nebuchadnezzar then “conquered all of Ha[ma]th.”⁴ That is, he moved immediately to assert control over all the kingdoms nearby that had previously been friendly with Egypt. It is inconceivable that he did not press his advantage after he had so thoroughly routed Egyptian forces and had deprived Egypt of a leader. Josephus reports that at this time, Nebuchadnezzar “occupied all Syria, with the exception of Judaea, as far as Pelusium [on the Egyptian border].”⁵ Immediately afterward, his father died, and he hurried back to Babylon to take control of the kingdom.

The Book of Daniel agrees that Nebuchadnezzar did not occupy Judah in 605. It says only that he approached Jerusalem and threatened war. The expression “besieged” (Daniel 1:1) can refer merely to action preliminary to a siege.⁶ Jehoiakim was able to appease the aggressor by giving him hostages and treasure. That Nebuchadnezzar took Jewish captives before he returned to Babylon for his coronation is confirmed by Berosus, a Babylonian priest who died about 250 B.C. In his history of Babylon, quoted by Josephus, Berosus says,

Being informed ere long of his father’s death, Nebuchadnezzar settled the affairs of Egypt and the other countries. The prisoners—Jews, Phoenicians, Syrians, and those of Egyptian nationality—were consigned to some of his friends, with orders to conduct them to Babylonia, along with the heavy troops and the rest of the spoils; while he himself, with a small escort, pushed across the desert to Babylon.⁷

Spoils and captives

The chart on the next page gives an overview of the events connected with the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. The Babylonians came against Judah not just in 605, but repeatedly, and took captives at four different times: in 597, 586, and 581 (or 580) as well as in 605. Altogether, about 15,000 men, women, and children made the arduous thousand-mile trek from Judah to Babylon.

After their successful assault upon Jerusalem in 605, the Babylonians removed some of the vessels in the house of God (verse 2). They took also a group of young men meeting five requirements (verses 3–4).

1. The young men were related to the royal family.
2. They were “children,” meaning that they were in their early teens or younger.
3. They had “no blemish” and were “well favoured.” In other words, they were good looking. This requirement was not unusual. In

every ancient Middle Eastern court, it was customary to let only good-looking people serve as the king's attendants.

4. The young men were "skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science." Not only were they well educated, but also they were intelligent enough to use and apply what they had learned.

5. They were able "to stand in the king's palace." That is, they were a gracious addition to the court. Having tact, self-confidence, and the other traits of a winning personality, they were highly presentable even to a king.

Disposal of the spoils

The plundered sacred vessels were taken to the treasure house of Nebuchadnezzar's god (verse 2). The many inscriptions of Nebuchadnezzar that archaeologists have unearthed make it plain that he was indeed a sincere believer in the gods of Babylon. His motive in giving his god a gift from the spoils of the Jewish Temple was twofold: to express gratitude for help in victory, and to assert the superiority of his god over the god of Israel. Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar felt that just as the nation of Judah would henceforth pay tribute to him, so Judah's god should henceforth pay tribute to his god.

Contrary to what Nebuchadnezzar thought, his victory over Judah was not due to his own personal prowess or to the superiority of his god. "And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand" (verse 2). Judah's humiliation was the Lord's doing.

Fate of the captives

The young captives from Judah entered a new life with several abhorrent, or at least disagreeable, aspects.

1. The captives were put under the authority of Ashpenaz, master of the eunuchs (verse 3). Ancient oriental kingdoms customarily surrounded the king with eunuchs in the belief that such men were less inclined to conspire against him. Whether Daniel and his friends were made eunuchs has long been debated, however. Many scholars today take the position that *saris*, the singular form of the Hebrew word translated "eunuchs" in verse 3, may refer to a court official who was not a eunuch. They note that Potiphar is called a *saris* ("officer" in Genesis 37:36; 39:1) although he had a wife. As many other words have done, however, *saris* underwent a shift in meaning. Originally, the word referred to a court official, but because many court officials were eunuchs, the meaning narrowed until, by the first millennium B.C., the word referred specifically to a eunuch.¹⁰ It is probable, therefore, that Daniel

DATE		RULER	EVENTS	SOURCES
605	May-June?	Jehoiakim	The Babylonians defeated the Egyptians at Carchemish.	<i>Bab. Chron.</i>
605	June-Aug.		Nebuchadnezzar threatened Jerusalem, then retreated after receiving spoil and hostages. The hostages included Daniel and his three friends.	Dan. 1:1-7
605	Aug. 15		Nabopolassar died. Nebuchadnezzar returned to Babylon to establish his position as successor.	<i>Bab. Chron.</i>
605	Sept. 7		Nebuchadnezzar took the throne of Babylon.	<i>Bab. Chron.</i>
604-602			Jehoiakim paid yearly tribute to Nebuchadnezzar.	2 Kings 24:1
601			Jehoiakim rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar.	2 Kings 24:1
601	Nov.-Dec.		Nebuchadnezzar attacked Egypt. After the two armies had collided in fierce combat, both withdrew with heavy losses. Judah renewed its alliance with Egypt.	<i>Bab. Chron.</i>
600-598			While Nebuchadnezzar rebuilt his military machine, the Babylonians and their allies sent raiding parties to harass Judah.	<i>Bab. Chron.</i> ; 2 Kings 24:2
597	Jan.		Nebuchadnezzar undertook a new campaign in the west.	<i>Bab. Chron.</i>
597	March 16		Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem, evidently without a battle.	<i>Bab. Chron.</i> ; ⁸ Jos. Ant. 10.6.3.
597	soon after March 16	Jehoiachin	Nebuchadnezzar bound Jehoiakim in chains to take him to Babylon, but, perhaps in reaction to some word of defiance, slew him instead and cast his body outside the city walls to lie there unburied. ⁹ After appointing Jehoiachin to rule over Judah, Nebuchadnezzar carried spoil back to Babylon, arriving in time for the New Year's celebration on April 13.	2 Chron. 36:6-7; Jer. 36:30; 2 Kings 24:6; <i>Bab. Chron.</i>
597	April		After the coming of the new year, Nebuchadnezzar, for reasons unknown, sent forces to take Jehoiachin and bring him to Babylon.	2 Chron. 36:10
597	May-June		Jehoiachin resisted, provoking the Babylonians to besiege Jerusalem.	2 Kings 24:10
597	soon after June 22	Zedekiah	Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem and Jehoiachin surrendered. Nebuchadnezzar then led into exile the king, the king's family, and all the most able citizens of the realm. The men numbered 3023. All the captives, families included, numbered about 10,000. Among them was Ezekiel. Nebuchadnezzar removed more treasure from the Temple and placed Zedekiah on the throne.	2 Kings 24:11-17; 2 Chron. 36:9; Jer. 52:28; Ezek. 1:2
593	May-Aug.		Zedekiah received ambassadors from neighboring lands to plot rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar.	Jer. 27-28
587	Jan. 5		Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem and encircled it with his army.	Jer. 39:1
586	July 18		The Babylonians ended eighteen months of siege by breaking through the wall. Zedekiah and his soldiers fled by night and were captured in the plains of Jericho. After his sons were killed before his eyes, Zedekiah was blinded and taken to Babylon.	Jer. 39:2, 4-7
586	Aug. 17	Gedaliah	The Babylonians began the work of demolishing the city. When they had stripped everything of value from the Temple, they burned every important building and tore down the city walls. The chief men of the city were killed. Deserters and some of the poor, 832 men together with their families, were taken to Babylon. Allowed to do as he pleased, Jeremiah chose to join the poor who would remain in the land. The Babylonians appointed Gedaliah as governor over the remnant.	Jer. 52:12-14; 17-27, 29; 39:9-14; 2 Kings 25:22
586	Oct.-Nov.	none	Gedaliah was assassinated by an agent of the king of Ammon. Johanan and the other leaders of residual Judean forces persuaded the remnant that they should ignore Jeremiah's counsel and flee to Egypt. Jeremiah was forced to accompany them.	Jer. 40:1-10; 41:16-43:7
581 (580)			The Babylonian general Nebuzar-adan took another 745 men and their families into captivity, thus emptying the land of its Jewish inhabitants.	Jer. 52:30

and the other captives were actually made eunuchs. There is no record that any of them married or had offspring.

In Israel, the law excluded eunuchs from public worship (Deuteronomy 23:1). The intent, largely realized, was to discourage the people of Israel from degrading their sons by making them eunuchs. Here is one illustration of the vast superiority of the laws of Moses to the laws of other nations.

2. The captives were taught the learning and language of the Chaldeans, their captors (verse 4). They would sit under instruction for three years (verse 5).

3. During the period of training, they were given a special diet consisting of food and wine from the king's table, the purpose being to make them pink and plump in appearance (verse 5).

4. They were given Babylonian names (verse 7).

Babylonian education

The first hurdle for scholars in Mesopotamian schools during the era of Nebuchadnezzar was to master cuneiform, the system of writing that the scribes had been using for more than a millennium. Cuneiform was extremely complex, involving five hundred separate signs,¹¹ many of which had multiple meanings.¹²

The traditional curriculum gave central place to the lore accumulated by the Sumerians, whose civilization had flourished before 2000 B.C. A typical school text that students copied and memorized presented a cuneiform list of Sumerian words (all the kinds of trees, plants, tools, garments, stone objects, or government officials, for example) together with their translations in Akkadian, the ancient language of Babylon.¹³ In Daniel's day, however, even Akkadian was becoming a forgotten language. It was being replaced by Aramaic, the language of commerce throughout the Middle East.¹⁴ Sumerian had therefore receded from its former prominence in scribal education, and the new emphasis was upon the preservation of Akkadian. Many of the late Babylonian school texts found recently in the ruins of a temple were lists of Akkadian verbs.¹⁵

The students in a Babylonian school had to master a broad curriculum. Besides sign lists and word lists, they studied moral fables, proverbs, and literary classics (such as the *Epic of Creation* and the *Epic of Gilgamesh*), as well as works on history, law (such as the ancient *Code of Hammurapi*), and mathematics.¹⁶ The Babylonians were proficient at solving problems in astronomy and engineering at a level comparable to modern high-school algebra. They solved them intuitively, however, without recourse to abstract equations.¹⁷ Much of what was taught in Babylonian schools would today be classified as occult science. The texts that students were required to read included many dealing with omens, astrological phenomena, or methods to combat evil spirits.¹⁸

It is doubtful that Daniel and his friends could have become adept at reading and writing cuneiform with only a few years of training. Nor could they have learned much Sumerian. The education of a scribe normally lasted from childhood to young manhood.¹⁹ Yet in a few years, the four Hebrews could have learned enough Akkadian and enough cuneiform signs to read the standard school texts with the help of syllabaries and dictionaries. Perhaps they were permitted to read Aramaic translations in place of the original. The likelihood that these would have been written on perishable materials explains why none have survived.²⁰

Usefulness of the captives

Nebuchadnezzar found the captives useful for at least three reasons.²¹

1. They served as hostages. Judah would be less likely to rebel if, in punishment, the finest of her young men, including relatives of the king, might be killed. As it turned out, Judah rebelled anyway.

2. He wanted them to grace his court, where they would serve as a constant reminder of his great military achievements. Imagine the effect of court pageantry upon any visitor. The spectacle of princes from all the adjoining nations paying homage to Nebuchadnezzar and doing his bidding would quicken the visitor's own reverence for the king.

3. He intended to prepare a class of royal servants who were Babylonian in their language, education, and thinking and yet who retained a good working knowledge of Jewish culture. In the future, such men might be useful in governing Judah.

An old prophecy fulfilled

The removal of Daniel and his three friends from their homeland was the distant outworking of an incident about a hundred years earlier. The king of Judah at that time was Hezekiah, a man who served God so fervently and consistently that the verdict of Scripture is,

5 He trusted in the LORD God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor *any* that were before him.

2 Kings 18:5

After fourteen successful years on the throne, Hezekiah fell victim to a deadly sickness.

1 In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came unto him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live.

2 Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the LORD,

3 And said, Remember now, O LORD, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done *that which is good* in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore.

4 Then came the word of the LORD to Isaiah, saying,

5 Go, and say to Hezekiah, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years.

6 And I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria: and I will defend this city.

7 And this *shall be* a sign unto thee from the LORD, that the LORD will do this thing that he hath spoken;

8 Behold, I will bring again the shadow of the degrees, which is gone down in the sun dial of Ahaz, ten degrees backward. So the sun returned ten degrees, by which degrees it was gone down.

Isaiah 38:1-8

When Hezekiah pleaded with God to spare his life, the prophet Isaiah came as God's messenger and announced that the king's life would be prolonged fifteen years (verse 5). To confirm the word of the prophet, God caused the shadow of the sun to move backward on the sun dial of the king (verse 8).

The sickness indeed departed from Hezekiah. Yet despite all the grace poured out upon his life, he soon fell into sin. The sin occurred when the king of Babylon sent ambassadors to congratulate Hezekiah on his recovery.

1 At that time Merodachbaladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah: for he had heard that he had been sick, and was recovered.

2 And Hezekiah was glad of them, and shewed them the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah shewed them not.

3 Then came Isaiah the prophet unto king Hezekiah, and said unto him, What said these men? and from whence came they unto thee? And Hezekiah said, They are come from a far country unto me, *even* from Babylon.

4 Then said he, What have they seen in thine house? And Hezekiah answered, All that *is* in mine house have they seen: there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shewed them.

5 Then said Isaiah to Hezekiah, Hear the word of the LORD of hosts;

6 Behold, the days come, that all that *is* in thine house, and *that which* thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the LORD.

7 And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.

8 Then said Hezekiah to Isaiah, Good is the word of the LORD which thou hast spoken. He said moreover, For there shall be peace and truth in my days.

Isaiah 39:1-8

What exactly did Hezekiah do wrong? He offended God in two ways (verse 2).

1. He failed to acknowledge God as the source of his wealth and success. He was guilty of boasting.

2. He curried the favor of a pagan king. He sidled up to the world and sought the world's approval. Perhaps he was seeking to enhance national security by means of a political alliance with Babylon, whereas he should have trusted in God for protection.

God pronounced a twofold judgment upon Hezekiah.

1. All the treasure accumulated by Hezekiah and his predecessors would be removed to Babylon (verse 6). Indeed, beginning in 605, the Babylonians stole the wealth of Judah. The pillage continued until the nation was left despoiled and desolate.

2. Certain young men from his seed would be taken away to serve as eunuchs in the court of Babylon (verse 7). That they would become eunuchs is obviously part of the judgment. The word "eunuch" must therefore imply humiliation. It cannot mean a court official. It seems inescapable that, in fulfillment of prophecy, Daniel and his friends were actually made eunuchs. Although these princely young men suffered for another man's sin, we should not feel that God was unfair to them. On the contrary, as pointed out by the prophet Jeremiah, their captivity was, in a sense, a particular blessing, for they were spared from the horrors that would soon fall upon Jerusalem (Jeremiah 24:4–10). Many of those left behind were destined to perish from starvation, pestilence, or the sword.

The prospect that all his wealth would go into the coffers of Babylon should have been appalling to Hezekiah. It should have been even more appalling that sons of a future generation would be disgraced by castration and made unable to perpetuate his line. Yet his last words in response to the judgment, "For there shall be peace and truth in my days" (verse 8; abbreviated in 2 Kings 20:19), read as complacent or even flippant when taken alone. His true attitude is clarified, however, by his preceding words, which read as sincerely contrite: "Good is the word of the LORD which thou hast spoken" (verse 8).

Another account reveals that after the king recovered from illness, he fell into pride, provoking God's wrath on himself and his people. Only by humbling himself was he able to avert further trouble (2 Chronicles 32:24–26, 31). The two accounts are likely parallel. The pride that the chronicler records was probably the same that Hezekiah expressed when he boasted before the Babylonians, and the chronicler's story of the king humbling himself probably refers to his contrite response when Isaiah rebuked him.

The fulfillment of God's judgment on Hezekiah is a fitting beginning to the Book of Daniel for two reasons.

1. The record of this judgment, pronounced over a century earlier, shows that God controls the future, and teaches us to approach the

prophecies of Daniel with a right attitude—with seriousness and respect, and with confidence that they will come to pass.

2. The record of this judgment alerts us to several instructive contrasts between Hezekiah, the man whom God punished, and Daniel, the man whom God blessed.

a) Hezekiah was a boaster in himself, but Daniel was not. Daniel never failed to give credit to the God of heaven.

b) Hezekiah sought the approval of a heathen king, but Daniel did not. Daniel sought the approval of God alone, and to gain that approval he was willing to adopt a lifestyle of rigorous separation from all the defiling practices of the world. For example, he refused to violate God's law by eating the king's food (Daniel 1:8). We might think that he was making a fuss over a little thing. It was merely a question of what he would have for supper. Yet he refused to eat the king's food even though the scruple he would surrender by such compromise with the world was relatively minor, and even though the cost of obeying his conscience might be his own life.

Four heroes introduced

The captives included Daniel and his friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (verse 6). Pairing these names with their meanings will make them easier to remember.

Among the Hebrews, a man's name generally incorporated one or both of the two principal divine names: *Elohim* and *Yahweh* ("Jehovah"). *El-*, the first syllable of *Elohim*, might appear in the name either at the beginning (as in *Elijah*) or at the end (as in *Daniel* and *Ezekiel*). *Yah-* (in English variously spelled "Je-," "-jah," or "-iah"), the first syllable of *Yahweh*, might also appear either at the beginning (as in *Jehu* and *Jehoshaphat*) or at the end (as in *Hezekiah*, *Zechariah*, *Isaiah*, and *Elijah*).

Any remaining portion of a Hebrew name—any portion that did not point to God—was also meaningful. So, the name as a whole was a condensed thought. For example, *Ezekiel* means, "God strengthens."²² The names of Daniel and his friends express important spiritual truths.

Daniel—"God is my judge."²³

Hananiah—"God has been gracious."²⁴

Mishael—"Who is what God is?"²⁵

Azariah—"God has helped."²⁶

In our culture we give scant attention to the meanings of names. As a result, few names among us fit the person. For example, my first name is Stanley, which means "stony meadow." But a stony meadow is not my birthplace, my present home, or where I long to be. Often in the Bible, however, a man's name gives a true picture of what he is like. It may tell the essence of his character. Daniel's name, meaning, "God is

my judge,” summarizes both his earthly conduct and his eternal standing.

1. Throughout his life he never hesitated to do what God wanted, even though his obedience to God might incur the disapproval or wrath of men. He did not care what men thought. He only cared what God thought. So, he might say of himself, “God is my judge.”

2. God will indeed judge him. The last verse of Daniel’s book speaks of him being raised at a day still future to appear before God and to receive his reward for a lifetime of faithful service (Daniel 12:13).

Daniel’s Moral Dilemma

verse 8-14

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.

What Daniel tolerated

Daniel yielded without protest to many aspects of his new life.

1. He did not object to the schooling he was to undergo. As shown earlier, he would be required to study mythology and occult science.

2. He did not object to his new name. Formerly he was called Daniel, but in the Babylonian court he would be called Belteshazzar, which probably means, “Bel, protect the hostage of the king.”²⁷ Bel was a Babylonian deity. There is no consensus among scholars as to the meanings of *Shadrach* and *Meshach*, although each may be a tribute to one of the other Babylonian deities.²⁸ *Abed-nego* may signify a servant of the god Nebo.²⁹

What Daniel refused to tolerate

Yet though Daniel was submissive to every other requirement laid on the young captives, he drew the line at eating the king's food and drinking the king's wine (verse 8). Why did he object to the food and drink but not to his new name or to his schooling under the Babylonians? We can surely agree that the name and the education imposed upon him were not the best. Yet why were they not absolutely wrong? Why was compromise permissible in these matters but not permissible in the matter of eating and drinking?

Three tests to distinguish right from wrong

If we go through life thoughtfully, with our eyes open to moral questions, we will be careful about what practices we adopt. Any doubtful practice must be rejected if it fails any of three tests.

1. Is it contrary to Scripture? In other words, is it expressly forbidden by Scripture or is it inconsistent with a moral principle based on Scripture?
2. Is my motive pure?
3. Will I and others escape defilement?

Scripture is silent concerning many modern vices, such as smoking marijuana and playing the lottery, because they did not exist in Biblical times. But they are certainly inconsistent with moral principles based on Scripture. One vice that has appeared only in the last generation is the viewing of corrupt programs on TV. Nowhere does the Bible set TV off limits for the people of God. Yet the Bible does say,

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.
Psalm 1:1

This and other passages undergird two moral principles that clearly expose the iniquity in televised entertainment.

1. We ought not to place ourselves on the receiving end of influence seeking to arouse our ungodly lusts, whether the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, or the pride of life.
2. We ought not to participate vicariously (at second hand) in the sins of others.

Why neither the name nor the education was unscriptural

The Bible does not prohibit the use of a pagan name. A new convert with such a name need not exchange it for one with godly meaning. A name like Mohammed or Diana (Roman goddess of the woods and

mountains) or Thurston (“stone of Thor”; Thor was one of the chief gods of Norse mythology) is not the best, but it is not so badly tainted that to speak it easily takes on overtones of tribute to a false prophet or deity.

Also, the Bible does not denounce the study of a false religion. Whether such study is justified depends on three considerations.

1. Its purpose. The only legitimate purpose is to combat the false religion more effectively. Daniel’s education in Babylonian religion and magic qualified him for a high position in the kingdom of Babylon. After attaining that position, he was able in uniquely dramatic ways to demonstrate the futility and worthlessness of any religion apart from the worship of the true God.

2. Its intensity. It is most unwise to let an interest in false religion become an absorption or obsession. We must major in truth, minor in error.

3. Its likely effect. The study of a false religion is wrong if we are not well enough grounded in the Scriptures to recognize and reject every falsehood gnawing at the truth. Daniel’s schooling was acceptable only because he was not tempted to believe any of its pagan elements. What he faced in his education was, however, much different from the humanistic lies taught today in public schools. These lies are so plausible and so difficult to separate from the truth that no one, whether in kindergarten or graduate school, can completely defend himself against them.

Scriptural objections to the diet

Many commentators have surmised that Daniel rejected the prescribed diet because the food and drink had been offered to idols. But in his book *Nebuchadrezzar and Babylon*, D. J. Wiseman states, “There is no indication that food from the royal table had previously been offered to idols.”³⁰ This book, published in 1985 under the auspices of the British Academy, is an authoritative summary of current knowledge concerning the reign of Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel’s objection to the diet was undoubtedly based on an explicit prohibition in the Word of God. He was surely well versed in the Scriptures available in his day. His early education probably emphasized the five books of Moses and the Book of Proverbs. The latter seems to have been passed down through the royal family for the instruction of young princes. Perhaps scrolls of these and other books of the Bible were tucked away in Daniel’s belongings when his captors carried him to Babylon.

As Daniel searched the Scriptures in his possession, he found no statute that specifically forbids the eating of meat sacrificed to idols. Yet he did find a strong warning not to indulge incautiously in the sumptuous fare of a king.

- 1 When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is before thee:
 2 And put a knife to thy throat, if thou *be* a man given to appetite.
 3 Be not desirous of his dainties: for they *are* deceitful meat.
 Proverbs 23:1-3

This passage taught Daniel that he should examine whether the rations from the king's table were fit for consumption. Elsewhere in the Scriptures, he found two injunctions clearly disallowing such food and drink.

1. The law of Moses forbids food derived from the flesh of unclean animals.

- 4 Nevertheless these shall ye not eat of them that chew the cud, or of them that divide the hoof: *as* the camel, because he cheweth the cud, but divideth not the hoof; he *is* unclean unto you.
 5 And the coney, because he cheweth the cud, but divideth not the hoof; he *is* unclean unto you.
 6 And the hare, because he cheweth the cud, but divideth not the hoof; he *is* unclean unto you.
 7 And the swine, though he divide the hoof, and be cloven-footed, yet he cheweth not the cud; he *is* unclean to you. . . .
 12 Whatsoever hath no fins nor scales in the waters, that *shall be* an abomination unto you.
 13 And these *are they which* ye shall have in abomination among the fowls; they shall not be eaten, they *are* an abomination: the eagle, and the ossifrage, and the ospray,
 14 And the vulture, and the kite after his kind;
 15 Every raven after his kind;
 16 And the owl, and the night hawk, and the cuckow, and the hawk after his kind,
 17 And the little owl, and the cormorant, and the great owl,
 18 And the swan, and the pelican, and the gier eagle,
 19 And the stork, the heron after her kind, and the lapwing, and the bat.
 20 All fowls that creep, going upon *all* four, *shall be* an abomination unto you.

Leviticus 11:4-20

The king's food undoubtedly included meat that the law designated unclean.

The eminent Old Testament scholar Robert Dick Wilson conjectured that the Babylonians were fond of drinking wine mixed with blood.³¹ Blood was, of course, a food altogether forbidden to the people of God (Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 3:17).

2. The Book of Proverbs counsels against drinking intoxicating wine.

- 31 Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, *when* it moveth itself aright.
 32 At the last it biteth like an adder.
 33 Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things.

34 Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast.

35 They have stricken me, *shalt thou say*, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.

Proverbs 23:31–35

Why Daniel could not accept the diet with a pure motive

If Daniel took the king's food and drink, his motive in part would be to gain the acceptance and approval of the ungodly. He would be trying to please the king, just as Hezekiah had curried the favor of the Babylonian king a century earlier. He would also be trying to win the esteem of the other boys. As a normal teenager, he felt urges to eat alongside them, join in their pseudosophisticated conversation, enjoy their jests and foolery, and compete with them in their bouts of eating and drinking to excess. Yet Daniel refused the king's food and drink, recognizing that to raise no objection would be to seek the world's approval through worldly behavior.

Defiling effects of the diet

Daniel's chief fear of the king's food and drink was that they would defile him. He knew from the Book of Proverbs that intoxicating wine is defiling both in its moral and physical effects. Moreover, he undoubtedly knew that one reason for God's stricture against unclean foods is that many of them are unhealthy. Otherwise, if he did not view the offered food and drink as unwholesome, why did he tell the king's servant that if he were excused from the regular diet, he would, within just ten days, look better than all the other boys? He asked to eat "pulse," which can refer to any vegetable food, including grains.³² Eating nothing but pulse assured that he would avoid all wine, unclean meats, and bizarre delicacies. The word translated "meat" (verse 5) means rich food.³³ Although he was foregoing acceptable meats and beverages, he evidently believed that a simple diet of vegetables was far healthier than the sumptuous diet provided by the king.

Daniel's decision

Daniel purposed in his heart not to defile himself with the king's food and drink (verse 8). The Hebrew text says, literally, that he "laid" the decision to do right "upon his heart."³⁴ In other words, he made the decision in his mind, and then, instead of allowing his emotions to get in the way, he marshaled them in support of his decision. The picture here is of a man who gathers up all his energies into a firm, unshakable determination to carry through a course of action to its conclusion.

Daniel knew very well that the conclusion of his course of action might be death. No kindness or softness moderated the king's justice. Anyone who displeased Nebuchadnezzar could expect to die swiftly, and by a method of execution that was grisly in the extreme. When the king was enraged against the wise men of Babylon, he condemned them to be cut into pieces (Daniel 2:5). In other words, while they were still alive and conscious, they were to be dismembered, limb from limb, with an ax. When Daniel's three friends refused to obey the king's order to bow down before a great image, the king cast them alive into a fiery furnace (Daniel 3:15–20). He put away two false prophets who annoyed him by roasting them in the fire (Jeremiah 29:22). As noted earlier, he punished the Jewish king Zedekiah by blinding him after he had witnessed the slaughter of his sons (Jeremiah 52:10–11).

We see how courageous Daniel was. He was no bubble-brained adolescent. He was a young prince with the heart of a lion. We see why God was so pleased with him. How many young people today would have stood with Daniel?

His decision is even more remarkable when we consider that he made it all alone. He had no prodding from parents or pastors. He apparently had no encouragement at the outset even from his three friends. The record says, "Daniel purposed in his heart," and "he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself" (verse 8). There is no mention of the other boys. Evidently, they joined the protest later, under his leadership. But the initial decision to resist the king's order was made by Daniel on his own.

Ashpenaz's reference to the other boys in his reply, "For why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which *are* of your sort?" (verse 10), does not mean that the other boys were present during this conversation. The text names only Daniel when it tells whom Ashpenaz was addressing (verse 10). Nor does Ashpenaz's reference to the other boys necessarily mean that Daniel had presented himself as their spokesman. Ashpenaz probably said "your faces" instead of "your face" because, having discovered that Daniel's objection was based on a Jewish scruple, he guessed that the other Jews would also like to be excused from the king's diet.

Ashpenaz was afraid of a comparison between "your faces" and others "of your sort." The danger was not that Daniel and his three friends would become less attractive than the other Hebrew children. "Of your sort" is properly translated "of your age."³⁵ Thus, the outcome Ashpenaz feared was that the Hebrew children would make a poor showing next to the captive children from other lands.

Excuses for sin

To rationalize compliance with the king's orders, Daniel could have resorted to one of the easy excuses for sin that we all find appealing.

1. Nobody will know. Daniel was a thousand miles away from his parents. He was a thousand miles away from his teachers, who perhaps included Jeremiah. He was a thousand miles away from everyone he knew except a few boys his own age. How easy it would have been to buckle under and take the king's food and drink! But he was steadfast in doing right. How do we act when we are away from our Christian friends and acquaintances? Do we lead a double life?

Jesus furnishes a withering answer to the first excuse.

- 1 . . . Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.
- 2 For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known.
- 3 Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops.

Luke 12:1-3

How does God know what we do in secret? There is no place to hide from His view (Psalm 139:1-12).

2. It's not so bad. Daniel might have reasoned: "If something were really wrong with this food and drink, why would the king of Babylon insist that they be given to us? He is a great king, a wise man. I come from Jerusalem, the conquered city of an outlying petty kingdom. Maybe some of the things I have been taught are a little backward. I need to enlarge my thinking, broaden my horizons, take a first step out into the world of sophistication." But Daniel did not hide sin under this sort of excuse.

What about us? Do we long for sophistication? Sophistication beckons to our vanity by promising that if we will chase after a deeper, more discriminating knowledge of the world, we will join a superior group—an elite. Yet sophistication is always basically dishonest. It is always an effort to make vice look like virtue. To accomplish this deception, sophistication gives vice an alluring name and sets it in the midst of fashionable people.

This is not a pipe full of tobacco weed. This is an exotic Turkish blend in genuine briarwood.

This is not decayed grape juice. This is a rare vintage of Chateau Laffitte-Rothschild.

This is not a dirty movie. This is an art film, a memorable example of classic cinema.

Lest we be seduced by such words, we must remember Paul's admonition. "I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple

concerning evil” (Romans 16:19). We are to take no interest in evil things, though they appear to contain much good mixed with the bad, though they seem wonderfully desirable or inventive. We are to know nothing about them. Why? Because, as it says in Proverbs about wine, at the last they will bite like a serpent.

If, in obedience to the Word of God, we shield our eyes from worldly attractions, keep our feet from worldly places, and guard our hearts from worldly lusts, the result of our innocence will be that the world will see us as narrow and naïve, as simple indeed in a pejorative sense.

3. Everybody else is doing it. As shown earlier, Daniel was probably all alone in his initial decision to refuse the prescribed diet. There is no evidence that he was supported even by his three friends. He could easily have told himself, “Look, nobody else believes it is wrong, so it must not be wrong.” But Daniel was a young man who thought for himself, who could shrug off the influence of others if it undercut his own convictions. His name was, “God is my judge.” That is, “I am concerned only to please God—I follow God, not men.” What about us? How often do we follow men, not God? But the Bible says,

12 For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise. . . .

18 For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.

2 Corinthians 10:12, 18

One of the most widely read commentaries on Daniel was written in 1946 by M. R. DeHaan, an outstanding Bible teacher of the last generation. In his discussion of Daniel’s first chapter, he lingers for several pages on the problem of worldliness among Christian people.³⁶ He demonstrates the rapid slippage in standards by listing some of the worldly practices that have crept into the church during his own lifetime. If anyone today objected to the same practices, he would be written off as a fanatic, for nearly all are now accepted without question by most professing Christians. Why has this slippage in standards come about? The reason is that Christians have one eye on God, one eye on the people around them, and they chart a course somewhere between.

4. This is an order. Daniel had no doubt been instructed to respect and obey authority. Thus, when the order came down dictating his food and drink, he could easily have said to himself, “Well, I don’t agree, but God placed me under the king’s authority, so I had better do what I am told.” Although pious in appearance, such thinking betrays a distorted view of authority. The Biblical answer is,

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained by God.

Romans 13:1

The chief idea expressed here is that no man has authority in himself. Whatever authority he possesses has been delegated to him by God. Authority resides in his directives only so far as they are consistent with God's Word. If they are not consistent with God's Word, he has overstepped his authority, and his directives are not binding on anyone.

Most people today are inclined to be too headstrong. Resistance to legitimate authority is a prevalent sin undermining the witness of the contemporary church. Yet there are times when good people are too submissive. Frequently in the past, a pastor has entered the pulpit and begun to question the literal truth of the Scriptures or the necessity of separated living, and his people have respected him too much to raise any objection. Instead, they have meekly let themselves be corrupted by devilish lies spoken through the mouth of an authority figure.

5. God will forgive me. If Daniel had repented after taking the king's food and wine, God would indeed have forgiven him. But the sinner who stands on the brink of sin and says, "I will repent afterward," is making a very hazardous calculation, for three reasons.

a) If the sin is attractive today, it will be even more attractive tomorrow, when it is more familiar.

b) If conscience cannot prevail today, it will have less fight in it tomorrow, when it is discouraged by failure.

c) No man should think that in himself he has the power to repent. Scripture teaches that repentance is a work of God.

Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?

Romans 2:4

In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.

2 Timothy 2:25

Anyone who ignores God and willfully sins has no right to expect that God will turn him around in the future. Maybe God will let him go his own way. Whoever says, "If I sin, God will forgive me," is being presumptuous. He is saying that if he throws himself into a pit of self-ruin, God will be obliged to rescue him. He would be well advised to heed the warning stated three times in Scripture, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" (Matthew 4:7; Deuteronomy 6:16; Luke 4:12). Here is a sharp rebuke of the fifth excuse for sin.

6. God has failed me, so I have no duty to obey Him. If anyone has had cause for bitterness against God, it is Daniel. While still a child, he was wrenched away from his own country and transported over a thousand miles into permanent captivity. Never again would he see his home or family. Then he was humiliated by being made a eunuch, and for the rest of his life his only prospect was to be a servant in the court of a pagan egotist. It is possible that the boy felt anger churning inside

him. But he wanted to do right, so instead of directing his anger against God, he directed it against the ungodly world around him. Anger can be a constructive force. In Daniel's case, it may have been the force enabling him to stand up and say, nicely, "I will not participate in your sin."

How do we react when God appears to withdraw His favor from us, when we have multiplied problems that seem undeserved? Do we turn away from Him in anger? Does resentment at the trouble He has permitted in our lives cause us to walk in rebellion against Him? But our trouble and difficulty are nothing compared with Job's, and look at what he said: "What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (Job 2:10). Here is the answer to the sixth excuse.

The maturity of the young Daniel after suffering several life-shattering blows is remarkable. Forsaking the laws of a God who had apparently forsaken him would have been easy. Yet, even at the price of almost certain death, he chose to do right.

Two objectives of Daniel's protest

On the one hand, Daniel was determined not to accept the king's food and drink. On the other hand, he did not want to throw his life away recklessly. God wants His children to do right, and in doing right they may earn the violent hatred of an evil world. But they need not deliberately provoke that hatred. If Daniel had defied the king in such a way that the king had no alternative but to take Daniel's life, then Daniel would have been of no further use to God. Therefore, to save his life, Daniel sought permission from the men over him to abstain from the defiling food and drink.

Conduct Daniel avoided

How could Daniel escape from the king's wishes and not incur the king's wrath? Here was a task for a mature master of diplomacy. Yet Daniel was only a teenager. The great wisdom in the course he chose shows that he must have relied on God's leading at every step. Only with God's help could he have avoided all those ways of expressing his conscience that would have courted disaster.

1. He did not publicly oppose the king. If Daniel had been an outspoken young man with rebellious tendencies, he might have mounted a soapbox before all the other boys and announced that he, a holy Jew, would never submit to the king's unholy demands. But a few minutes later, he would have been dead.

Also today, any Christian whose conscience is uneasy about a demand from higher authority should, if possible, express his reservations privately, not publicly. If he embarrasses his superiors by public

opposition, they may harden the objectionable demand and deal with him severely.

2. Even in private, he avoided a defiant attitude. He made no threats, showed no hostility. He merely requested permission to forego the food and drink allotted him (verse 8).

The trouble with a defiant attitude is that it may backfire. If a Christian complains belligerently about an offensive requirement, his superiors may feel that he is questioning their ability to make him do what they want. So, to prove their authority, they may insist that he comply. To gain their cooperation, he must keep a spirit of meekness. He must make them feel as if he is seeking a favor that only they can provide. He must convince them that he desires to support and not to subvert their authority.

Steps Daniel took

The whole process shows the perfect wisdom available to anyone seeking to do God's will. The steps Daniel took illustrate how we also should proceed when we find ourselves poised delicately between the competing directives of God and man.

1. He respected the chain of command. He went straight to Ashpenaz, his immediate superior. He did not go over the head of Ashpenaz to the king. Nor did he go to some underling who lacked authority to make a decision.

2. He approached Ashpenaz with a request. His manner was so tactful and winning that Ashpenaz took a great liking to him (verse 9). The master of the eunuchs answered sympathetically that he would like to help Daniel, but he could not. Why? He was afraid of the king (verse 10). If Daniel showed ill effects after abstaining from the prescribed diet, the king might discover that Ashpenaz had sidestepped one of his orders, and Ashpenaz might lose his head.

3. He did not press the matter too far. After Ashpenaz gave his answer, Daniel did not argue with him. He said only what he planned to say and no more. Then he went home and did some hard thinking. Do we also keep our mouths under control, or do we habitually put them on automatic pilot?

4. He carefully considered what he had been told. He pondered Ashpenaz's words until he was able to read between the lines. He realized that Ashpenaz's objection hinged on only one thing, fear for his life. Also, in Ashpenaz's friendly attitude he sensed an implied permission to forego the king's diet if he could maintain a healthy appearance.

5. He found a way of satisfying the objection. Instead of going back to Ashpenaz, he approached someone else, a servant identified as Melzar in the King James Version (hereafter called the KJV). This, incidentally, is probably the name of an office rather than of a man. Melzar

(or, the Melzar) was an underling with direct responsibility for the food and drink of the captives. Daniel doubtless expected Melzar to relay the conversation to Ashpenaz. Because Ashpenaz had been afraid that a change in Daniel's diet would produce poor health and appearance, Daniel proposed a test (verses 12–16). He said to Melzar, "Feed us ten days on pulse and we will emerge healthier and better looking than any of the boys on the king's diet." He did not choose too short a time for the benefits to be seen, nor too long a time to be acceptable to Ashpenaz. Obviously, Ashpenaz would not wait for weeks to see what would happen. Before then, any change for the worse might come to the king's attention.

6. He rallied support. Apparently it was just before Daniel approached Melzar that the other boys joined the drama by also deciding to refuse the defiling food and wine. Perhaps Daniel had been urging them to participate in the test so that the healthful benefits of the simple vegetable diet would be conspicuous and undeniable.

7. He took a leading role. Once the other boys were behind him, he did not push off the duty of speaking onto someone else. Rather, he did the speaking himself. He recognized that God had shown him, not the others, the right course of action. Therefore, he should be the one to carry it out.

Daniel's Vindication

verses 15–16

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.

Outcome of the test

"Fairer" (verse 15) means simply "better." At the end of the test, the four boys looked better—that is, healthier—than all the rest. No wonder they looked healthier if they were not drinking alcohol or eating exotic foods. The wholesome diet that they had chosen must have given a good color to their complexions and made their eyes sparkle.

But they were also "fatter in flesh" (verse 15). How could they have become fatter than the rest? People go on vegetable diets to lose weight, whereas the food and drink from the king's table were meant to be as fattening as possible. The point is this. Just as God miraculously delivered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego from the fiery furnace, and just as He miraculously delivered Daniel from the lions' den, so also, when

Daniel and his three friends resolved to remain unpolluted by forbidden food and drink, He intervened miraculously to uphold their convictions and preserve their lives. Although they were eating only pulse, He caused them, within a mere ten days, to become noticeably stouter than all the other boys.

What would the Hebrews have done if the test had failed? Daniel's intentions have often been misunderstood. In his proposal to Melzar, he made no promise that if the test failed, he and the others would begin taking the king's food and wine. In fact, he had unalterably purposed in his heart to shun anything that would defile him, and he was prepared to remain true to his conscience even at the cost of his own life. Daniel said, "As thou seest, deal with thy servants" (verse 13). In other words: "If we look good, then perhaps you will consider giving us the food we want. If we look worse or no better than the others, then perhaps you will decide to withhold the pulse." But he quite deliberately did not add, "And we will eat whatever you provide." If the test had failed, he and the others would probably have gone on a hunger strike. They simply would have refused the fare set before them. But they would not have suffered much hunger. As rebels against the king's policy, they would have been quickly executed.

Purpose of the test

The test was not a test of God's will. From Scripture, Daniel already knew God's will concerning such food and drink. Yet how often are we prompted by dissatisfaction with what Scripture says into seeking additional guidance! Indeed, we accept guidance that is easily manipulated by the evil one—guidance from circumstances, feelings, or the advice of people who profess to be spiritual or not too spiritual. Then when we go off in the wrong direction, we think that just because God does not stop us cold in our tracks, we have His approval and leading.

Also, the test was not a last effort to obey God. In Daniel's mind there was no plan to obey God only to the point of danger. Daniel never said to himself: "I will make every reasonable attempt to work out a way of keeping the law of God, but God can expect only so much of me. If the king won't cooperate, and Ashpenaz won't cooperate, and Melzar won't cooperate, then what choice do I have but to obey the king's order? Surely, God does not want me to lose my life over a question of food and drink." But Daniel's mind did not toy with thoughts like these. He was fully prepared to die if the test failed.

What then was the purpose of the test? The test was simply an effort to gain his master's cooperation. He was doubtful about helping the four Hebrews, so they allayed his doubts by showing him that he was at no risk. Their appearance after eating a diet of vegetables would be exactly what the king wanted.

Limits to diplomacy

Earlier, we found that when Daniel sought to be excused from the king's food and wine, he shunned two kinds of conduct. He did not oppose the king publicly or express a defiant attitude. Instead, he used wise, mature diplomacy. Yet diplomacy is not always possible and, when possible, is not always successful.

Consider an incident some years later, when Daniel's three friends came to a convocation of the king's officials and the king ordered them all to bow down before a great image (Daniel 3). As followers of the true God, the Hebrews could not obey. They had to remain standing. Hence, they were immediately spotted by their enemies and dragged before the king. Faced with public insubordination, the king demanded of the Hebrews that they bow down or die. What could they do? Their decision whether to obey had to be rendered immediately, in front of all the people assembled around the throne. The methods of diplomacy were of no avail. Rather, they necessarily resorted to the kinds of conduct that Daniel had once avoided.

1. They opposed the king publicly.
2. Their opposition took the form of bold defiance. They said, "We *are* not careful to answer thee in this matter" (verse 16). They even expressed contempt for the king's punishment. They declared that it would be a trifling thing for God to deliver them from the fiery furnace (verse 17). Moreover, they forthrightly branded the king's gods as unworthy of their worship. Realizing that they might soon come into God's presence, buoyed up by a zeal to die heroically for the cause of truth, they did not mince words. They denounced the worship of idols (verse 18). The effect of their words on the king was not to win his sympathy, but to antagonize him thoroughly. He became full of fury (verse 19).

When an authority figure places us under a requirement that offends our conscience, what approach should we take—quiet diplomacy or open resistance? We resort to open resistance only if all else fails.

Virtue Rewarded

verses 17-21

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.

How Daniel and his friends distinguished themselves

At the end of their training, the four Hebrews were personally interviewed by Nebuchadnezzar and found to excel all the other boys. Their superior knowledge and bearing earned each a position in the king's service (verse 19). Subsequently, after years of listening to their advice on matters of government, the king rated the four Hebrews as ten times wiser than all his other counselors (verse 20).

The most outstanding of the four was Daniel. He was so successful as a counselor to the king that his career not only outlasted the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, but survived the conquest of Babylon by the Persians (verse 21). Because of his proven abilities, he was appointed to a high post in the administration of Cyrus, the first Persian king. Specifically, he was made the chief assistant of Darius, the ruler whom Cyrus set over the province of Babylon (Daniel 6:1-3).

The first year of Cyrus (verse 21) was not the year of Daniel's death or demotion, but probably the year when Daniel retired from active government service. Daniel's death occurred no earlier than the third year of Cyrus, the date of the last vision in the Book of Daniel (Daniel 10:1).

How God rewarded Daniel

God rewarded Daniel in three ways for his courageous refusal to compromise with the world.

1. Preservation. God preserved his life.
2. Exaltation. God gave him an exalted role in the kingdom of Babylon.
3. Revelation. Through dreams and visions, God revealed to Daniel progressively more of Himself and of His program for the future history of nations and empires.

How God rewards every believer

A believer today should not expect to duplicate Daniel's experience, for Jesus said,

19 If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.

20 Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.

21 But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me.

John 15:19-21

Jesus said also,

These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

John 16:33

Specifically, we cannot expect our lives to be preserved. For the sake of Christ, we may suffer a martyr's death. Also, we cannot expect to be exalted. Rather than reach heights of privilege and success, we may, like our Master, be counted as misfits and failures. And we cannot expect God to reveal Himself to us in visions. The God we serve is someone we know primarily through the testimony of the Bible.

Yet though God does not promise to preserve or exalt us in this world, and though we live by faith rather than by sight, He has promised us preservation, exaltation, and revelation in the world to come.

1. Preservation.

The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.

Psalm 121:8

27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:

28 And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand.

29 My Father, which gave *them* me, is greater than all; and no *man* is able to pluck *them* out of my Father's hand.

John 10:27-29

2. Exaltation.

15 Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance.

16 In thy name shall they rejoice all the day: and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted.

17 For thou *art* the glory of their strength; and in thy favour our horn shall be exalted.

Psalm 89:15-17

42 And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom *his* lord shall make ruler over his household, to give *them their* portion of meat in due season?

43 Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.

44 Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath.

Luke 12:42-44

3. Revelation.

As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.

Psalm 17:15

For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

1 Corinthians 13:12

Notes

Chapter One

¹By customary Judean reckoning, the third year of Jehoiakim began on Tishri 1 in 606 and ended on the last day of Elul in 605. See Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, new revised ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), 183; A. Malamat, "The Twilight of Judah: In the Egyptian-Babylonian Maelstrom," *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum* 28, Congress Volume: Edinburgh, 1974 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), 124, 129; A. R. Millard, "Daniel 1–6 and History," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 49 (1977): 69; Jack Finegan, *Archaeological History of the Ancient Middle East* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1979), 387. The exact limits were probably September 19 of the first year, October 6 of the second. See Richard A. Parker and Waldo H. Dubberstein, *Babylonian Chronology 626 B.C.–A.D. 75* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1956), 27.

²A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, vol. 5 of *Texts from Cuneiform Sources*, ed. A. Leo Oppenheim et al. (Locust Valley, N.Y.: J. J. Augustin Publisher, 1975), 99.

³Wiseman, *Nebuchadrezzar*, 15.

⁴Grayson, 99. Wiseman, the first translator of this portion of the *Chronicle*, understood the text to mean, "Nebuchadnezzar conquered the whole of the land of Hatti," Hatti or Hattu being the Babylonian designation for Syria. See D. J. Wiseman, "Historical Records of Assyria and Babylonia," in *Documents from Old Testament Times*, ed. D. Winton Thomas (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1958), 78–79. Wiseman, *Nebuchadrezzar*, 17, now concurs with Grayson that the place name in the text is *Ha-(ma-a)-tu* (Hamath). The difference is immaterial for our concerns, since Hamath lies in the heart of Syria, and the chronicler's concept of the whole region of Hamath probably took in a wide area (compare with Jeremiah 39:5).

⁵Josephus *Antiquities* 10.6.1.

⁶Wiseman, *Nebuchadrezzar*, 23.

⁷Josephus *Against Apion* 1.19.

⁸The Bible states that Nebuchadnezzar came personally to Jerusalem both to unseat Jehoiakim (2 Chronicles 36:5–6) and, three months later, in the Babylonian king's eighth year, to remove Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24:8–12). The *Babylonian Chronicle* mentions no assault against Judah in Nebuchadnezzar's eighth year, but says that in his seventh year, he "encamped against the city of Judah and . . . captured the city (and) seized (its) king. A king of his own choice he appointed in the city (and) taking the vast tribute he brought it into Babylon" (Grayson, 102).

Scholars have decided that the kings then deposed and installed were Jehoiachin and Zedekiah (Wiseman, "Historical Records," 80–81).

But Scripture places this succession in Nebuchadnezzar's eight year. Also, there is no reason to think that the *Chronicle* would fail to substantiate an assault against Jehoiakim rather than an assault against Jehoiachin. Positing Jehoiakim as the target of the assault noticed by the *Chronicle* produces harmony among all the sources.

The *Chronicle's* silence about an assault in Nebuchadnezzar's eighth year hardly proves that none occurred, for the *Chronicle* offers an extremely abbreviated record of events. It allots only a few lines to each year of the king's reign. Concerning his eighth year, it says only that the king spent two months at the end of the year along his northern frontier (Grayson, 102).

⁹The comment in 2 Kings 24:6 that Jehoiakim "slept with his fathers" merely means that he joined them in death. It does not mean that he was buried with them.

¹⁰K. A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (Chicago: InterVarsity Press, 1966), 165–166. In an Assyrian legal text dating 1450–1250 B.C., the term *sa risin* is used twice in contexts that require the meaning "eunuch." In both instances, the term describes the condition to be imposed on a malefactor in punishment for his crime. See G. R. Driver and John C. Miles, eds., *The Assyrian Laws* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), 4, 388–389 (A.15.54), 390–391 (A.20.97), 463. The term *sa resi* occurs frequently in about thirty Assyrian legislative texts found at Calah (Nimrud). In his analysis of these tablets, dating from the first quarter of the eighth century B.C., J. V. Kinnier Wilson shows that the *sa resi* were a distinct class of government officials. Without any reservation, he calls them eunuchs. See J. V. Kinnier Wilson, *The Nimrud Wine Lists: A Study of Men and Administration at the Assyrian Capital in the Eighth Century, B.C.*, Cuneiform Texts from Nimrud I (London: British School of Archaeology in Iraq, 1972), 13–14, 45–64, 82–83.

¹¹Joan Oates, *Babylon* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979), 151.

¹²A. Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 235–238, 244–246.

¹³Oates, 252; Oppenheim, 246–247.

¹⁴Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Chaldea, Chaldeans," in *The New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology*, ed. E. M. Blaiklock and R. K. Harrison (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1983), 123; Xenophon *Cyropaedia* 7.5.31.

¹⁵Wiseman, *Nebuchadnezzar*, 87.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 86–89.

¹⁷Georges Roux, *Ancient Iraq* (n.p.: George Allen & Unwin, 1964; repr., Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1966), 329–333; Oates, 184–187.

¹⁸Wiseman, *Nebuchadnezzar*, 86, 88–90, 92–93; Oates, 178–183.

¹⁹Oates, 152.

²⁰Wiseman, *Nebuchadnezzar*, 1.

²¹Ibid., 81–82; John F. Walvoord, *Daniel: the Key to Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 34.

²²Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (n.p., 1906; repr., Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979), 306.

²³Ibid., 193.

²⁴Ibid., 337.

²⁵Ibid., 567.

²⁶Ibid., 741.

²⁷Robert Dick Wilson, *Studies in the Book of Daniel*, 1 vol. ed. (n.p.: By the author, 1917; repr., Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1979), 1:30–33. The critics regard the new names of the four Hebrews as the literary invention of a second-century author who knew only a smattering of Babylonian. Concerning *Belteshazzar*, they say that it may be a real Babylonian name which the author found somewhere but mistakenly interpreted as a tribute to the god Bel. So, in chapter 4, the author has Nebuchadnezzar say, “But at the last Daniel came in before me, whose name *was* Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god” (verse 8). But, the critics say, if the name is truly Babylonian, it means only, “Protect his life,” or, “Lady [Ishtar], protect the king.” Wilson long ago set aside this attack on the Book of Daniel by demonstrating the reading given in this commentary.

²⁸James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, a vol. of *The International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1927), 123; Edward J. Young, *A Commentary on Daniel* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1949; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1972), 43; Wiseman, *Nebuchadnezzar*, 85–86; H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Daniel* (n.p.: Augsburg Publishing House, 1949; repr., Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1969), 65.

²⁹Ibid. The critics say that *Nego* is a second-century misspelling of the god’s name. Yet the name *Abed-nego* has been found in papyri from the fifth-century B.C. See Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, revised ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), 397. Wiseman, *Nebuchadnezzar*, 86, points out that *negu* can be read “to sing joyously.”

³⁰Wiseman, *Nebuchadnezzar*, 85.

³¹R. D. Wilson, 2:251.

³²Leupold, 70.

³³Wiseman, *Nebuchadnezzar*, 85.

³⁴Jay P. Green, Sr., *The Interlinear Bible: Hebrew/English*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1983), 3:2033.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶M. R. DeHaan, *Daniel the Prophet: 35 Simple Studies in the Book of Daniel* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1947), 35–53.