

The Book Of Daniel (Part One)

Daniel's Background

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Given 26-Oct-13; Sermon #1182

The book of Daniel is a clear revelation of the meaning of history. Daniel gives the meaning of history more clearly than any other portion of the Bible. And what is more, it tells us how to live for God in ungodly times, like our own.

Some approach this book as if it were a puzzle given to stretch our minds and to challenge us to compare scripture with scripture, to figure things out. And some people only focus on the prophetic portions of the book and speculation runs rampant whenever anyone is delving into it.

They spend excessive amounts of time trying to pin-point the exact time of end-time events, often neglecting essential spiritual principles. No one can doubt that there are puzzling elements to this prophecy, and at one point Daniel himself was puzzled. There are parts of his book that have never been completely and conclusively explained. But to think of Daniel primarily as a puzzle of prophecy is to miss its extraordinary relevance to us and its illuminating insights into history.

Consider these facts:

1. Daniel is a godly man sent to live in ungodly Babylon at a time when God's blessing upon Judah seemed to have been withdrawn or postponed. This means that his position was much like that of believers trying to live in secular society today.
2. The Babylon of Daniel's day was a type of all kingdoms that do not acknowledge God or think they can dispense with Him, and this is a fitting description of most of the world in our time, including so-called Christian America.
3. Daniel and his three friends—Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah—were under tremendous pressure to conform. Religion was tolerated—even respected—as long as they did not allow it to intrude into public life or rock the boat of state. That is our situation also: We can practice our religion so long as it is not in the schools, at work, or in the public arena.

4. The world seemed to be winning. Nebuchadnezzar believed himself to be above having to answer to anybody. It was in an even greater way than our national leaders today. Our Presidents, Prime Ministers, dictators, even kings do not have quite the absolute personal power Nebuchadnezzar had over life and death of his people.

5. Nevertheless, despite these things, God told Daniel that it is He—God—who is in control of history. His purposes are being accomplished even in the overthrow and captivity of His people. Furthermore, in the end, God will establish a Kingdom that will endure forever. The destiny of the people of God is wrapped up in that eternal Kingdom.

Those are five very plain, very simple facts and also parallels between Daniel's time and what he was dealing with and what we are dealing with today.

So, the main theme of the Book of Daniel is the sovereignty of the living God who endures forever, whose Kingdom will not be destroyed, and whose dominion will never end. And that is exciting and that is encouraging and comforting.

Is there any message that is so timely and valuable for Christians living in our own secular and materialistic times, as that message is? Indeed, in Daniel, we have a stirring and helpful example of one who not only lived through such times and survived them, but who actually triumphed in them and excelled in public life to the glory of God.

Daniel did not compromise. He did not bow to this world's idols. He was hated and plotted against, but he triumphed because he knew God and trusted Him to do with his life whatever was best.

One of the best quotations in all the Bible is from this book. It makes precisely that point. It is from the scene in which Daniel's friends are summoned before Nebuchadnezzar for their refusal to bow before the golden statue and explain why they will not bow down. So here in Daniel 3, we will read verses 16 through 18.

Daniel 3:16-18 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if

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not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.”

We must seek such character and faith in our times as well because, no doubt, many of us will be faced with similar incidents. People who are aware of the dangers of trying to serve God in this world, but who trust God despite the danger and who will not compromise, are the only ones who really triumph regardless of appearances. In the final analysis, they are the ones who make a difference in the world—not these leaders of the world, but the faithful.

The God of Daniel must be honored and revered throughout our whole families. Not only we, the leaders—as fathers and husbands and so on—but, every last member of the family must honor and reverence God.

Turn forward a few pages to Daniel 6:26. The God of Daniel must be honored, as I said.

Daniel 6:26 I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom men must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel. For He is the living God, and steadfast forever; His kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed, and His dominion shall endure to the end.

Nebuchadnezzar was inspired by God through all the agony that he was put through to realize this fact. Each and every one of the heads of our families or personal kingdoms, if you will, should feel an even greater reverence and awe than Nebuchadnezzar eventually did about God’s sovereignty. Nebuchadnezzar was never converted; he never received God’s Holy Spirit. How much more do we with God’s Holy Spirit have the obligation and duty to reverence and fear and honor God?

There is no certain evidence that Nebuchadnezzar meant that the God of Daniel should be honored as the only God, but the probability is that he meant that God should be recognized as the God of greatest power and glory and as worthy of universal reverence.

Tucked between the great Old Testament prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel on the one hand, and the twelve Minor Prophets that conclude the Old Testament on the other, lies this book of Daniel. In Matthew 24, Jesus called Daniel a prophet, thus validating both the man and his function.

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Matthew 24:15 Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand)...

As we read the Book of Daniel, we are to understand what is there. We are to study it, contemplate it, and apply it in our lives.

What is the value of Daniel? A large portion of the book given to prophecy is one measure of his value but is not the whole basis of the book's place in the canon. He foretells the history of his portion of the world from the time of Nebuchadnezzar up to the beginning of the Christian era, accurately forecasting the rise and fall of the Medes and Persians, the Greek kingdom of Alexander the Great, and his successors in Rome. He speaks of some things yet to come. Although these predictions are important, they are not necessarily the most important theme in Daniel.

What is the primary and most important theme? This is not a hard question at all, nor do we have to go far for the answer. The theme is stated at the very beginning in the words that give a historical setting for the story. If you flip back a few pages to the beginning of Daniel, he writes:

Daniel 1:1-2 In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the articles of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the articles into the treasure house of his god.

By way of historical background, it is helpful to know that Nebuchadnezzar attacked the southern kingdom of Judah three times, beginning with the first invasion in 605 BC, a little more than a hundred years after the northern kingdom of Israel had fallen to the Assyrians.

The second invasion occurred around 597 BC when Jehoiakim, son of the King of Judah, was compelled to surrender Jerusalem and go into captivity with many of the Jewish leaders including the royal family, the commanders of the army, craftsmen, and even some of the priests like Ezekiel himself.

The third invasion was the one we remember most. It took place in 586 BC when

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Jerusalem was completely destroyed and the people of the land were deported to Babylon. Jeremiah was in Jerusalem at the time of this final destruction of the city.

Since Daniel begins by relating the events of the book to the deliverance of the King Jehoiakim into Nebuchadnezzar's hands, it must have been through the first of these three invasions that Daniel and his friends—Hananiah named Shadrach, Mishael named Meshach, and Azariah named Abed-Nego—were taken from Jerusalem to Babylon to be trained for Nebuchadnezzar's service.

The interesting thing about the beginning of the book, however, is that it is not the four men whose stories will be told in subsequent chapters of Daniel, who are said to have been brought back to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar, but rather "the articles from the temple of God" that Nebuchadnezzar "put in the treasure house of his god."

So the things of God—the articles of God—in God's temple were removed and put into Nebuchadnezzar's temple of his gods. That is not an incidental or irrelevant beginning. On the contrary, it is the theme of the book and the key to everything that follows. But it seems so much more vague when we look at it just on the surface.

As the story will show, Nebuchadnezzar was an exceedingly arrogant man, as you well know, knowing the story. The conquests he made were understood by him to be proof of the sovereignty and superiority of his gods, which he did not always clearly distinguish from himself to all others.

Jews boasted that their God, Yahweh, was all-powerful, and here we have a conflict. Nebuchadnezzar believed that he was greater than that God. So when he forced the capitulation of Jerusalem, his cause and his gods seemed vindicated. His gods seemed to have won. It was in demonstration of that conviction that he brought the gold and silver articles that had been declared to the service of Yahweh in Jerusalem to Babylon to be placed in the treasure house of his god. In Nebuchadnezzar's mind, the heathen gods had triumphed and he himself was sovereign. In this case, as in so many other historical situations, appearances were very deceiving.

Actually, Yahweh was very much in charge of the overthrow of Jerusalem, as He had been many times earlier in its defense. In fact, it was Yahweh who had brought on the destruction, sending it as a punishment for the people's sins, much like we are seeing happening today to the Israelitish nations.

In spite of the fact that He had delivered Jehoiakim into Nebuchadnezzar's hands, God was going to show that He was and is sovereign and leave no doubt at all about it. The

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main spiritual emphasis in Daniel is the absolute sovereignty of Yahweh, the God of Israel. At the time when it seemed to all the world that His cause was lost and that the gods of the heathen had triumphed, causing His temple to be burned to the ground, it pleased the Eternal amazingly and unmistakably to display His omnificence.

The theme running through the whole book is that the riches of kings and the affairs of men are subject to God's decrees. He is able to accomplish His will despite the most determined opposition of the mightiest rulers of the earth.

The miracles recorded in chapters 1 through 6 demonstrate God's sovereignty on behalf of His saints. In chapter 1, we find the surpassing health of Daniel and his three companions after ten days of a simple healthy diet. In chapter 2, we find the miraculous disclosure to Daniel of the contents of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. In chapter 3, we find the amazing deliverance of Daniel's three friends from the fiery furnace. In chapter 4, we find the previous warning to Nebuchadnezzar of seven years of dehumanizing insanity because of his arrogant pride. In chapter 5, we find the terrifying prediction inscribed on the banquet wall of Belshazzar, followed by a speedy fulfillment of the same. And in chapter 6, we find Daniel's deliverance from a lion's den. All clearly show that the Lord God of Israel was in charge of the tide of human affairs and was perfectly able to deliver His people from pagan oppression during their captivity and slavery.

The greatest and most important theme of Daniel is that there is only God who is Yahweh and that He is sovereign over all the events of history. No matter what situation or position or condition His people are in—whether being in slavery or enjoying the affluence of a blessed nation. This needs to be placed in an even larger context. Consider that the theme of Daniel concerns the existence of two societies or cities: one is God's society, the other is Satan's society—the society of this world. These two societies or cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; and the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self.

Consider the contrast between Babylon, which is a spectacular embodiment of the earthly city, and Jerusalem, which is the symbol of the City of God. The struggle between Nebuchadnezzar and God recorded in Daniel is actually only one example of that greater struggle between the world's way of doing things and God's way of doing things, which has prevailed at all times and prevails today. This is what makes Daniel a contemporary book—one ready for us to use for our own encouragement and faith-building today.

The primary characteristic of Babylon in Nebuchadnezzar's time is what we could call its radical, secular humanism. We can see this because of a statement Nebuchadnezzar

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makes later on in Daniel. Now turn forward please a few chapters to chapter 4, in verse 30.

Daniel 4:30 The king spoke, saying, “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?”

We can just picture the leaders of the nations today saying this to themselves in various phrasings, or at least acting as if that is the way they believe. We are seeing it in an even greater way today in the leader of this nation who, while he destroys and demolishes the country—deteriorates it—(and the nation helps him through everyone’s sin), we see that he is getting more proud that he does more destruction. That is exactly what happened to Israel and will eventually happen to the Gentile nations of the world.

This is a true statement in one sense, that is, the statement here in Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar has built Babylon, and he has undoubtedly done it for his own glory. But in forgetting God, who had given him the opportunity to create such magnificence, Nebuchadnezzar was actually taking God’s glory to himself. Like all secular humanists, he was saying that all that exists is of man, by man, and for man’s glory. That is a true expression of the earthly city.

In 21st century America, secularism is notable in many ways, as people increasingly view reality as emerging from man and as existing for man and his glory. Let me give you two examples of that that you are very familiar with.

First, there is a philosophy of evolution, which is a dominant reference for the way most people think and which extends to almost everything, especially in education. Why is evolution so popular? Why are educators so insistent that it and only it must be taught in our schools? There are different reasons for evolution’s popularity, of course. For one thing, according to evolutionary theory, everything is knowledgeable since everything stands in a direct causal relationship to everything else and may be traced backward or forward through those relationships. This has obvious appeal.

Second, reality has only one explanation: the fittest survive—whether a biological mutation, a government, or an ideal. Nebuchadnezzar believed that he built Babylon by his own mighty power.

Third, the theory of evolution claims that mankind is always becoming greater in mental capacity and will one day ascend to a higher plane of existence, when in reality mankind

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is degenerating mentally and physically because of sin. Nebuchadnezzar built Babylon to honor his own majesty, which would inevitably be destroyed.

Fourth, and probably the main reason: Evolution eliminates God, which was precisely what Nebuchadnezzar was trying to do in his own way. If all things can be explained as a natural outworking or development of previous causes, then God may be safely banished to an other-worldly kingdom or even be eliminated altogether, as many even so-called theologians have done. Evolution allows man to be the center of the universe, or so he thinks.

The second example of today's secularism is the current idea of the separation of church and state, which comes into a study of Daniel. The struggle of Nebuchadnezzar, who represents the state, is against God, and this is so prominent throughout the entire book, especially the story of Nebuchadnezzar. The idea of a separation of church and state used to mean that each functioned separately; kings or presidents not being allowed to appoint clerical authorities or run the church, and clerical authorities not being allowed to appoint kings or presidents. Nevertheless, it was always understood that both church and state were responsible to God, in whose wisdom each had been established, and they were two independent servants of one Master. Each was to remind the other of its God-appointed duties and recall it to upright, godly conduct if it would stray.

Today, however, the idea of the separation of church and state is taken often by professing Christians to mean that the church is irrelevant to the state, though the state increasingly brings its secular philosophy to bear on the church; for example, forcing it to acknowledge homosexual marriage and homosexuality and abortion and such things as that.

Although true Christians should not get involved with politics since our citizenship is in heaven, we should not neglect being informed ourselves about national or international issues. Jesus tells His disciples (and that is you and me) about the importance of watching. And our watching the events that are happening and unfolding in the world is part of that watching.

Luke 21:34-36 But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.

So it is called the snare for those people who are ignorant. If you look at people today or if you are seeing the Jay Leno on-the-street interviews and some of the other interviews showing how stupid people are about everything, you realize that they are going to fall into that snare. Sadly, there are some people in the church who are in that same boat, who are totally ignorant of what is going on around them. If they are not careful, they will fall into that snare. We do have to watch and pray about these things.

As a result of the separation of church and state in this country, the articulation of spiritual and moral principles is eliminated from political and legal debates, policies, and laws. The state becomes its own god, with its chief operating principle being paganism. For its part, the state deliberately tries to keep religious values out of politics, promising to protect the right to worship so long as those wanting to worship do so on the reservation that it is totally in private. At some point in time, if you have read the book *1984* or seen the movie, you realize that their goal is even to have surveillance in your home. It will come to that point if God allows it; they certainly have the technology.

Because of the enmity between the average person and God, the one thing Christians must not do according to the immoral government and corrupt legal system is attempt to bring their convictions out of this isolation ward into this demonic world. This is the way the world's cities always think; they are always against God, even when they say they are for God. How many Presidents have we had that claimed to be Christian and were anything but that?

Nebuchadnezzar considered himself master because he was able to take gold and silver objects out of the Jerusalem treasury and carry them to Babylon. Cain, which is where the secular city began, considered himself master because he had the strength and cunning to kill Abel. Rome considered itself master because its legions were able to march unhindered across the ancient world, burning and destroying. But the world is not master. God is master, God is sovereign, and He is able to bring the secular city down and He will, as we read in the Book of Revelation.

He did it in the case of Nebuchadnezzar, as the story of Daniel shows. Nebuchadnezzar judged himself superior to all around him because of his military triumphs and achievements. He thought he had no need for God, but God declared otherwise in Daniel 4.

Daniel 4:31-32 While the word was still in the king's mouth, a voice fell from heaven: "King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling

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shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.”

That is what happened. Nebuchadnezzar became insane and was driven from the city.

Daniel 4:33 That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws.

Has there ever been a more frightening description of any man? This is what happens when people take the glory of God to themselves. They lose the proper human glory they should have, that of having been made in God's image, and they become like beasts. And most certainly, they become worse than beasts because beasts, when they are beast-like, are at least behaving the way beasts should behave, while we, by contrast, commit crimes of which they cannot even conceive, making us more beastly or worse than the most beastly.

At the same time, while the world is living by its own standards and for its own glory in opposition to God, there are other people who know God and honestly try to please Him. In this story, the other people are Daniel and his friends. They are not the most visible people, just as the city they represent is not nearly as visible as the city of this world. But they are substantial people. In the final analysis, they are the only ones who really make a difference for good.

No one is by nature in the company of these servants of the true God. All are born into the secular city, but the City of God can be entered by a new birth through faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. In John 3:3, Jesus says, “No one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again.” So the doors of that city stand open for anyone called by God who will enter it. Abraham was a citizen of the heavenly city who lived for God in the secular city. And it is almost in a similar way to what Daniel was doing, although Abraham was not a slave in the same sense.

Hebrews 11:9-10 By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

We are members of the City of God and we must live here in a way that makes the invisible kingdom real to us. It is not something that we only are citizens of on the Sabbath; it must be actively performed, being applied in our lives every day. Daniel and Abraham did that very thing. Abraham regarded himself as a stranger and sojourner and yet he had a strong expectation of a fixed habitation and a permanent inheritance. He looked on the permanent residence of the righteous—the heavenly city—and though he had an undoubted confidence that the Promised Land would be given to his descendants (Abraham's), yet since he did not possess it himself, he looked forward to his own future permanent fixed residence.

We see the result of Abraham's faith in his forsaking the world, and there are three distinct things we can learn from this that parallels Daniel's faithfulness. The work of Abraham's faith shows us what we should give up, what we should endure, and what we should live for.

What did Abraham have to give up?

Genesis 12:1 Now the Lord had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you.

What a command! Consider what he had forsaken and endured. In the eyes of his family, how absurd and far-fetched his decision to obey must have been. But Abraham was supported by a certain hope, and he waited for a city which has permanent foundations, whose builder and maker is the Supreme God. What this means is that while Abraham expected the possession of the Promised Land for his descendants, yet his faith looked beyond this for a permanent home in a future world. As a result of his giving up the world, he endured hardships and lived on the hope of a future blessing which he will receive. And all this he did by faith and obedience.

Let us apply Abraham's case and conduct to our own. What is the world we have to give up? It is the way of the world, the objects, the society, and the philosophy to which we are drawn that draw out our sinful inclinations. Our personality and temperament influence our interests and desires and those things become our world, if we are not resisting it and working to overcome our sins and the tendencies towards them.

Let us briefly consider seven areas of conduct that may become our idolatrous world if we do not take heed.

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1. To one man, nature is his world. He has a mind to enjoy extremely the beauties and the works of nature. The feelings produced by a rich sunset or a beautiful view are his personal religion if he gazes at the beauty of a flower, forgets the God who made it, and replaces the Creator with the created object as his focus. He confuses and mistakes the one for the other. Environmentalism is his religion or sentiment or some such feeling.
2. In another person, applause and praise is his world. He lives for his pride and has lived for it all his life. Every act of his life is governed by what people think of it. The man's world would be human applause, admiration, and flattery.
3. To some people, mere worldly success is their world, what they call climbing the ladder of success. They live for this. Their whole view of right and wrong is almost bound by their chance of success in their profession, their trade, or their place.
4. Some make their family their world. If you put your family on a pedestal above God, above worship of and obedience to Him, your family is your world.
5. To others, pleasure is their world. Society's only object is to gratify the senses or entertain the imagination. Good-natured society, dissipated society, intellectual society, idle society whose object it is to pass away the dull hours of life with immoral and dishonest actions or by loathing and apathetic carelessness through the precious fleeting hours of time. Ambitious society, whose great object it is to surpass each other and display wealth or power.
6. To some, excess activity like sports, texting, even an over-abundance of church activity, can be a kind of world if it is done in an over-abundant or excessive way.
7. To some, a particular set of circumstances connected with religion is their world. It might be a particular minister whom they almost worship or a particular religious friend whose word with them would almost supersede the authority of Scripture.

Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego had to resist and deal with the

enticements and attractions of the world around them. They were given food by the king, they were given the best of places to live, and they were surrounded by an affluent society. They had to resist those areas of potential idolatry. So also this is what we must do and give up for Christ's and the church's sake. We must demonstrate our faith like Abraham, Daniel, and his friends did by forsaking and avoiding the worlds that are easily available to us.

I Corinthians 10:12-14 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

Abraham had to flee from idolatry; Daniel and his friends had to flee from idolatry; and we also have to do the very same, having the same pressures and temptations. All of God's people who have resisted and avoided and fled from carnal desires and interests did it as a result of faith, and that is why they are referred to as great heroes of faith. By faith, Abraham gave up the world and rested on future promises, and by faith we must give up the world and rest on future promises.

What is the result of giving up these things? Let me give you seven brief examples that coincide with the previous seven areas of potentially idolatrous conduct. Again, these are fairly brief.

1. If your world is the excessive admiration of nature, of the natural environment, of the earth around you, faith helps by opening your eyes to see a realm of much greater glory and importance, a much more interesting and vital world of breathtaking spiritual family, knowledge, and activity.
2. If your world is the praise of human beings, you are called to give it up. Faith offers you the praise of God instead, the approval of your Savior.
3. If your world is success and your earthly vocation and you are called by conscience to resign hopes of high success here on earth, faith points through the veil of humiliation to the everlasting where you will reign as Kings and Priests forever.

4. If your world is your family whose affections God calls you willingly and cheerfully to resign, faith points to a reunion in God's Kingdom with all of them in a much better plane and standard and world.
5. If your world is society with vain, empty, delusive, dissipating pleasure, faith points you to a society whose whole object is God; whose whole religion is spirit, truth, and praise; and whose whole will is obedience. A society of perfect spirit beings purified by the power of the Spirit and glorified by God.
6. If your world is activity and Laodiceanism to the call of God, faith offers a field of interesting and fulfilling righteous service before God forever rather than the temporary.
7. If your world is a particular sphere of religious circumstances, faith points you to God and compels you to trust in Him, not in human beings.

Now back to Daniel. Those are the same kinds of things everyone has to deal with, as did Daniel. In Daniel 1, we are going to read verses 3 through 8. Some of this we have touched on, but this gives us the context.

Daniel 1:3-8 Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles, young men in whom there was no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who had ability to serve in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans. And the king appointed for them a daily provision of the king's delicacies and of the wine which he drank, and three years of training for them, so that at the end of that time they might serve before the king. Now from among those of the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego. But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.

Daniel's story is of a man of God in worldly Babylon, very similar to those of us here, although we were not under such strict order and maybe even a type of slavery. And we are always God's people in the midst of those who do not honor and in fact oppose our Divine King. Daniel's trials are given to us as a great encouragement, as I mentioned earlier.

In analyzing Daniel, we have before us a tremendous example of how God proves the faith of his people in these days by various trials, and how with wonderful wisdom He has taken care to strengthen our minds by ancient examples. Now He has done this so that we will never be spiritually weakened by the concussion of the severest trials and tribulations, or at least if we should falter at all, that we should never finally fall away. Because although the servants of God are required to run in a course impeded by many obstacles, yet whoever diligently reads this book will find in it whatever is needed by voluntary and active runner to guide him from the starting point to the goal. Here then in Daniel we observe, as in a living picture, that when God spares and even indulges the wicked for a time, He proves His servants like gold and silver so that we should never complain that we have been thrown into the furnace or trial while evil people enjoy the easy and spoilt life of the world.

In order to understand Daniel, we must realize that the Babylon to which Daniel and his three friends were taken was a secular, worldly place and that their initial experiences there were intended to blot out of their minds the remembrance of the true God and their homeland. We see this in several ways that we not only see this in Daniel's life and the three friends of his, but we also see that that is happening in our own lives, as this nation tries to wipe away our thoughts of God, Christianity, and the right way of living by inundating us with sheer impure evil ways of life.

For one thing, Nebuchadnezzar ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to choose young men who would be easily molded by their new environment. He attempted to lure them with the delicacies of food that the great city of Babylon could provide. Now primarily we notice Nebuchadnezzar's intentions in altering the young men's names, which is very interesting. The Hebrew names of these young men were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. They were changed to Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. It should be immediately evident to anyone with even a limited knowledge of Hebrew that the Jewish names of these men each contain a name of God and has a spiritual meaning.

Daniel and Mishael both contain the syllable at the end, 'el', which means God, and is the basis of the frequently appearing name Elohim. Daniel means 'God is my Judge';

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Michael means 'Who is like God?' The other two names—Hananiah and Azariah—both contain a shortened form of the name 'Yahweh'—Yah, ah. So that is Mish-ah-el and Az-ah-riah. They both contain that. So Hananiah means 'Yahweh is gracious' and Azariah means 'Yahweh is my Helper'. We see that God named those men for specific reasons to express a biblical principle.

Now the very names of these men were reminders of their heritage and a challenge to them to remain faithful to the Lord. But now deported into a strange pagan land, their names are changed. And the names they are given all contain a reference to one of the false gods of the ancient Babylonians. We can see what Nebuchadnezzar was doing and what his minions were doing—trying to wipe away everything that had any evidence of the real God, the true God of the Israelites.

All the names they are given contain a reference to one of the false gods of the ancient Babylonians—Aku or Nebo. It was a way of saying that these who had been servants of the Jewish God were now servants and worshippers of the gods of the pagan pantheon. Now Belshazzar is a form of Baal-tazar, meaning 'May the lady (that is wife of the god Baal or Bale) protect the King'. It is what Daniel's Belshazzar name meant.

Now it is interesting that it is referring to the wife of the god Baal (the Baal gods were a whole series of gods, but I am just using it in a single form here). So the wife of Baal actually was a reference to the wife being Semiramis or Athena. And the Statue of Liberty is a statue of Athena. So we see a direct tie into the paganism in this society today. It just never ends. All the way down through history, you can trace these things that are continually rearing their heads in societies. We have even something that the people of this nation almost worship: the Statue of Liberty, a statue of Athena.

But the change accomplished nothing with these men. Nebuchadnezzar changed the men's names, but he could not change their hearts. They remained faithful to the true God of Israel, as the story shows. And now let us apply that to our own age.

One thing that the world seems always to try to do—it has happened in the past and it is happening in our time—is to take Biblical words and re-work them to convey the world's ideas. It has always been one of Satan's subtlest tricks. It happens in mainstream theology as well.

We just heard an example of it regarding the Statue of Liberty actually being a representation of Athena. Well, sin used to mean rebellion against God and His righteous law, but today, in mainstream theology, it means ignorance or merely the kind of oppression that is supposed to reside in social structures. It does not mean anything

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against God at all anymore. To liberal theology, Jesus is no longer the incarnate God who died for our salvation, but rather just an example or what might even be termed an evolutionary peak of the human race.

Now faith is awareness of oppression and beginning to do something about it and so on, according to the world. Of course, in the secular world, the readjustment of words is even more ridiculous and extreme, as the wrong use of the term 'born again' by mainstream Christianity as a kind of club password.

Herbert Armstrong and the Worldwide Church of God avoided the term 'born again' as much as possible, it seems, because of the misleading Protestant connotation or association the term had with the 'once saved, always saved' false doctrine. So this is part of the reason I prefer the more literal 'born from above' form of the term. But in the context of the true interpretation, either terms—'born from above' or 'born again'—can be used and rightly so. Nevertheless, if the truth of what is behind these words remains strong in the minds and hearts of those who really know the truth, then the vitality of the faith will remain regardless of the world's corruptions of these words. And we persevere because God strengthens us to stand against this pop culture. We have to be very careful in how we use the words and that we are using them correctly because the world—both secular and theological world—has redefined them which causes a great deal of confusion, both in the secular world as well as the theology world.

When the Protestant churches talk about certain things, they are not talking about the same things that we are oftentimes. So that is why reading commentaries and things that other mainstream ministers have written is very dangerous, and you have to be very careful with that.

Now perhaps the most important verse in the first chapter of Daniel is verse 8, which says:

Daniel 1:8 But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank.

Now what is your reaction to that? Remember that Daniel is a young man at this time, and we know from the later development of the story that he lives for a very long time beyond this—through the rule of four emperors in fact. He was probably in his nineties when he died.

So, as of verse 8, he was probably between 15 and 17 but somewhere in his late teens;

and it was at this young age that he was taken away from his own country and culture and plunged into this strange but exciting life of the great world capital and lured to royalty by the best of all possible education—that is secular education—and by provision of the same kind of food served to King Nebuchadnezzar himself. The pressure was on for these young men.

Yet Daniel refused to partake of this food. So again, what is your reaction to that? Do you find it a very little thing? Many do. You see Daniel's decision as the immaturity and foolishness of youth. Would you have acted as Daniel and his friends did in these circumstances or would you have gone along with your great benefactor's desires? Would you have said, "After all, why should we live by Jewish dietary laws while in Babylon? Let us eat and drink. It is just a little or it is just a small thing."

Well, it may seem like a small thing. Yet that is just the point because it is in the seemingly small matters that great spiritual victories are won. This is where decisions to live a holy life are initially made, not necessarily in the big things although big sins come when little things are neglected. Daniel had said, "I want to live for God in big ways, but I am not going to make a fool of myself by my master, my employer, or my teacher in the seemingly trivial matter of eating and drinking the king's food." Once he had said that, we would all be in much worse shape in not having his example in strengthening our faith.

But because he started out obedient and loyal to God in small things, God used him greatly. It is mostly in youth that the most significant and life-forming decisions are made. If you are a young person, then you should pay particular close attention to this point. Most young people want their lives to count, even more so than older people I think. We all do, but especially young people. And most Christian young people want their lives to count for God. Youth dreams big and that is mostly a good thing. So you should dream big. But youth is also often impatient and undisciplined, and young people are tempted to let the little things slide. You must not do that if you are God's young man or young woman. God will make your life count, but this will not happen unless you determine to live for Him in the little things now. And I remind you of what Jesus said in Luke 16 in verse 10: "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much, and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much." Do not forget those little things. Being holy, given over to God now, is the essential and best possible preparation for future service, joy, and long life.

Daniel is a story of the struggle of the world's people and Satan's culture against God's people and God's culture, but it is also a story of men who lived for God by choosing the path of personal faithfulness and holiness.

This is no contradiction because it is only those who actually embody the spiritual standards of the City of God who make any lasting positive difference in the world. Faithfulness and holiness is separation to God, devotion to God, service to God. It is being of one mind with God and wanting God's will.

Why is the kind of faithfulness and holiness exercised by Daniel so necessary? Well, let us look at seven reasons and seven scriptures to support them, and we will go through these fairly rapidly.

The first is, we must be holy because the voice of God and Scripture plainly command it. So here in I Peter 1, verses 14 through 16 says:

I Peter 1:14-15 As obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct...

That includes the little things.

I Peter 1:15 Because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

This is not optional; God did not say, "I would like you to live a holy life, but if you are not too excited about that particular lifestyle, do not worry about it. We will work on something else." That is not the way it works. He will definitely work on something else as well as this.

God said, "Be holy because I am holy," and we must be holy because the holy God commands it. The Ten Commandments are not suggestions, as we read on billboards, but it is a very strong truth.

The second is that we must be holy because this is the ultimate purpose for which Christ came into the world. It is all-encompassing in one sense. Now some may say, "But I thought Jesus came to save us from the penalty of our sins." Well, yes, He did come for that, but God's word also says in Ephesians 5, verses 25 through 27:

Ephesians 5:25-27 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she

should be holy and without blemish.

So many professing Christians think they would like the benefits of salvation without the obligation of living God's way of life for Christ, but they cannot have them because Christ came to make them holy, just as much as He came to save them from the penalty of their sins. If a person is fighting against holiness, he is fighting against nothing less than the purpose of God.

Three: We must be holy because this is the only sound evidence that we have a saving faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. How is this so? Well, James in his letter speaks of two kinds of faith—a living faith and a dead faith that saves no one. Satan and his demons have the deadest or deadliest of all faiths. They believe there is a God and that Jesus is His Son sent to save His people, but they do not submit to Him, are not loyal to Him, and do not live for Him. In fact, their whole purpose is to viciously hate Him.

A living faith does live for Him and therefore shows itself in good works. That is why James says, here in James 2 in verse 26:

James 2:26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

Now, of course, it is talking about good works. Consider this so-called deathbed conversions. In most, if not all, cases those conversions are illusory. There is rare expectation people on their death bed have the same character as they did during their lives up to that point. People do not change their whole character overnight. The only safe evidence that we are one with Christ and Christ is in us is a holy life. By their fruit you shall know them. We are known by our fruit by what we produce in our life. God's Spirit in us produces spiritual fruit. Faithfulness is one of the things that is produced. It is a living faith.

Fourth: We must be holy because this is the only proof that we love the Father and the Son in sincerity. Jesus was quite plain on this point. And we are going to read three separate verses.

John 14:15 If you love Me, keep My commandments.

John 14:21 He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who

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loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.

John 14:23 Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.

That is like saying He will take His people into His holy city. This is in no way a manipulative love. It is a reflection of God's love. I John 4 verse 19 says:

I John 4:19 We love Him because He first loved us.

How could the point be more clearly spoken? If you love God, you will obey Him, and you will be holy. If you do not obey Him, you do not love Him, whatever you claim.

Number Five: We must be holy because this is the only sound evidence that we are the children of God. All who are God's children are also heirs of His promise, but a willingness to follow Christ and suffering is another sign of being God's children. The Apostle Paul writes about this in Romans 8 verses 14 through 17.

Romans 8:14-17 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself [Jesus Christ] bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

The Spirit of God does not lead you to sin; the Spirit of God does not lead to disobedience. Now if you are led by God's Spirit, you will lead a holy life and the evidence of that holy life will be sound evidence that you are God's son or daughter.

The sixth is that we must be holy because this is the most effective and true way to do good to others. Many people today have some desire to do good to others and many social and benevolent programs are an expression of that praiseworthy desire. But many people of the world involved in the work of philanthropy are themselves immoral. So are they really doing a good work? Do they help others by advancing a low moral standard, one that is easy for them to live up to? Do they help others by whittling down

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and persecuting the righteous standards of God while replacing them with a new pop morality? Well, not at all.

You help others by upholding the highest possible standards, and above all, by living according to those standards yourself. Our faithful and righteous witness does make a difference. There are several places in the New Testament in which the Godly conduct of a believer is said to be the best hope of doing good to someone else. For instance, here in I Peter 3 verses 1 and 2, Peter writes:

I Peter 3:1-2 Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear.

In the long term, the righteous conduct of a spouse may win over the other spouse to try living God's way of life. Right-doing accompanied with a fear of God is a good witness to the unbeliever. No doubt, many, besides spouses, have been won over to Christ by the consistent holy behavior of a Christian. Many people come into the church as a result of the fine witness and example of someone they know who is a believer who is in the church.

The seventh and last one is that we must be holy because our present and future peace and joy depends much upon it. Not all suffering is directly related to a suffering person's sin. Christ's words about the man born blind in John 9, in verse 3, should correct us of attempts to make that an easy and one-on-one relationship, where we believe suffering is directly related to sin in every case. Although all suffering does not come directly from one sin, the reverse is true, however. All sin produces suffering and we do not think this way naturally. In fact, we often think just the opposite through human reasoning.

When we come up against one of God's commandments, we think that we would like to do something else and immediately assume that if only we could do what really wanted to do, we would be happy. That does not sound like a converted attitude at all, does it? But I know sometimes that will slip in to the human reasoning that we have. We think that we would be absolutely miserable being God; and we do not actually say it in these terms, but we sometimes act that way. I would say we have a serious problem if we do. That was Satan's argument in his temptation of Eve, but it is as diabolical now as it was then. To heed it is to forget from where our good comes. James 1 in verse 17 says:

James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes

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down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

If you want blessings, obey God. This is His way of life. If you want to be cursed, do the opposite. If we turn from this good, we do not turn to peace and joy, but away from it. The author of Hebrews wrote in Hebrews 12, in verse 14:

Hebrews 12:14 Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.

So if you are trying to live your life without trying to be holy, and trying to be righteous, trying to do the right thing, you will not see God. That is a direct statement inspired by God. It is a scary one; it is a terrifying one.

All right, let us begin to wrap this up. The objection that forms in some people's mind is that these points are all very well and good. But that is just not possible for you to live a holy life in your circumstance. The excuses go something like this: "If I did the right thing in my job, I would lose it" or "None of my friends would speak to me" or "I would never get a head." Another one: "I just cannot be holy. I have tried it and failed." If you are thinking this way, let us turn back to Daniel for a moment. Daniel 1 in verse 12.

Daniel 1:12-13 [Daniel said to the guards who had been appointed over him] Please test your servants for ten days...

Remember this is following his request that they eat only vegetables or a healthy diet.

Daniel 1:12-13 Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then let our appearance be examined before you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of the king's delicacies; and as you see fit, so deal with your servants [meaning us].

That took faith and it took a lot of it. It took absolute confidence in God that He was with them and that He would take care of them whether it would be to allow them to live or die. They were willing to accept God's will, whatever it was. The guard agreed to this test, and at the end of the ten days, the young men looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. Moreover, it was not only

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in their appearance that Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah excelled; they also excelled in knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. The text concludes by noting that at the end of the three years of training when the king brought his young protégés in for testing, what did he find? Daniel 1 in verse 20:

Daniel 1:20 And in all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all his realm.

God performed a miracle for them because of their faith and because He wanted to show His sovereignty above all others, and this begins, in one sense, a small way of God beginning to pronounce and show that He is sovereign over all.

So we have seen how Daniel describes how he and his three friends were taken into exile, into slavery, remained undefiled, and were promoted and preserved. The people of Judah could have interpreted their exile to Babylon as the end of their special relationship with God. But not only does the Book of Daniel show them that it is possible to be faithful to God even away from the Promised Land or even in exile, it also shows us that God has not abandoned His plan for the whole world. He controls all of history, even the direst conflicts, to bring His Messiah's rule to all nations.

The key theme for chapter 1 of Daniel is that it is possible to live a faithful life in exile surrounded by pagan influences and propaganda if we set our minds on serving God and Christ wholeheartedly. Though trials and difficulties will continue for the saints up until the end, those who are faithful will be raised to glory, honor, and everlasting life in God's Kingdom. So remember that scripture that we are all very familiar with and have memorized, in Matthew 6 in verse 33:

Matthew 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.