

## Courageously Being in the World but Not of It

Message 1 of 6 in the series: "Daniel: Living with Courage and Confidence"

### A. In 605 BC, God punished the people of Israel because they had turned their backs on Him, chosen to worship the false gods of the nations around them, and refused to repent.

"During the third year of King Jehoiakim's reign in Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. The LORD gave him victory over King Jehoiakim of Judah and permitted him to take some of the sacred objects from the Temple of God. So, Nebuchadnezzar took them back to the land of Babylonia and placed them in the treasure-house of his god. Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, his chief of staff, to bring to the palace some of the young men of Judah's royal family and other noble families, who had been brought to Babylon as captives." Daniel 1:1-3 (NLT) (2 Chronicles 36:5-7)

1. Before they ever entered the Promised Land, Moses reminded the Israelites that God had chosen them to be powerful witnesses for Him to the nations around them. "Look, I now teach you these decrees and regulations just as the Lord my God commanded me, so that you may obey them in the land you are about to enter and occupy. **Obey them completely, and you will display your wisdom and intelligence among the surrounding nations.** When they hear all these decrees, they will exclaim, 'How wise and prudent are the people of this great nation!' For what great nation has a god as near to them as the Lord our God is near to us whenever we call on him?" Deuteronomy 4:5-7 (NLT)
2. Moses also warned the Israelites of the terrible consequences they would face if they turned their backs on God and sought to fit in/get along with the people around them by worshiping their gods and adopting their values. "**But if you refuse to listen to the Lord your God** and do not obey all the commands and decrees I am giving you today... The Lord will exile you and your king to a nation unknown to you and your ancestors. **There in exile you will worship gods of wood and stone!** You will become an object of horror, ridicule, and mockery among all the nations to which the Lord sends you." Deuteronomy 28:15a & 36-37 (NLT)

**IMPORTANT:** God has strategically placed us to be powerful witnesses for Him to our culture. "I'm not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one. They do not belong to this world any more than I do. Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth. **Just as you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world.**" John 17:15-18 (NLT)

### B. Daniel is a powerful example of someone who lived out his faith with courage and confidence in a hostile culture.

1. The Babylonians were very strategic in how they assimilated the people they conquered into their culture. "**Select only strong, healthy, and good-looking young men,**" he said. "Make sure they are well versed in every branch of learning, are gifted with knowledge and good judgment, and are suited to serve in the royal palace. **Train these young men in the language and literature of Babylon.**" The king assigned them a daily ration of food and wine from his own kitchens. They were to be trained **for three years**, and then they would enter the royal service. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were four of the young men chosen, all from the tribe of Judah. The chief of staff renamed them with these Babylonian names: Daniel was called Belteshazzar. Hananiah was called Shadrach. Mishael was called Meshach. Azariah was called Abednego." Daniel 1:4-7 (NLT)

*Note:* The Babylonians harvested the best and brightest from every nation they conquered and assimilated them by totally immersing them in Babylonian culture. They isolated them from their families and their faith communities, fed them a Babylonian diet, educated/indoctrinated them in the language and literature of Babylon, gave them new identities, and installed them in the King's service.

**IMPORTANT:** The devil (the "prince of the power of the air" in Ephesians 2:2) is always working to assimilate us into worldly thinking by using every form of media to educate/indoctrinate us and immerse us in sinful temptations. His goal is to make us useless witnesses for Christ. "Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, **the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.** Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith." 1 Peter 5:8-9a (NLT)

2. Daniel courageously resolved to not defile himself with food that would cause him to violate the dietary laws God had given the Jewish people. (see Exodus 34:15, Leviticus 11 & 17:10-14) "But Daniel was determined not to defile himself by eating the food and wine given to them by the king. He asked the chief of staff for permission not to eat these unacceptable foods. Now **God had given the chief of staff both respect and affection for Daniel.** But he responded, 'I am afraid of my lord the king, who has

ordered that you eat this food and wine. If you become pale and thin compared to the other youths your age, I am afraid the king will have me beheaded.’ Daniel spoke with the attendant who had been appointed by the chief of staff to look after Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. **‘Please test us for ten days on a diet of vegetables and water,’** Daniel said. ‘At the end of the ten days, see how we look compared to the other young men who are eating the king’s food. **Then make your decision in light of what you see.’** The attendant agreed to Daniel’s suggestion and tested them for ten days. At the end of the ten days, Daniel and his three friends looked healthier and better nourished than the young men who had been eating the food assigned by the king. So after that, the attendant fed them only vegetables instead of the food and wine provided for the others.” Daniel 1:8-16 (NLT)

*Note:* God gave Nebuchadnezzar’s chief of staff respect and affection for Daniel because Daniel was seeking to faithfully and humbly obey God’s Word even while he had every excuse to compromise. **“When a man’s ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.”**

Proverbs 16:7 (NKJV)

*Note:* Daniel showed respect and kindness as he made his request. “A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but must be kind to everyone, be able to teach, and **be patient with difficult people. Gently instruct those who oppose the truth.** Perhaps God will change those people’s hearts, and they will learn the truth. Then they will come to their senses and escape from the devil’s trap. For they have been held captive by him to do whatever he wants.” 2 Timothy 2:24-26 (NLT)

**IMPORTANT:** We need to show respect and use wisdom and tact when we speak about our Christian convictions with unbelieving friends and neighbors. “Live wisely among those who are not believers and make the most of every opportunity. **Let your conversation be gracious and attractive** so that you will have the right response for everyone.” Colossians 4:5-6 (NLT)

3. God rewarded the faithfulness of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah by elevating them to high positions of leadership in Babylon where they would become powerful witnesses for Him.

“God gave these four young men an unusual aptitude for understanding every aspect of literature and wisdom. And God gave Daniel the special ability to interpret the meanings of visions and dreams. When the training period ordered by the king was completed, the chief of staff brought all the young men to King Nebuchadnezzar. The king talked with them, and no one impressed him as much as Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. So they entered the royal service. **Whenever the king consulted them in any matter requiring wisdom and balanced judgment, he found them ten times more capable** than any of the magicians and enchanters in his entire kingdom.” Daniel 1:17-20 (NLT)

**IMPORTANT!** We can be confident that the Lord will protect/rescue/reward us if we seek to faithfully serve as His witnesses wherever He places us. **“To the faithful you show yourself faithful; to those with integrity you show integrity.** To the pure you show yourself pure, but to the crooked you show yourself shrewd. **You rescue the humble,** but you humiliate the proud.” Psalm 18:25-27 (NLT)

*Note:* Daniel remained a faithful servant of the Lord his entire life. “Daniel remained in the royal service **until the first year of the reign of King Cyrus.**” Daniel 1:21 (NLT) (536 BC)

**VERY IMPORTANT!** We can resolve to be God-pleasers rather than people-pleasers in 2025. “Obviously, **I’m not trying to win the approval of people, but of God.** If pleasing people were my goal, I would not be Christ’s servant.” Galatians 1:10 (NLT)

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### Connect Group Discussion Questions:

1. Read Daniel 1:1-3 & Jeremiah 25:1-14. Why did God allow the Babylonians to destroy Jerusalem and take godly people like Daniel captive?
2. What methods did the Babylonians use to assimilate Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah into their culture? (Daniel 1:4-7) What methods does the devil use to assimilate us into the world’s ways of thinking? (Ephesians 2:1-4, Romans 12:2, Hebrews 10:25)
3. Why do you think Daniel resolved to not eat food that would make him violate OT food restrictions when he had every excuse to compromise and fit-in? (Daniel 1:8-16) What excuses do we use to fit-in with our culture even when we know God’s Word tells us not to do so?

4. Discuss how we might apply Daniel's strategy for requesting a special diet in our relationships with unbelievers. a. Daniel showed respect and kindness as he made his request. (2 Timothy 2:24-26, Colossians 4:5-6) b. Daniel confidently trusted the Lord to give him favor and protection as he sought to be faithful wherever God placed him. (Psalm 18:25-27, Proverbs 16:7)
5. What does it mean for Christians to be in the world but not of it? (John 17:15-18, Philippians 2:13-15) Why is this important? (Matthew 5:13-16)
6. What's the difference between a God-pleaser and a people pleaser? (Galatians 1:10) Why can't we be both?
7. How does it make you feel to know that there is a lot of reliable archaeological and historical evidence outside the Bible that corroborates the details in the OT book of Daniel?