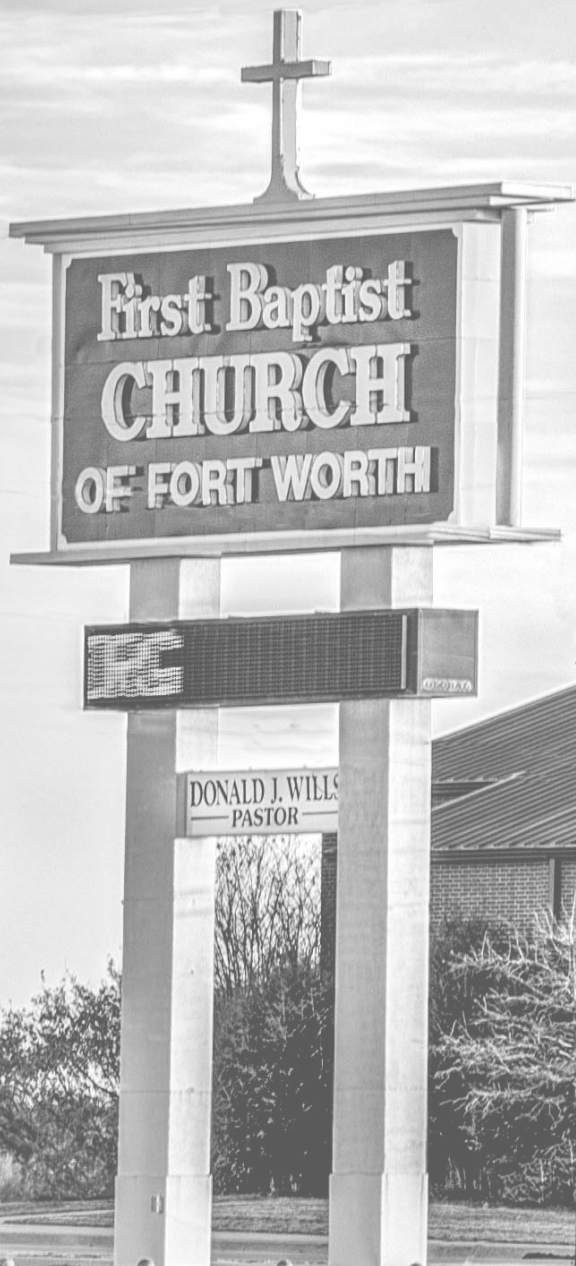
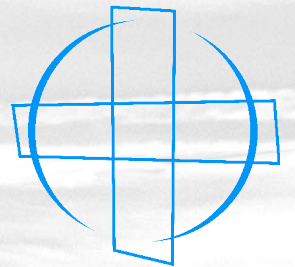


JULY  
2024

Donald J. Wills  
*Senior Pastor*

# CONQUER



The purpose of First Baptist Church of Fort Worth is to **introduce** people into a loving relationship with Jesus, **instruct** them in spiritual growth through God's Word, **inspire** them to serve for God's kingdom, and **incorporate** them in authentic worship to glorify God.

## A Note From Our Pastor

There is a saying, “Conquer or be Conquered.” Certainly, the enemy throws many challenging events at us in life to which we could succumb if it were not for our faith in Whom we have believed. Paul put it this way in 2 Corinthians 4:8: “We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.” The pre-text to this statement is that there is a treasure in these earthen vessels that we reside in; that treasure is the indwelling power of God. Through His power at work in us, we are His dwelling presence and, no matter what life may hold for us, we are not destroyed. We are not conquered by the enemy, but we are “more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (Rom 8:37).

As a reminder, the layout of this Curriculum begins with a 7-day approach for both the teacher and the members to get the most from each study. We also acknowledge that teachers may have their own methods for preparing the lessons and we encourage them to prepare in the way that makes them most effective in presenting God’s Word and the weekly lesson. We also encourage each teacher and member to use the suggested 7-day approach for their own personal study and encouragement.

As we dive into this study of Daniel, we find that he was faced with all types of adversity. Yet, through it all, he remained faithful and committed to his faith in God. He believed at every challenge God is faithful and will see him through. Our comfort is in knowing He will do the same for us and that we are truly more than conquerors.

Blessings,

Pastor Don Wills



## *Suggested Plan for Using this Bible Study Guide Effectively*

### *Introduce*

**Day 1:** Read and meditate on the Scripture, asking God to guide you throughout the week as you study His Word and allowing Him to speak to you through the Spirit. Read the **INTRODUCE** portion of the lesson commentary.

### *Instruct*

**Day 2:** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and read the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary. Concentrate on memorizing the focal verse for that particular week.

**Day 3:** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and answer the focal questions in the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary.

### *Inspire*

**Day 4:** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and begin thinking about tangible ways you can incorporate the principles you learned into your daily life. Read the **INSPIRE** portion of the lesson commentary.

### *Incorporate*

**Day 5:** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and apply the theological principle that you learned from this week in a tangible way. Use the **INCORPORATE** portion of the lesson commentary to guide you.

**Day 6:** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and in the journal section describe how God allowed you to apply this passage in a real and tangible way this week.

**Day 7:** Review the Scripture and share with others in your Connect Class on Sunday morning at 9:30 am. Be ready to share your experience about how God allowed you to apply the lesson for that week.

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# *Conquering Compromise*

## *Daniel 1:1-21*

Focal Verse:

“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 1:8

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## Introduce

When cooking, most of us follow a recipe—whether one handed down by our families through the generations, obtained from a trusted cookbook, found on the internet via a quick search, or disseminated through social media. If we follow the recipe explicitly without any deviation or error whatsoever, the product will taste exactly as designed by the chef. If, on the other hand, we begin to improvise and change even one of the ingredients, it will drastically alter the taste! And usually, these alterations do not turn out well in the end!

On one of those cold, wintery nights in January or February that seem so distant in the now-scorching Texas heat, suppose you begin craving some delectable tortilla soup. Not really having a recipe, you peruse the internet and find one that sounds good for the palate. With your laptop perched on your kitchen island, you go to the pantry, refrigerator, and freezer to begin assembling the items on the ingredient list. To your disappointment however, you don't have some of the items! So, what do you do? You don't want to leave the comfort of your home to trek to the store in the early evening. You could just make another dish for dinner, but you really had your heart and taste buds set on this particular one!



So, an idea pops into your head. You think, “I’ll compromise. I’ll use substitutes.” Since you’ve chosen something close to the original ingredients, you think it should still taste the same. The recipe calls for yellow squash, but you only have green zucchini squash. “Close enough,” you say to yourself as you fetch it from the drawer in the refrigerator. After pulling out the other items on the list, you see that you need a red bell pepper, but only find two small jalapenos instead. You then lay them to the side along with all the other ingredients. Having assembled everything you thought you would need, you realize that you don't have the fresh sprig of cilantro for which the recipe called. Even so, you still decide to make the tortilla soup.

You cut, dice, and add all the ingredients into a pot and begin to slow-cook it.

## Introduce

While waiting for what seems an eternity, you excitedly anticipate tasting the product for which you had labored so long and improvised so much in order to make it happen. You expect it to taste delicious! After all, you had followed the recipe “almost” exactly, only substituting or omitting a couple of the ingredients here or there. With steam billowing from the spoon, you slowly put it to your lips to let the first wave of flavor penetrate your taste buds. But instead of sending a feeling of elation and enjoyment from its savory flavor profile, it causes your lips to pucker and your eyes to water. “What went wrong,” you wonder? Continuing to ruminate on the disaster, you think, “Altering a few ingredients couldn’t have produced such drastic results. A little compromise in the kitchen doesn’t hurt anything.”

Like a dish gone awry because the cook didn’t follow the recipe, moral compromise in life—even a little—produces drastic results. In Scripture, God has given us a specific plan to follow. And He wants us to follow it exactly! To run the race of life successfully, we cannot deviate from that plan at all! Having been exiled to Babylon and under intense pressure by the culture to reject God’s way and follow what seemed right to man, Daniel and his friends stuck tenaciously to God’s plan. They refused to compromise and even made a wager with the king’s court to see whose plan worked best. In the end, Daniel and his friends proved God’s plan is always the best. Therefore, may we follow God’s plan specifically as His people, refusing to compromise and bow down to the culture, so that we might honor Him and live successfully according to His will.

Key  
Question

Even in small ways that we might not even think noticeable, how have some in the church compromised with our culture today?



## Daniel 1:1-2

### THE SACKING OF THE CITY:

During **the third year of King** Jehoiakim's **reign** (605 BC), Babylon sought to expand its territory westward which meant an inevitable conflict with the world's only other superpower at the time—Egypt. Because of its fertile ground, the key trade routes which passed through it, and its strategic location, Judah became the coveted prize for both nations who battled to seize control. Prior to becoming **king**, Nebuchadnezzar served as a brilliant military commander, defeating Pharaoh Neco II and the Egyptians in the Battle of Carchemish ([Jer 46:2](#)). Turning his attention to Judah, he then waged war against **Jerusalem**, hoping to overthrow **Jehoiakim** who was loyal to Neco II because he had appointed him as king (v. 1). During this time, Nebuchadnezzar's father died, propelling him into the kingship, but undaunted in his military conquest he continued his campaign against Judah and **Jerusalem** in order to subjugate the nation.

In 604 BC, God **gave Jehoiakim** and **Judah into** Nebuchadnezzar's **hand** (v. 2). After sacking the city, he plundered the temple, taking some of the valuable **articles** used in worship to **Shinar** or Babylon (see [Isa 11:11](#); [Zech 5:11](#)). Not only enriching himself from the spoils of war, but also as a sign of the "superiority" of **his god**, Marduk, over the Lord, Nebuchadnezzar added these holy **articles** to the treasury of his own temple. This defiant action didn't escape Daniel's notice, for he reinforced the idea of the Lord's sovereignty by noting that God **gave** Nebuchadnezzar victory. God allowed the city to fall; Nebuchadnezzar didn't just come and take it! For nearly a century, God had sent prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah to warn **Judah** to repent and return to Him or face the harsh reality of judgment. But they obstinately refused. So, they suffered the penalty by their own choice and watched the demise of their nation at the hands of the Babylonians. Just as God promised in Isaiah 39:6-7, the Babylonians utterly destroyed the nation and took many people captive, which included Daniel and his three friends, exiling them in their capital.

Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,' says the LORD. And they shall take away some of your sons who will descend from you, whom you will beget; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.

Isaiah 39:6-7

### Daniel 1:3-5

#### THE SUBJUGATION OF THE YOUTH:

King Nebuchadnezzar wanted to integrate these captives from Israel fully into Babylonian life as a means to control them, so he instructed **Ashpenaz** to **bring some of the children of Israel** to receive specialized training (v. 3). The text identifies **Ashpenaz** as **the master** of the king's **eunuchs**. **Eunuchs**, in this case, refers to any official appointed to serve the king, but not specifically to an impotent man. Today, we would liken **Ashpenaz** to a "chief of staff" who oversees the king's affairs. In verse 4, Nebuchadnezzar specifies exactly who among the **children of Israel** he wants chosen. The word **young men** there refers to youth in their early teens, particularly around fourteen. As such, Nebuchadnezzar sought **young**, impressionable **men** from among the captives because he believed that he would have a much easier time indoctrinating them into the Babylonian culture. In other words, he hoped to influence them before they became older and more set in their ways.

Today, our culture operates in this exact same way. It tries to indoctrinate children at a young, impressionable age to follow the pattern of thinking it sets forth as right. In our culture, such indoctrination may include elements of sexual perversion, challenging substantiated biological/scientific facts, promoting the inherent "evil" of our country and its institutions, or advocating principles of socialism and communism which inevitably lead to humanism and the denial of God's existence. This indoctrination may appear subtle at times, but it has become pervasive in almost every facet of society: traditional media (tv and movies), social media, sports, advertisements, government programs, and even in the classroom where some have exchanged the core building-blocks of education for the promotion of social constructs! No one can escape this attempt to indoctrinate our minds and influence our behavior because it inundates every aspect of our world!

Question  
# 1

In what specific ways do you see the indoctrination of children and youth in our culture today?

We are in a battle with culture for the minds of the youth—and really anyone for that matter! As believers, we cannot ignore this battle by becoming indifferent or

tolerant. We must start early in teaching our **children** the foundational principles by which God has commanded us to live in Scripture. We cannot wait to start teaching them because society starts even earlier, attempting to influence them through children's programming, cartoons, movies, and pre-school curriculum. If we naively wait, we will find ourselves at a major disadvantage because the culture will have a tremendous head start which will prove difficult to overcome.



Moreover, we cannot rely on others to train our **children** for us. God has assigned the responsibility for educating and training **children** to their nuclear families ([Deut 6:6-9](#); [Prov 22:6](#); [Eph 6:4](#)). Even though the church can help supplement this training (Titus 2:1-8), the responsibility still primarily falls to the parents! To be effective in our training, we must practice what we preach. We must guard our own hearts and minds from corrupt cultural practices and set an example for our **children**. Therefore, we must teach them both verbally by communicating the principles from God's Word and visually by following those same principles ourselves. As we will see through Daniel's commitment to the Lord, it appears that his family had begun teaching him the joy of serving God at a young age—well before he even became a teenager—for he stood firm on his godly principles in the face of great pressure to compromise his faith in a foreign land surrounded by complete strangers.

Question  
# 2

In what specific ways should you start teaching children at a young age in order to battle the indoctrination of the culture?

Nebuchadnezzar had specific requirements for the **young men** who should be selected for this pilot program. They should be **descendants** from the king or those of other nobility (v. 3). Perhaps, Nebuchadnezzar thought that the descendants of the wealthy, ruling class would wield more influence over the rest of the captives in exile

## Instruct

from Israel. If he could assimilate the aristocratic class into Babylonian culture, the others would simply follow their lead. This tactic would be no different than using a celebrity or athlete to promote a platform in order to influence people. Advertisers, activists, and politicians all use celebrities to peddle their products or push their agenda because they appeal to people and can easily sway their thinking.

Furthermore, we even have a large group of people specifically designated as “influencers” today. Their sole job is to motivate people to think and act in a particular way. Usually, these people display extraordinary physical beauty, exceptional strength or athleticism, contagious charisma, and sometimes tremendous



intelligence. People idolize them. Their outgoing personalities, outward physical attractiveness, and popularity appeal to people, causing them to follow almost without question. Notice that the requirements Nebuchadnezzar establishes in verse 4 fit this same pattern. First, these **young men** should be physically attractive which the text specifies as without **blemish** and **good-looking**. Taken together with **good-looking** or handsome, without **blemish** indicates that they had no physical defects; in other words, they were healthy, virile **young men**.

Second, they should also be intelligent which the text describes as **gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge**, and quick to understand. Nebuchadnezzar wanted individuals who could retain information and learn quickly so that he could teach them **the language** and **literature** of the Babylonians (**Chaldeans**) in hopes of employing them in his administration—further giving them the impetus to assimilate to the Babylonian culture. Yet, **the king** didn't actually want **young men** who would think for themselves independently, but rather some who could be pressured and bribed into adopting the Babylonian way of life. He wanted **young men** who would willingly compromise their beliefs and forego their allegiance to the Lord when showered with privilege, power, and possessions.

Nebuchadnezzar doesn't hide his intentions. He allocates the best resources his

kingdom has to offer in hopes of winning the loyalty of these **young men**. He specifically gives them the best food and drink—that which he himself consumes—so that at the end of their **three years of training** they **might serve** in his administration (v. 5). If they would only compromise their faith and accept the Babylonian way of life, these **young men** could have had it all! They would live in the lap of luxury in the king’s palace without fear, they would have a lavish lifestyle of all the best things in life without experiencing need or poverty, and they would have a position of power in the government. They had every reason to adopt this secular culture and follow the king’s demands, but they still refused!



Our culture constantly pressures us to compromise our faith rather than stand firm on the truth of God. It attempts to bribe us in the very same way as Daniel and his friends through the illusion of power, privilege, wealth, and success if only we would follow its ways. Culture ties our success to becoming part of a group with all the right connections.

To become part of such a group, we must adopt its values and adhere to its practices. Inevitably, however, we don’t merely “tolerate” the things that these groups practice; we begin to participate in them ourselves! If we don’t, then we risk being left behind and left out. At its worst, culture can ruin us, threatening to “cancel” us if we reject its views and seek to live according to God’s absolute truth. We risk losing everything in life: relationships, opportunities, income, and the like. Following God can leave us alone and vulnerable in the world just like it did Daniel.

Perhaps, we can see this principle most clearly illustrated in college students vying for entry into a fraternity or sorority. While not all these institutions have sordid reputations, many do. They require extreme hazing and are well-known for their scandalous debauchery. Students who join these organizations don’t just verbally give consent to what goes on. On the contrary, they join in the fray! But this type of thinking

## Instruct

thinking and acting doesn't just surface during college as young people experiment. It is truly a way of life that governs every part of the world.

The world always pressures us to conform to its ways. This occurs in any secular business, institution, organization, social group, or extracurricular activity! In business, for example, many tolerate and even engage in shady practices accepted as standard in the industry—such as “hidden” or “junk” fees. It doesn't make it right or justify one's participation just because everyone does it and no one challenges it. Yet, such practices pervade our world in every area. People merely go along with them, remain silent about them, and participate willingly in them as long as it is beneficial to their own personal advancement.



Question  
# 3

In what ways specifically does culture pressure us to conform to its views?

## Daniel 1:6-8

### **THE STEADFASTNESS OF DANIEL:**

For the first time, the text identifies the four young Hebrews by name who exhibited exemplary courage to stand on the principles God had established. In addition to **Daniel**, whose name aptly means “God is my judge,” we find **Hananiah** (“the Lord is gracious”), **Mishael** (“who is what God is?”), and **Azariah** (“the Lord will help”). Ironically, however, we don't know them by these names which praise the one and true living God—Yahweh; we more frequently refer to them by their Babylonian names which praise their false gods: **Shadrach**, **Meshach**, and **Abed-Nego** (v. 7). In addition to these three young men, Daniel also had his name changed to **Belteshazzar**. Although all these names have a somewhat illusive origin, they still all draw attention to the false gods served in Babylon. **Belteshazzar**, for instance, means something akin to “may the god Bel protect him.” **Shadrach** likely refers to the moon god Aku (“the command

of Aku”), **Meshach** is similar to his Hebrew name (“who is what Aku is?”), and **Abed-Nego** means something like “servant of the god Nebo.”

To this point, none of these Hebrew **young men** had vocally objected to learning about Babylonian culture or even to receiving different names. But now Daniel took issue with the requirements when they directly conflicted with God’s commands and required that he compromise his faith. So, he **purposed**, or determined, **in his heart that he would not defile himself** by eating from the king’s rations (v. 8). Therefore, he politely asked Ashpenaz to excuse him from participating in this part of the program. Likely, Daniel perceived that **the king’s** food and drink would **defile** him in one of two ways: 1) he would eat prohibited meat, such as pork (see [Lev 11:3-8](#)) or the meat would have been prepared incorrectly, such as with the blood still in it (see [Lev 19:26](#)) or 2) the food and drink would have been used in pagan religious rituals which would bring dishonor to the only true and living God, Yahweh (see [1 Cor 10:23-33](#)).



In either case, Daniel knew that God had called His people to distinguish themselves from the world so that they might point the world to a relationship with Him.

We can learn two valuable lessons from the way in which Daniel handled this situation and his steadfast refusal to compromise. First, it didn’t catch Daniel off guard. He had a plan about what he would do when faced with a situation that required compromise. He already knew what God expected of him through Scripture, so he determined beforehand how he would respond in faith. He certainly had every reason to compromise and go along with the crowd so he could live a privileged, trouble-free life in Babylon. But he had already resolved in his heart to follow God which allowed him to resist the temptation. Therefore, Daniel acted with intention. He didn’t let the promise of privilege, power, and position distract him in his pursuit of the Lord!

In 2012, the National Park Service adopted the slogan “know before you go” in an attempt to curtail wildfires during a particularly dry year in the Teton wilderness of

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Wyoming.\* This slogan emphasized the personal responsibility of each visitor to know the current fire restrictions and proper fire etiquette before lighting that first campfire. Visitors need to have both a knowledge of the regulations and a practical plan in place to recreate responsibly, ensuring they don't engage in potentially destructive and life-threatening actions. The same proves true for us as believers. We need to "know before we go." Before we ever find ourselves in a tempting situation, we need to know what God has said in Scripture and have plan in place to abide by it. We have no excuse for putting ourselves into destructive, life-threatening situations (i.e., sin). We know temptation will come. We know that the world will pressure us to compromise our faith. So, we must decide now what we will do. We must be prepared to act!

Question  
# 4

How have you prepared yourself to face the pressure of this world to compromise?

## In Reference



*\*Traci Weaver, "Know before You Go' Campaign Spreads like Wildfire," available from [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov) (accessed April 9, 2024).*

Second, Daniel didn't remain silent for fear of retribution or cancelation, but he spoke the truth respectfully. Daniel didn't demand, but politely **requested** that he be allowed to continue to follow the diet of his own conviction (v. 8). He didn't complain. He didn't hurl insults or resort to personal attacks. He didn't disparage the quality of the **king's food**. Rather, he respectfully addressed Ashpenaz and proposed an alternative solution. Today, people generally respond in one of two ways. Some will remain silent and say nothing. They don't see any harm in going along with the crowd or even abstaining, but allowing the crowd to do what it wants. They will participate to please people and refuse to speak to avoid any conflict. Others,





however, will attack, criticize, complain, and insult those with differing views. They try to brow-beat them into submission. God has called us to do neither. God has called us to speak out vocally, but to do so with tact. After all, our goal is not to repel people, but to show them God's way is best. We can't accomplish this if we don't say anything at all or if we verbally brow-beat people and turn them off!

Question  
# 5

When have you had to use tact in order to extricate yourself from a situation that sought to compromise your faith?

## Daniel 1:9-14

### THE SEPARATION FROM THE CULTURE:

As the narrative advances, we find **God** firmly in control of the situation. Although Ashpenaz respected Daniel and his three friends, it was **God** Himself who **brought** him **into the favor and goodwill** of this chief of staff. Daniel didn't have any special ability to persuade or influence culture, he simply resolved not to compromise his faith and God took care of the rest. We must remember that even in the darkest, most-difficult times God is still in control. Even if we cannot readily see Him at work in that moment or see how the situation may turn out, we still need to trust Him. Daniel had no way of knowing how Ashpenaz or the king would respond to his request. Yet, he trusted God even if things took a turn for the worse!


Ashpenaz does object to Daniel's request because he fears **the king** (v. 10). Since **the king** was providing the best **food** in the kingdom, Ashpenaz surmises that their special diet of **vegetables** would compromise their health (i.e., their **faces looking worse than young men of their age**) and derail the program. Not only would it jeopardize Daniel's life, but it would also endanger Ashpenaz because Nebuchadnezzar has put him in charge of overseeing this program. Once again, Daniel politely challenges Ashpenaz's objections, countering it with a proposal of his own. He urges the chief of staff to run a **test for ten days**, letting them **eat vegetables** and **drink water** only (v. 12). While Scripture does allow for the consumption of some types of meats, the text doesn't provide any reason why Daniel asks **to eat only vegetables**. And it's really useless to speculate why. Nonetheless, Daniel proposes that Ashpenaz then evaluate their **appearance** after **ten days** in comparison with those **who ate from**

**the king's** rations (v. 13). At that time, he could then judge for himself the results and do with Daniel **as** he sees **fit**—to which Ashpenaz agrees (v. 14).

Question  
# 6

In what ways specifically has God called us to set ourselves apart from our culture?

We need to follow Daniel's example by countering cultural objections to our refusal to compromise with a challenge of our own. Rather than simply refuse to comply with its demands, we need to counter with a proposal that points to Christ. If they have an objection, we must have a solution! This is all part of the planning which we talked about in the previous section. We must always be ready to give a response ([1 Peter 3:15](#)). We must let others see Christ working in us, so they can see the benefit for themselves. When they see the benefit of Christ working in us, then we can encourage them to try it for themselves. Thus, we can join the psalmist in saying, "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good: Blessed is the man who trusts in Him" ([Psalm 34:8](#)). To do this, we must be prepared to counter the world's objections by boldly displaying godly transformation in the way we live.



Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good;  
Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!  
Psalm 34:8

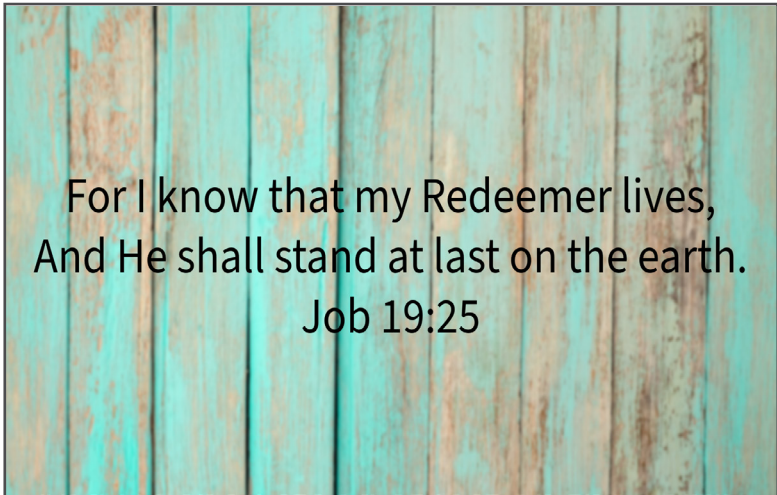
Although Ashpenaz responded favorably to the request, Daniel also had to prepare for the possibility that he could have rejected it. Likewise, we must prepare ourselves for the possibility that society may not relent in its pressure against us. If society doesn't relent and even begins to persecute us, we must still do what is right regardless of what may happen. As we will see in future lessons, Daniel (the lion's den) and his friends (the fiery furnace) resolved to do what was right no matter what might happen to them. They refused to compromise even if it meant risking their lives to follow God. Therefore, our response to any situation should never be based upon whether or not God will deliver us immediately from troubles or trials. Our response should always be based on our desire to serve God in righteousness because He has faithfully promised to give eternal life to those who have trusted His Son.

Therefore, we must prepare ourselves to face the consequences of our actions if we choose to defy the way of this world. Such consequences could entail fines imposed or expulsion from school for refusing to refer to someone by their “chosen” pronouns, being imprisoned for hate speech for calling homosexuality a sin, being fired for speaking out against obvious bias in the workplace, being fined or arrested for sharing the gospel on a public street, being arrested for praying outside an abortion clinic, or being black-listed for affirming Jesus is the only way to have eternal life. While in most cases Christians have not yet been martyred to the point of death in the United States for their faith, all these other consequences and penalties have increasingly begun to occur in our own country! Have you decided what you will do if faced with such a challenge? Have you thought about how you would respond? Do you have a plan?

Question  
# 7

How do you specifically see persecution on the rise in our own country for those who stand on the absolute truth of Scripture?

At times, God may choose to deliver us from such circumstances—giving us **favor** and **goodwill** with the world like He did Daniel. At other times, He may allow us to go through great tribulation and turmoil, using the battle to strengthen our faith and bring glory to Himself so others might see Him at work through us—just like He also did with Daniel and his friends. Still, at other times, following the Lord may require our lives—for many throughout Scripture died for their faith. We must stand strong in our faith, knowing that God is sovereign and He will vindicate us whether here on earth or when we get to heaven. If we have trusted in Christ, no matter what happens to us on this earth our outcome is certain; our victory has already been won. We must never compromise our faith. We must use every opportunity that God affords us to stand firm, display our faith in Him, and show the world that His way is always best! We cannot accomplish these things if we choose to compromise even in the least.



For I know that my Redeemer lives,  
And He shall stand at last on the earth.  
Job 19:25

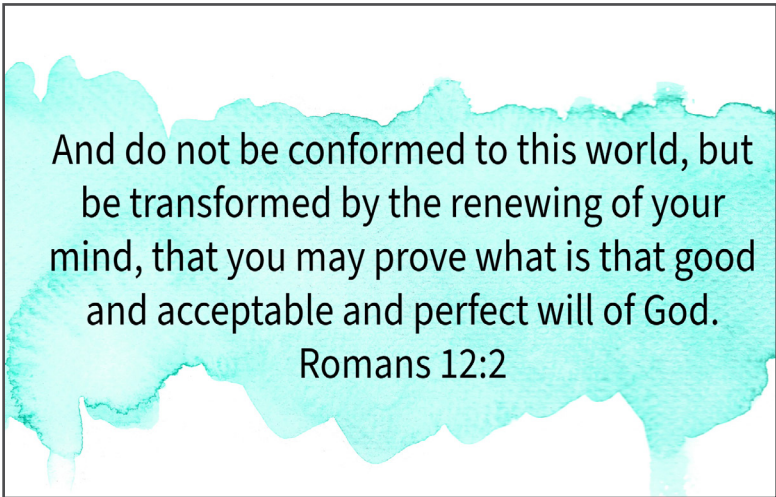
### Daniel 1:15-21

#### **THE SUCCESS OF THEIR OBEDIENCE:**

After the **ten**-day trial period for their diet concluded, the four **young men** looked healthier (literally **better**) and more well-nourished (literally **fatter in the flesh**) than any of the others who had eaten the royal rations (v. 15). As a result, Ashpenaz no longer sought to require them to **eat** from **the king's** food, but allowed them to continue their special diet of **vegetables** and **water** (v. 16). But the blessing of their success didn't stop with their diet, God rewarded them with **knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom** (v. 17). To Daniel specifically, God gave the ability to **understand** or interpret **all visions** and **dreams**. Because He had found these young men faithful in the small things, He now entrusted them with more responsibility (see [Luke 16:10-13](#)).

After the completion of the three-year training period (see [Dan 1:5](#)), **the king brought in** all those who had participated in the program for review (v. 18). While speaking with them, four **young men** particularly stood out from the rest: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (v. 19). As a result, Nebuchadnezzar immediately promoted them to positions of service in his administration, **for none** could match their skill. In fact, **the king found them ten times better in all matters of wisdom and understanding** than anyone currently serving in his kingdom (v. 20).

What can we learn from Daniel and his friends' experience? God will certainly bless us for our faithful service to Him. Although He may not always reward us with tangible possessions or positions of authority like He did with these **young men**, God will always grant us the **wisdom** and **understanding** we need to operate in this world successfully. Therefore, we must use those blessings which God has graciously given us for His honor and glory to demonstrate His transformative power to the world around us. Others should visibly see a difference in us when compared to those who follow the course of the world.



And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Romans 12:2

But, for our situation, I think there is an even more poignant point which we must take away. Sometimes we allow the potential of blessing and our pursuit of being blessed to overshadow the main principle that God wants us to apply in our own lives. Herein lies the point of the entire lesson: We must remain faithful in everything—even the things which may seem insignificant in life. If Daniel would have compromised his faith in this little matter of diet which seems so insignificant to us, it would have been much more difficult to remain faithful on much weightier matters. Had Daniel compromised on just this one issue, it would have made it much easier to compromise on others in the future. We can only conquer compromise by remaining faithful in every area. We cannot pick and choose. We cannot compromise even in one or two areas and expect to be successful in the way that God intends. We must serve Him devotedly in everything—both the big and the little!

Question  
# 8

On what areas do you find it easiest to compromise? How could any compromise in those areas lead to compromise elsewhere?

## *Inspire*

From personal experience, I can tell you that substituting any ingredient in a recipe for tortilla soup doesn't work well. It turns into a disaster. And the same can be said for any moral compromise—even a little compromise turns into a great disaster. God has called us to follow His righteous plan and holy pattern without deviation or compromise. We cannot flirt with the world and hope for success. This is a recipe for disaster! After all, James reminds us, "Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" ([Jas 4:4](#)). To live as God intended, we must conquer compromise in any shape or form and conduct ourselves faithfully according to His Word.

## *Incorporate*

At what times in life have you been faced with the challenge to compromise? How did you respond?

What are some little or insignificant things on which people find it easy to compromise today? How does this affect our ability to remain faithful in the seemingly bigger or more significant areas?

Because we all fail at times, in what areas have you compromised in the past? How did you overcome that compromise to serve Jesus? If you haven't, what steps should you take to get back on track?

## ***Journal: Document God's Work***

*July 14, 2024*



# *Conquering With Counsel*

## *Daniel 2:1-45*

Focal Verse:

“I thank You and praise You, O God of my fathers; You have given me wisdom and might, and have now made known to me what we asked of You, for You have made known to us the king’s demand.”

Daniel 2:23

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## Introduce

Before the advent of personal assistants on “smart” phones or other common household devices which have been programmed to “answer” a variety of questions, we had the Magic Eight Ball.

Designed in the shape of a number eight billiard ball, one side was flat with a tiny display that flashed answers to questions posed, supposedly foretelling the “future.” Popularized in the 70s and 80s, companies particularly marketed this novelty to children. They would ask the device a question, shake it, and then wait



a few seconds for an answer to pop up on the display. It could respond with several different variations of phrases that basically indicted yes, no, or maybe/unclear. For example, it might say something like, “It is certain” or “Outlook not so good.” At other times, it might reply, “Cannot predict now” or “Ask again later.”

As children, we would always try to manipulate the answers this toy gave. We didn’t really have control over the ones it generated, but we would keep asking the same question repeatedly until we got the answer we wanted. When we did, we became elated. We began pointing to the device and begging our friends to look at the response it gave even though it occurred only by chance. However, almost every child old enough to use it recognized that it was a toy for entertainment purposes only. With the exception of perhaps a few, no one took any of its answers seriously despite asking it some weighty, life-changing questions!

Other than the engineering and science behind the mechanical construction of the physical device, it had no actual intelligence. It simply spouted random, pre-programmed, and pre-determined answers based upon the logic given in its computer coding. For this reason, the answer stated may or may not even make sense regarding the question. Today’s computers may contain “artificial intelligence” that can “think,” respond, and act in certain ways, but even so it has its own limitations. No matter how much technology may advance, it will never truly be able to solve abstract, real-life problems.

## Introduce

In Daniel 2, King Nebuchadnezzar summoned all the astrologers and magicians in his kingdom to interpret a troubling dream he had. The Chaldeans thus spoke confidently reassuring the king that they could give a satisfactory answer. But they couldn't. Both the king and the Chaldeans sought information from the wrong source. Like the Magic Eight Ball, the inanimate "sources" they invoked and the methods of divination they employed had no intelligence behind them. Metaphorically, they got the answer, "Cannot predict now," because their source could not give a definitive answer!

Daniel, on the other hand, did not consult a "magic" book which contained symbols and incantations designed to foretell the future or seek counsel from an inanimate object which had no ability whatsoever to answer. On the contrary, he sought counsel from the right place: the Lord. If we trust in wisdom or counsel from any other source, whether artificial intelligence, human logic, or the so-called "spiritual" divinations still used today, we have trusted in the wrong source. God alone is infallible. He never makes a mistake! Only He can give us sage advice that directs our paths rightly. May we always trust in Him and in nothing else. May we always seek counsel from Him first rather than as a last resort after we have tried every other option.

Key  
Question

In what ways has God provide wisdom and counsel for us today?

## Daniel 2:1-4

### THE CORRUPT COUNSEL OF THE WORLD:

During the **second year of his reign** (603-602 BC), Nebuchadnezzar had a very disturbing dream which **troubled** him to the point of losing **sleep** (v. 1). Although plural, the word **dreams** in this verse refers to a single episode rather than multiple events, for the king only seeks the interpretation of one specific dream. When we wish someone “sweet dreams,” for example, we desire that they have a peaceful state of rest—not literally multiple **dreams**. The same principle applies to Nebuchadnezzar here. He has had one particularly troubling dream which has gripped him with fear and paranoia so much that he could not **sleep**. Daniel thus captures the magnitude of the king’s fear through the phrase **his spirit was so troubled**. The word translated **troubled** literally means to strike with a hammer. Today, we’d use the common expression “gut punch” to describe how shocking and upsetting this dream truly was!

If you’ve ever experienced such an unsettling dream, you can probably identify with the king. Such vivid **dreams** cause us to awaken suddenly in the middle of the night with our hearts racing and breathing labored as if we’ve run a one-hundred-yard dash. Our muscles normally relaxed in sleep have become stiff with tension and anxiety. Because the terror from the dream felt so real, we have difficulty returning to sleep. We lie in our bed wide-awake, trying to make sense of it all. We don’t forget a single detail because the dream is vividly seared into our memories. In the morning after such a sleepless night, we most likely tell the dream to others—subconsciously hoping that they might help us process it.



Question  
# 1

What kinds of things cause you to lose sleep as you try to sort through them?

Nebuchadnezzar's experience followed this same pattern. He laid in his bed wide awake, trying to make sense of the things that had consumed his mind. So, he summoned all the so-called "spiritual mediums" and advisors of his day who claimed to have the ability to interpret such **dreams** (v. 2). Technically, we don't use **magicians** or **sorcerers** today to describe such cultic advisors; however, taken together with **astrologers**, we would call them psychics, fortune-tellers, or even mentalists (mind-readers). The term **Chaldeans** would then refer to a specialized group of highly educated and trained individuals—similar to the training Daniel and his friends had received. Although not exactly equivalent to these modern positions, the **Chaldeans** would function like psychologists or psychiatrists who offer an "educated" guess as to the source and solution of a problem. Having assembled this group of so-called experts, Nebuchadnezzar desperately wanted **to know** what this dream meant for him (v. 3). However, he has not yet divulged its contents nor revealed why it **troubled** him so deeply.

From this brief historical introduction, we can learn a valuable principle that we must apply in our lives. We must be very careful about the origin of the counsel or advice that we seek. The source from which we get our information matters! As we continue our study of this passage, it will become evident that only God gives wise counsel. The counsel of those in the world is limited and often corrupted by their own weaknesses and inabilities. Even so, that obvious deficiency does not stop people from seeking counsel from the wrong source. They often trust sources that tell them what they want to hear rather than the truth. Today, people seek advice from everyone, but God. God becomes the last resort—if even an option at all!

God Himself must be the source of our counsel. We must always start with Him. Until we ourselves have spent time with Him personally in prayer and reading Scripture, we should not consult any other form of counsel. We need to hear God speak first. He alone must be the source of our wisdom and knowledge ([Prov 2:1-6](#)).

"Then you will understand the fear  
of the LORD, And find the knowledge  
of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; From  
His mouth come knowledge  
and understanding;"  
Proverbs 2:5-6

Indeed, God promises to give us wisdom if only we would ask ([Jas 1:5](#)). Yet, too often, we find ourselves in trouble because we skip these crucial steps and immediately seek the advice of other people before we have even consulted with God. If we still need more clarity, direction, a different perspective, or reassurance in weighty matters, we can certainly seek mature, godly counsel. But we shouldn't start there; we should go directly to the source (God) ourselves.

Unfortunately, people follow the advice of friends, family, and close associates more fervently than they follow the counsel of God which never fails. In fact, many people "collect" advice without ever evaluating its truthfulness simply because they "hear" something which sounds agreeable ([2 Tim 4:3-4](#)). God, however, has called us to exercise discernment and wisdom. We must evaluate the source and content of the counsel we seek! While it is not wrong to seek godly counsel from others, we must always use discretion. The person who gives the advice must exhibit spiritual maturity and bear fruit consistent with God's character. But even more importantly, the counsel that we receive must always match Scripture. So, it is incumbent upon us to pray for discernment and search Scripture ourselves to verify the advice we have received!

Question  
# 2

How carefully do you evaluate the advice you receive before you apply it?

### *Daniel 2:5-13*

#### **THE CHALLENGE OF UNGODLY COUNSEL:**

After gathering his advisors, Nebuchadnezzar issues them an impossible challenge. He wants them to **make known** both **the dream** and its **interpretation** (v. 5). As difficult as it would have been to convince him of the accuracy of their **interpretation**, the king now makes it an utterly impossible task for these soothsayers. He refuses to describe the content of his dream to them. These fraudulent advisors must literally read the king's mind and tell him what he dreamed in addition to providing an interpretation. If they fail, they will all be killed (literally cut into pieces) and their houses destroyed (literally made a pile of garbage). If they succeed, Nebuchadnezzar will bestow gifts, rewards, and great honor upon them (v. 6). Nothing can change his mind; he considers the matter settled (i.e., his decision is firm).

Knowing the impossibility of the king's demand doesn't stop these mediums from

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trying to convince him to reveal the specifics of the dream so they could interpret it (v. 7). If they could convince him to tell them his dream, they would at least have a chance to offer a vague answer and buy some time before the accuracy of their interpretation could be verified. At this time, those who practiced divination in Babylon relied on books which contained a series of symbols along with the standard possibilities for interpreting them. From this literature, the soothsayers could then formulate broad, vague interpretations that could be applied to any situation. As the event unfolded, skilled mediums could then twist these symbols to fit any circumstance.

In a way, they functioned much like psychics and astrologers do today. Neither can read minds nor predict the future. Their predictions are so broad that they



could be applied to any situation and, therefore, perceived as true. Consider this: “psychics” would broadly say, “You will come into money.” Their statements have no specificity. It could happen at any time and in any number of ways, for which the “psychics” will take credit. It could be interest earned on an account you already have, a refund for which you already applied, or a payment from stock dividends. You could even literally find money on the sidewalk. No “psychic” would ever specify, “You will come into money on July 15, 2024, when Publisher’s Clearinghouse shows up at your door with a giant check”—unless he or she had insider information! Only God knows the thoughts of man along with the future. Only He can offer such insight if He so chooses. Any other attempt to offer such counsel will prove fraudulent!

Question  
# 3

What is the appeal in seeking “advice” from such practitioners even though most people realize they are fake?

Nebuchadnezzar calls their bluff. He knows these mediums cannot interpret his **dream**. They are just stalling (literally gaining **time**) because they know his mind is made up (v. 8). After reminding them that they face the death penalty, he assures them

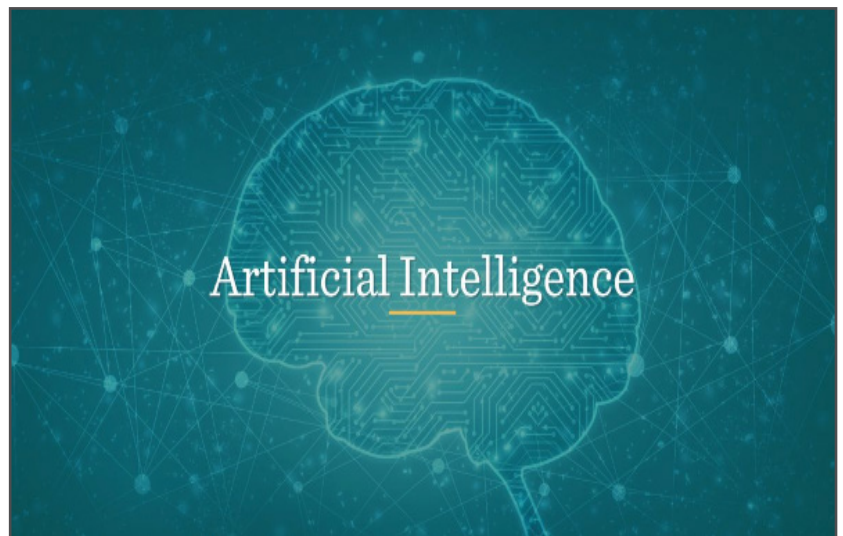
that he knows their tricks. Nebuchadnezzar suspects that these mediums **have agreed** to lie to him in order to save their lives (v. 9). They will make up some **interpretation** to satisfy him and tell him what he wants to hear until things settle down (i.e., **the times have changed**). The only way he can verify whether they tell the truth is if they can reveal the specific contents of **the dream** itself—an impossible feat.

This revelation from **the king** terrifies these mediums. They have been ousted as frauds. They don't possess any special knowledge or ability as they have claimed! In fact, they affirm that no **man on earth** can do what **the king** has asked (v. 10). Supposedly, these renowned and gifted individuals would have been blessed by the gods with discernment on such matters. But now they must sheepishly admit that they don't have such an intimate relationship with them, for no one **can tell** these things **to the king expect the gods, whose dwelling is not with the flesh** (v. 11). They have no answer and no way to get an answer!

Question  
# 4

How can we help others see the danger of consulting such sources—even if for entertainment purposes only?

So, what does this challenge have to do with us? Apart from God, such counsel truly offers no answers and provides no way to get an answer. Worldly wisdom, although it may appear to have value, is only a big scam because it can never resolve our problems. The wisdom the world peddles may have some element of truth, but it primarily depends on a programmed response pre-determined collectively by mankind. For example, artificial intelligence falsely gives the illusion that it can solve complex problems. In reality, however, it relies strictly on the logic input into it to formulate an answer. In other words, it can only answer so far as someone has programmed it to answer. Searching on the Internet works in the same way. Programmers set up an algorithm that determines what results are displayed while



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suppressing others. As a form of censorship, this can influence people to think a certain way when they are presented with only one side!

Yet, we as humans function in much the same way. We may not call it programming, but our society “teaches” us to think and respond in a certain way. It truly conditions how we see the world (i.e., operant conditioning). These mediums in Babylon were “trained” to give certain stereotypical responses based upon their “books.” But the king saw through their phony, illogical words and demanded the truth. As believers, we must not allow ourselves to become conditioned by the world’s phony wisdom. We must test everything against Scripture. We must recognize that truly wise counsel comes from God alone. We must guard our minds ([Prov 4:20-27](#); [Phil 4:6-9](#)) and think like Christ ([Phil 2:5](#)) lest we become deceived by the “wisdom” the world offers.

Question  
# 5

In what ways are we conditioned by the world? What does the world use to condition the way we think and respond?

## Daniel 2:14-19

### THE COUNSEL FROM GOD:

Infuriated by his advisors’ inability, Nebuchadnezzar dispatched **Arioch**, his chief executioner, to **kill all the wise men** (v. 14). The word translated **guard** comes from the word “to kill”; hence, it refers to a chief executioner rather than just a “detachment of guards” or “soldiers” in the way we would ordinarily view it. Nevertheless, **Arioch** came to Daniel’s residence since he and his friends were numbered among this group officially condemned to death (v. 15). But Daniel had not yet heard about the king’s edict, so he inquired about what was happening. Notice, however, how verse 14 begins. Daniel responds to **Arioch with counsel and wisdom**. Although he still needs time to seek additional, more specific **counsel** from God once he learns of Nebuchadnezzar’s intentions, Daniel is still prepared with an immediate response to the situation. He is not caught off guard! With confidence, Daniel knew exactly where to turn for help.

Question  
# 6

What do you do to keep yourself prepared to respond “with counsel and wisdom” in times when challenging circumstances arise?



Without hesitation, Daniel asked for time to ascertain **the interpretation** of the **dream** (v. 16). So, pay attention to what he does next. He **went** inside and told his three friends, **Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah**, what had transpired (v. 17). He didn't tell them so that they could sit down and collectively come up with a solution on their own. He told them so that they might fall on their faces in prayer to **seek** wisdom from the Lord. Although the text never uses the word prayer specifically, it is clear that their actions constituted prayer. The text says that they sought **mercies from the God of heaven** so that



they **might not perish** (v. 18). We would call this praying! As they prayerfully sought God, Daniel received an answer. **The secret** of the king's dream **was revealed in a night vision** (v. 19).

We can learn two principles from Daniel's approach. We must prepare ourselves to **seek** God first so we can respond wisely to any situation. It should almost become a reflex. We must automatically know what to say and where to go to **seek** clarity when we need a specific answer to a problem: God. Like Daniel, we should immediately say, "What has God said? Let us **seek** the Lord on the matter to guide us specifically." Instead, many people start by analyzing the situation on their own, thinking about what they can do to fix it. They ask questions like, "What has already been tried?" And they continue by saying, "Have you tried this?"—never once pausing to **seek** the Lord!

Second, if we are faced with a problem, we can ask others to join us in prayer—both praying *for* us and *with* us. While we should **seek** God together collectively, we must resist turning the time into a group "brainstorming" session where opinions and suggestions are freely given before ever consulting with God. We must hear from God first! Too often, well-meaning people respond to such problems by telling their friends so that they can collectively find a solution. Rather than praying, they talk amongst themselves until they find a solution that seems workable—and they completely omit God from the process! Daniel and his friends did not spend the majority of their time

## Instruct

talking about what they would do and discussing various proposals. They waited and listened for direction from the Lord. Once God had clearly spoken, no debate or consensus was needed; Daniel acted!

Question  
# 7

In a group setting, what steps can we take to ensure that we're truly waiting upon and listening to the Lord rather than merely throwing out ideas as by trial and error?

### Daniel 2:20-23

#### **THE CELEBRATION OF GOD'S WISE COUNSEL:**

Immediately upon receiving an answer, Daniel praises God (vv. 19b-20). In fact, we could even translate **blessed** as praise. He broadly praises God for three things. First, he praises God for the wisdom and might that belong to Him (v. 20c). He acknowledges that God is the source of all **wisdom** and **understanding**. Second, Daniel praises God for His sovereignty (v. 21). Even in the uncertainty of exile and now with a death decree issued upon him, Daniel still confidently knows the Lord is still in control. God allows kingdoms to rise and fall (i.e., **changes the times and seasons**) and **kings** to come and go according to His plan. We have nothing to fear if we would only trust in Him. Third, Daniel praises God specifically for providing **wisdom** and strength to those who ask (vv. 21c-23). He spends the majority of his time thanking God for answering his prayer and granting him insight to respond to the king.

When God answers our requests, we should always take time to praise and thank Him—no matter in what way He may choose to respond. God always deserves our praise—even if He tells us no or to wait. Too often, we become like those nine lepers whom Jesus healed. When God answers our pleas, we simply go on our way and return to life as normal. We disappear without ever thanking Him. And He hears from us only when we need something again. Certainly, Daniel would have been anxious to go to the king to spare the lives of **the wise men**, but he still took time to stop and give thanks to the Lord immediately upon receiving direction.

Question  
# 8

How do you show God gratitude for answering your prayers—even if He says no or wait?

**THE COMMUNICATION OF GOD’S COUNSEL:**

After God revealed both the content and **the interpretation of the dream**, Daniel **went to** the chief executioner, **Arioch**, to request an audience with the king in hope of stopping the slaughter of the Babylonian mediums (v. 24). When bringing Daniel **before the king**, **Arioch** pompously takes credit for finding **a man** among **the captives** from **Judah** who could interpret his **dream** (v. 25). In reality, however, it was Daniel who broached the subject with **Arioch** and then subsequently approached him with the solution (v. 24). The chief executioner only “**found**” Daniel by happenstance while carrying out his official duty of putting to death these individuals. By introducing Daniel in this manner, **Arioch** likely aspired to secure a reward for himself and advance in Nebuchadnezzar’s administration.



Now, contrast this self-seeking, arrogant attitude with how Daniel responded to **the king** when asked if he could interpret **the dream** (v. 26). Daniel did not take any credit for himself whatsoever nor did he self-servingly seek advancement in the kingdom. On the contrary, he gave all the credit to God! He begins by noting the impossibility of the Babylonian mediums—or any prognosticator on earth for that matter—to do what **the king** commanded. None of them could reveal the secret things about which he asked of them. “**But there is a God in heaven,**” Daniel announces, “**Who reveals secrets, and has made known what will happen in the latter days**” (v. 28). Daniel makes clear the source of his revelation: Yahweh. The Babylonian gods were powerless to give an answer. The educated scholars of the day could not offer any insight. None of the king’s advisors could enlighten him. The one and only, true and living **God** alone could answer the king’s demands!

Like Daniel, we must give God all the credit for the mighty work He has done in our lives. We must acknowledge Him as the source of our strength and wisdom. If we don’t, how will people know from where these things come? They can wrongly attribute them to our personal ability, our resolve and hard work, luck or good fortune,

opportunity, or any number of other factors. If Daniel hadn't revealed God as his source, for example, Nebuchadnezzar could have attributed this miraculous answer to a pantheon of false gods, special ability on Daniel's part, or an infinite number of other factors just like today. Therefore, we must specifically point to God as the source of our success so that others might recognize and have a relationship with Him!

### Question # 9

How do you give God credit for the wisdom, knowledge, and opportunities that He has given you?

While Nebuchadnezzar's **dream** certainly has historical implications concerning the state of the world during both Christ's coming and return, we will only broadly discuss its interpretation. Our focus for this lesson remains upon the source of our counsel or wisdom: God. We can only conquer problems in life when we have counsel that comes from God! Daniel thus begins his discourse by relating what troubled **the king** so much about this **dream** (v. 29). **The king** was worried about what would happen historically based on the things he had seen and how they would specifically affect him. Once again, Daniel refuses to take any credit and directs the royal court's attention to God. He admits that he is not able to answer **this secret** because somehow he has **more wisdom** than anyone else, but only because God had revealed it to him (v. 30). God had given him this insight to save the lives of the Babylonian mediums, including his own and those of his friends, and to satisfy the king's curiosity.



In the king's **dream**, a large, ornate statue of a man stood before him (v. 31). Its various parts were made from different metals and substances. Its **head** was fashioned from **gold**, its **chest and arms** from **silver**, its stomach **and thighs** from **bronze** (v. 32) and finally its **legs** from **iron** and its **feet** consisted of **iron** mixed with **clay** (v. 33). As Nebuchadnezzar **watched**, a **stone cut without hands** was hurled toward the statue striking its brittle **feet** first and breaking **them into pieces** (v. 34). However, it did not

just damage the feet. It pulverized the entire statue, turning all the metals into dust which blew away in the **wind** (v. 35). The **stone** then grew in size to become a large **mountain** that **filled the whole earth**.

After relaying the exact contents of **the dream**, Daniel provides **the interpretation** (v. 36). Although he only identifies the first **kingdom** by name per se, the four parts of the statue characterized by each of the four different metals and materials represent four earthly kingdoms. Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian Empire represent the first **kingdom** signified by its **head of gold**. Yet, Daniel is quick to point to God's sovereignty. Nebuchadnezzar would have achieved none of these things if God had not allowed it. While Nebuchadnezzar is great in terms of earthly rulers, God has given him his **kingdom, power, strength, and glory** (v. 37). God alone granted him authority to rule over the civilized world and creation (v. 38).

Unlike God's eternal kingdom, the Babylonian Empire will not stand forever. Another **kingdom** represented by the **silver chest and arms** of the statue will rise and conquer Babylon. Indeed, in 539 BC under the leadership of Cyrus the Great the Medo-Persian Empire defeated the nation of Babylon (v. 39). While Daniel does not specify what makes the Medo-Persian Empire **inferior** to Babylon, a significant theme does arise, however. The successive empires in this list subsume the previous empire and then greatly expand its territory. The third empire represented by the **bronze stomach and thighs**, for instance, controlled the territory all the way from modern Eastern Europe throughout the entire Middle East at the height of its power. Like many nations, Medo-Persia fell to the Greeks under the leadership of Alexander the Great in 334 BC.

Finally, the strongest of all the empires represented by the **iron legs** which crushed every other nation was none other than Rome (v. 40). However, even the Roman Empire with all its might had a fundamental flaw. It had **clay** mixed with the **iron** in its **feet and toes** (v. 41); this impurity structurally weakened the strength of the metal. Daniel describes this part of the statue as **partly strong** and **partly fragile** (v. 42). Like any metallurgist



Daniel knew that **iron does not mix with clay** (v. 43)! The **feet partly** made of **clay** remind us of the human role in Rome's fall. Unlike humanism which says that mankind can band together to achieve utopia on his own, the way of man always leads to destruction without exception because of sin. Rome fell in part because of rampant immorality, the disregard for traditional families, corruption in the government, and complacency among the people. Does this sound familiar to us here in the United States today?

Although several factors contributed to Rome's downfall, it ultimately could not withstand God's judgment and His coming **kingdom** in Christ (v. 44). In a weakened and divided state focused on sinful human passions, the Roman Empire was no match for **the stone** which would be used to pulverize the statue into minute specks of dust. We know that through Christ God will establish a **kingdom** which will have no end and **never be destroyed**. It will take a literal act of God to usher in this era! Daniel highlights this aspect when he refers to **the stone cut without hands** (v. 45). Christ's work is two-fold: 1) He provided the way that we can have eternal life through His sacrificial death and 2) He will judge the world when He returns, punishing evildoers and vindicating His people who have followed Him. When He returns, He will remove the curse and stain of sin from the world to establish His **kingdom** in full. Only God—no mere human—can accomplish these two extraordinary feats!

So, the question then becomes: What does all this mean for us? We must look forward in anticipation of Jesus' return. We cannot trust in the things of this world. They will all fail. They all ultimately lead to destruction. Even though we may look around at our world today seeing only chaos, uncertainty, and hopelessness, we must remember that God is still sovereignly in control. We must trust in Him. We may not know the outcome of every situation we may face. Still, we must trust God and seek counsel from Him. God may not reveal every detail to us all at once—for He knows we cannot handle it. However, He does give us enough wisdom and insight if we walk with Him daily. He will give us enough wise counsel to get through the day while we continue to serve Him! We only need to ask just like Daniel did.

Our world bombards us with information. We have many people, institutions, organizations, and even inanimate devices that promise to provide truthful, accurate, and wise information. Yet, none of the wisdom the world offers can even remotely compare to the truth and wisdom of the Lord. Only God's wisdom leads to life. Only God's wisdom guarantees success. The wisdom pushed by the world is a fraud which ultimately results in destruction. As believers, we need to evaluate carefully the source of our knowledge and wisdom to ensure they come from God. We can only conquer this world and tackle the problems it poses when we conquer it through God's counsel!

## *Incorporate*

What is the danger of consulting others before consulting God—even if we think that they will offer “godly” counsel?

In what ways has counsel and wisdom from God helped you personally overcome a tense or adversarial situation?

How can you encourage people to rely on wisdom from God rather than trust in so-called secular sources? How can you help them learn to critique the value and truthfulness of such wisdom?



## ***Journal: Document God's Work***

*July 21, 2024*



# *Conquering with Confidence*

## *Daniel 3:1-30*

Focal Verse:

*"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."*

Daniel 3:17

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## Introduce

Since being signed into law in 1955 by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, every piece of our currency—whether coin or paper—has prominently borne the inscription: “In God We Trust.” Although much of the coinage had this phrase engraved upon it at the time of the Civil War, the federal government only officially passed legislation in 1955 acknowledging our nation’s dependence upon the Lord. As described in documentation from the House of Representatives’ historical records, Mr. Charles Bennett, a representative from Florida, introduced a bill with overwhelming bi-partisan support to add these words to all future currency.

In his remarks from the House floor, Mr. Bennett reminded our nation, “Nothing can be more certain than that our country was founded in a spiritual atmosphere and with a firm trust in God.”\*

Furthermore, he declared that “while the sentiment of trust in God is universal and timeless, these particular four words ‘In God We Trust’ are indigenous to our country.”

Given the political climate of the post-World War 2 era during which the ideology of Communism attempted to push Westward in an effort to champion atheism and promote dependence upon the state, Bennett proposed that we add these four words to our money which would then “serve as a constant reminder’ that the nation’s political and economic fortunes were tied to its spiritual faith.”

For those of us who have a relationship with Christ and have placed our confidence in Him alone, we know that his words ring true. His words on the House floor at that time, however, stand at odds with those both then and now who wish to silence God and censure the name of Jesus! With the propensity to re-write history, modern individuals have sought to disparage our nation’s Christian heritage, attempting to refocus our trust in man rather than in the Lord. Overall, most of our nation’s founding fathers and subsequent leaders have revered the Lord—the God of the Bible—not some nameless, impersonal force or just one among many in the pantheon of gods in ancient cultures.



## Introduce

Certainly, some founders, like in any era, misconstrued the identity of the Lord, but most acknowledged the God of the Bible and His Son, Jesus, as the only true and living God able to save and give life! Just because some do not like a particular part of history doesn't mean they can erase it and make it as though it never happened! Nonetheless, our nation as a whole has begun to place its confidence in man rather than the Lord—and we have begun to see the fruit of that shift in the world around us.

Twelve years after the codification of the phrase “In God We Trust” on our money, the Consumer Confidence Index was created as a means of gauging the health of the economy. It takes into account the spending habits of individuals, theorizing that if consumers are confident in their economic situation, they will spend more money thereby strengthening the economy. On the other hand, if consumers experience inflation or have doubts about their job security and spending-power, they will spend less money. Although our money has the phrase “In God We Trust” imprinted on it, confidence has clearly shifted from the Lord to our circumstances. Rather than trusting in the Lord for everything, many trust in man-made solutions, including what they can do themselves.

In Daniel 3, King Nebuchadnezzar wanted the whole world to idolize and revere the statue he built. He demanded everyone's devotion and worship. Yet, three Hebrew youth refused to bow their knees despite the threat of death. They remained devoted solely to the Lord. They placed their full confidence and trust in Him alone! Facing pressure, they defied the king saying, “If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us . . . and He will deliver us from your hand, O king” ([Dan 3:17](#)). We may not face certain death for our beliefs, but we live in a world that pressures us to bend to its desires and compromise our faith. We must be as bold as these three Hebrew youth in Daniel. We must maintain our confidence in the Lord alone no matter what we may face in life!

Key  
Question

How do your words and actions reflect whom or what you trust when a situation turns for the worst?

## In Reference



See “The Legislation Placing ‘In God We Trust’ on National Currency,” available from [history.house.gov](http://history.house.gov) (accessed April 23, 2024).

## Daniel 3:1-7

### **THE COMMAND TO WORSHIP:**

The book of Daniel effectively captures the essence of life in this world as a series of peaks and valleys, triumphs and trials, and ups and downs. Life is cyclical when it comes to experiencing highs and lows. But even so, one thing remains constant. We can have confidence in the Lord because He never fails and His will always prevails. For example, we ended our study last week on a high note. God had used Daniel to reveal the content and interpretation of the king's dream, thereby saving the lives of all the Babylonian mediums. Not only did Daniel and his friends escape death, but Nebuchadnezzar also showered him with praise, honor, and gifts—even appointing him as a high-level administrator over the province of Babylon as well as over all the wise men ([Dan 2:48](#)). As a result of his favor with the king, Daniel also secured high-level positions in the government for his three friends ([Dan 2:49](#)). But suddenly, the tides turned. Daniel's three friends found their lives once again in peril when the king constructed a statue and expected everyone to bow in worship. Never for a moment, however, did they waiver in their trust and confidence in the Lord.

Question  
#1

In what ways have you seen God remain constant in your life despite the peaks and valleys?

The text doesn't give an exact date or even an idea of how long after Nebuchadnezzar's dream that it took before he began to erect this gigantic statue with which chapter 3 opens. However, it seems that his dream did influence its construction somewhat. In his dream, the **image** had a **gold** head ([Dan 2:31-32](#)) which Daniel later revealed represented the Babylonian king and his kingdom ([Dan 2:36-37](#)). While the king may have loosely based this statue on his dream, a few significant changes also existed. First, **the image** or statue was entirely **gold**-plated—not just the



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head—as a sign of the king’s enormous power and wealth. Second, the dream never gives the exact dimensions of the colossal statue; Daniel simply refers to it as “a great image” ([Dan 2:31](#)).

The current text, however, lists the dimensions of the statue as **sixty cubits** tall and **six cubits** wide (v. 1). In antiquity, a cubit typically measured eighteen inches—the average length of the male forearm. Thus, the statue stood ninety feet tall by nine feet wide. To put this into perspective, the Statue of Liberty



stands at 151 feet tall or 305 feet with the pedestal included. Nebuchadnezzar had impressively built a statue nearly two-thirds as tall as the Statue of Liberty! The king had it built **on the plain of Dura** which most translations identify as a proper place name, but whose location is unknown today. The word **dura** in Akkadian means “wall” or “fortress” and was used in many place names at the time—like the French word “ville” which is attached to many US locations today: Lewisville or Colleyville. So, we can only surmise that the statue was constructed somewhere outside the city of Babylon on flat land (i.e., a **plain**) perhaps to make its colossal height even more impressive in an effort to force people to bow in awe!

Just as we would celebrate the completion of an important civic project or memorial today with a ribbon-cutting ceremony, nearly every prominent official in the administration attended **the dedication of the image** (v. 2). The list of those in attendance seems to begin with the highest-ranking officials, **the satraps**, progressing downward in rank to **all the officials of the provinces**. Although not exactly the same, the divisions of these leaders would function like our different agencies in the United States such as the Department of the Interior. The assistant secretary, director, deputy director, department heads, and finally those in the field offices would ultimately report to the Secretary of the Interior at the top. In this list of officials in Daniel, then, each one listed would report successively to the one above them until reaching the satraps at the top.

Nebuchadnezzar saw this as such an important achievement that he expected all

his officials to be present for the statue's unveiling (v. 3). Not only did he expect their presence, but he also expected them to lead the way in bowing before the statue in **worship** as he had commanded all people to do who **stood** in its presence. In fact, the king's **herald** read a proclamation aloud that everyone must **fall down** and **worship the gold image** whenever they heard a **symphony** of musical instruments playing in concert together (vv. 4-5). If they refused to pay homage, they would be burned alive in a **fiery furnace**—perhaps the very kiln used to smelt **the gold** to construct **the image** itself (v. 6)!

While the text does give the statue's dimensions and general location, it does not reveal whether it represented a Babylonian deity or the king himself. But it doesn't really matter. Bowing in **worship** to anyone or anything other than the Lord—whether a false god or a man—constitutes idolatry. Still, **people** of



every nationality and language dutifully **fell down** in **worship** of **the golden image** when the **music** began to play (v. 7). Some may have worshiped the statue to honor the king and perhaps earn favor with him. Others may have bowed down simply to go along with the crowd. But most undoubtedly **fell down** at the sound of the **music** because they feared the consequence of death in the **fiery furnace**. Today, we find people following the culture for these same three reasons. And most still follow out of fear—perhaps not a fear of dying, but one of being ostracized and canceled. God, however, has not called us to a spirit of fear, but to trust in Him whereby we can stand boldly in our faith without compromise (see [2 Tim 1:7](#)).

Question  
# 2

In what ways does fear motivate people simply to go along with culture without ever questioning it?

### Daniel 3:8-15

#### **THE CHARGE AGAINST THE TRIO:**

Because Nebuchadnezzar had summoned most of his officials to join the festivities, we would expect Daniel and his three friends to be in attendance. While Daniel does not specify what prevented him from coming to **the dedication** himself, we do learn that his friends were indeed there after a major problem erupts. As both his officials and subjects—let alone exiled captives from Judah—Nebuchadnezzar would have expected these three young men to comply fully with his orders. The trio thus had a choice to make: Do they follow the king's demand thereby saving their lives and keeping their coveted positions or do they follow the Lord's command prohibiting them from worshiping anyone except Him? Just as they had done in refusing to eat the king's food when it conflicted with God's directives (Dan 1), they now refused to bow before this golden behemoth. This drew both the attention and ire of others who reported their insolence directly to the king!

Before analyzing their choice, we must briefly pause to discuss how Christians can effectively engage culture, especially through politics, since Daniel and his friends held positions of great authority in the Babylonian government. Despite the differences between the type of governance for them (despotic monarchy) and us (democratic republic), the principles we learn from Daniel can be applied because God still sovereignly exercises control over the government today just as He did then ([Rom 13:1-7](#)). He still appoints people at the right time to advance His agenda—just as He did with

Joseph ([Gen 41:39-41](#)), Daniel, and Cyrus the Great ([Isa 44:28](#); [45:1](#)). Yet, many believers shy away from a discussion of politics and even fewer participate by becoming civil servants themselves or encouraging other qualified Christian candidates to run for office. Many erroneously see a false dichotomy between engaging the culture through effective civil service and separating themselves completely from politics as if the world around them has no bearing on their lives at all. While God has





not called everyone to serve in political office, He has called us to vote responsibly according to the principles in His Word and not steer clear of encouraging qualified Christian candidates whom He has called to run for office.

Even though they were appointed rather than elected, Daniel and his friends still provide a good model for how we can be involved in our world—including politics—to make a difference. First, we should always aim to please God and not man through our service ([Eph 6:5-9](#)). If a component of culture does not conflict with Scripture or constitute sin, we can freely participate—with the understanding that God always comes first. The moment any component of culture conflicts with God, however, we must follow God and not culture. We should not participate, condone, or accept any element that God clearly condemns. Moreover, we must separate ourselves from it no matter what may happen. Regardless of whether we are a citizen or an elected/appointed official, we must always boldly live out our faith in Christ. He should influence how we see the world which in turn influences what we do, how we vote, and how one serves in office. It is a fallacy to think we must separate Christ in any capacity from our decisions or actions. Atheists, agnostics, and proponents of all kinds of views do not separate their beliefs from their decisions! Why should we separate Christ from ours? This trio of youth didn't compromise their faith in the Lord when commanded to **worship** before the statue!

Question  
# 3

Despite many who may claim otherwise, how does what people believe influence how they vote, serve in office, or live as a citizen?

Second, we must always lead with integrity, refusing to become corrupted by power and privilege. We should never allow the prospect of power or wealth to consume us and control our decisions. This trio could have retained their status by going along with the king's orders, but they risked it all—including their very lives—to follow God! We should always live according to God's commands about what is right rather than our own opinions. If this means forfeiting our positions, status, or wealth for the sake of following Scripture, then so be it. We must, therefore, cultivate our relationship with the Lord daily and have a network of accountability through the church lest we become tempted by these things and falter. Daniel and his three friends continually banded together to seek the Lord when faced with the challenge of

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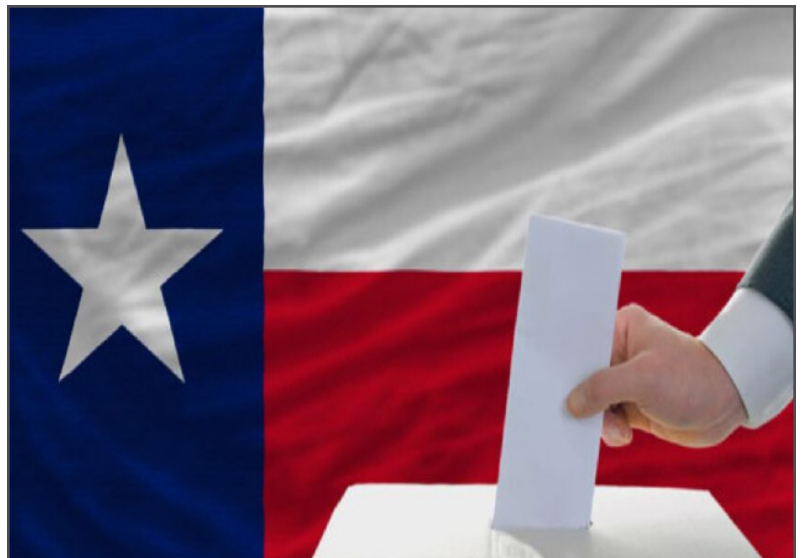
compromise and acquiescing the crowd! As a result, they never became sidetracked by seeking power, prestige, or wealth. They continually sought to serve the Lord together.

Third, we must use our position to have a positive impact on our world. Rather than advocating the status quo or promoting popular positions held by society in order to get along, we must live by the boundaries that God has spelled out in His Word. While we cannot “force” people to adopt or accept such godly practices, we must never compromise the truth. At the same time, we must also be ready to face the consequences society may impose on us all the while continuing to point others to Christ. As we will see at the end of this lesson, the way Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah stood firmly on their faith had a positive impact on the culture when they used their position to promote their belief in God to deliver them despite the edict of death. Even though God ultimately delivered them, they still experienced being tossed into the **fiery furnace** for their refusal to follow orders! Yet, they stood ready to accept these consequences no matter how they may turn out and continued to follow the Lord.

So, what bearing do these principles have upon us in terms of politics? They apply in three ways.

First, we must vote for the candidate whose platform best resembles biblical principles. We should primarily look at their policies and not their personalities. Can their policies generally be affirmed by Scripture? I’m not saying, however,

that we should dismiss moral failures, character flaws, or issues with integrity. Rather, their policies and platforms play a pivotal role because they will determine the law and the course of the country. Second, we should encourage godly people whom God has called to run for office. We should also raise up a younger generation not afraid to participate in politics while at the same time living out their faith loyally in Christ. We should also help them understand how they can have a positive impact through politics while at the same time instilling a strong foundation in Christ so they will not falter. Finally, we can run for office ourselves. We need people who will stand firmly on their faith in Christ and not waiver whatsoever when running for office.



This trio of Hebrew youth practiced these principles flawlessly even when challenged by the culture. The text reports that **certain Chaldeans** went and told the king that they refused to follow his command and bow in **worship** before the statue (v. 8). Although **Chaldeans** can refer to the Babylonian people in general, here it most likely refers to the king's advisors or officials—particularly the mediums of the previous chapter ([Dan 2:2](#)). They probably ratted these three individuals out because they were envious of their promotion ([Dan 2:49](#)) and sought a way to get back at them while also trying to advance their own cause with the king—just like we often see in the business world today. Now, they had a reason to bring harm upon them and get rid of them permanently. So, they approached Nebuchadnezzar reverently (v. 9) and began repeating his edict along with the consequence for disobedience, thereby setting a trap for Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (vv. 10-11).

In a skillful attempt to provoke the king to wrath, **the Chaldeans** identify the three **Jews** by their Babylonian names—**Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego**—who they claim **have not paid due regard** and have refused to **serve his gods or worship the** golden statue (v. 12). Their emotional words are designed to capture the trio's contempt, defiance, and disrespect toward the king who had graciously given so much to these captives by providing special training and appointing them to service in his kingdom. And indeed, this news did cause Nebuchadnezzar to fly in a fit of **rage** (v. 13). Even so, it didn't cloud his judgment. He didn't immediately condemn them to death on account of hearsay without a trial, but instead he requested that they be **brought** to him so that he could hear their side of the story. If Nebuchadnezzar didn't immediately jump to conclusions or pass judgment without hearing both sides even in his **fury**, then what does this say about how we should deal with a situation that makes us angry? The king at least gave them the opportunity to explain themselves and share their side.

As the three stood before him, Nebuchadnezzar asks whether the accusations against them **were** true (v. 14). But even before the text



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records their response, he does something truly remarkable. He offers them a second chance! If they **are ready** to bow in **worship** when the **music** plays again, then it would greatly please him and all would end well (v. 15). But if they refuse, he reminds them that they would **be immediately** thrown into the **fiery furnace**. While the text doesn't reveal any clear motive for the king to offer such a second chance, these youth likely held a special place in his mind because they showed more potential than anyone else in the kingdom ([Dan 1:19](#)) and God had used their friend, Daniel, to interpret his dream—a feat which no one else could do ([Dan 2:46-49](#)). Even so, this would not save them if they directly chose to defy his orders.

So, to reinforce the enormity of their decision, Nebuchadnezzar begged them to consider what **god** could **deliver** them **from** his **hands**. In a way, this serves as a slight against the Lord Himself who the king had already seen **deliver** them from certain death when none of the mediums could interpret his dream except Daniel. Thus, Nebuchadnezzar derisively mocks the only God who could reveal both the content and interpretation of the dream—not even He can save you from this fate he mistakenly surmises! By looking at how these events unfold, we can learn two principles pertinent to us.

First, the second chance to respond favorably to command to **worship the gold image** combined with more coercion from the king serves as a reminder of the world's persistence. The world constantly applies pressure to conform to its ways under the guise of being compassionate and wanting connection. Sometimes it's subtle pressure and other times it's more forceful, but it's always unrelenting. The world may seem loving, compassionate, and accepting in its approach, but it always ends in destruction if we succumb to its ways. Therefore, we must prepare ourselves to resist the onslaught and stand firm in our faith by putting our confidence in the Lord and trusting Him to see us through.

Question  
# 4

How does the world attempt to sway our thinking through pseudo-compassion, love, and acceptance?

Second, these events demonstrate the need to model Christ and display His grace that leads to true repentance in our lives. If the wayward world exhibits faux or pseudo-grace designed to compel people to surrender to its ways, how much more

should we display the true love, grace, and forgiveness of Christ in our lives to the world around us? After all, the New Testament teaches that we are ministers of God's grace through the gospel ([Eph 3:7](#); [2 Cor 5:18-19](#)), to forgive others as Christ has forgiven us ([Eph 4:32](#)), and to love others as Christ has loved us ([Eph 5:2](#)).

"Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation,"  
2 Corinthians 5:18

Question  
# 5

How should the grace and compassion that we display differ from the pseudo-grace and compassion of the world?

### *Daniel 3:16-18*

#### **THE CONFIDENCE IN GOD TO DELIVER:**

Upon receiving this ultimatum, the group didn't hesitate. They didn't even pause momentarily to consider their response. They boldly told the king that they had **no need to answer on this matter** concerning his first question whether it was **true** that they had refused to bow before the statue (v. 16). It was **true** and their answer remained the same. They won't change their minds. They have already firmly decided that they will not bow in **worship** no matter the threats against them. While they did not feel compelled to explain their reason behind their **answer** to the first question, they would respond to his second question: **Who is the god who will deliver you from my hands? The God whom they serve is able to deliver** them whether through the **fiery furnace** or even in death (vv. 17-18).

What we must notice about their response is that they had confidence in God to **deliver** them no matter how He might choose to do it. If God so chose, He could **deliver** them from the flames—that is God could have changed the king's mind or orchestrated events so that they were not cast into the **furnace** at all. Yet, they also realized that God does not always deliver us from such peril; He allows us to go *through*

## Instruct

it at times. But even if He did not choose deliver them from this peril right now, they were confident that God would still vindicate them in death (see [Job 19:25-27](#); [Heb 11:34](#)). Either way, they recognized God's sovereign control over the situation and trusted Him. Their only expectation was that God would indeed deliver them however He saw best, for He is able to do anything He desires. They need only trust Him and follow His plan.

Trusting in the Lord can be difficult at times because in our human nature we want to know the specific outcome of a situation with certainty. We want a tangible guarantee. Yet, God rarely gives us specific details. He wants us to learn to trust Him. He wants us to rely on Him without question, realizing that He has our best interests at heart. Even if we know the outcome with certainty and all the details, many of us would still try to wrestle control from the Lord and manipulate the situation to our own perceived benefit. God simply wants us to place our confidence in Him without any preconceived notions or expectations and allow Him to work things out as He sees best.

Question  
# 6

Why does God allow us to go through some trials, but not others? When faced with any decision or trial, what should our expectation of God be?

## *Daniel 3:19-27*

### **THE CONFUSION OF THE KING:**

Upon the trio's refusal to comply, Nebuchadnezzar became violently enraged so much that his anger visibly showed on his face (v. 19). It doesn't take much for us to visualize such anger with one's complexion turning red, eyebrows arched, eyes squinting, and veins protruding from the neck. In his wrath, he ordered **the furnace** to be heated **seven times** hotter than usual. **The furnace** was probably the kiln used to smelt the **gold** for the statue. As such, it would have been a large structure—likely built next to a hill or ramp with an opening at the top for the insertion of the raw materials and another at the bottom to stoke the fire and control airflow. To smelt **gold**, the temperature would need to exceed 1,900 degrees Fahrenheit! Consider the pain and scalding that occurs from boiling water which is only 212 degrees.

In a tremendous show of force, Nebuchadnezzar called on some of the strongest,

best-trained soldiers **in his army** (i.e., **mighty men of valor**) to seize them, tie them securely, and lead them to the place of execution. Even though the text doesn't suggest that the youth resisted, the king likely used such force to make an example of them for anyone else contemplating defying him. He had them **bound in their coats, trousers, turbans**, and other articles of clothing adding more fuel for the fire to consume. He also demonstrated a sense of **urgency** to quell anymore potential rebellion by having them immediately thrown in (v. 21). Because of the **urgency** to execute the king's command, the soldiers did not have time to protect themselves from the intense heat, so they perished while tossing (v. 22). Inserted from the upper portion of the kiln, gravity then propelled the youth downward toward the ground-level opening still **bound** (v. 23).

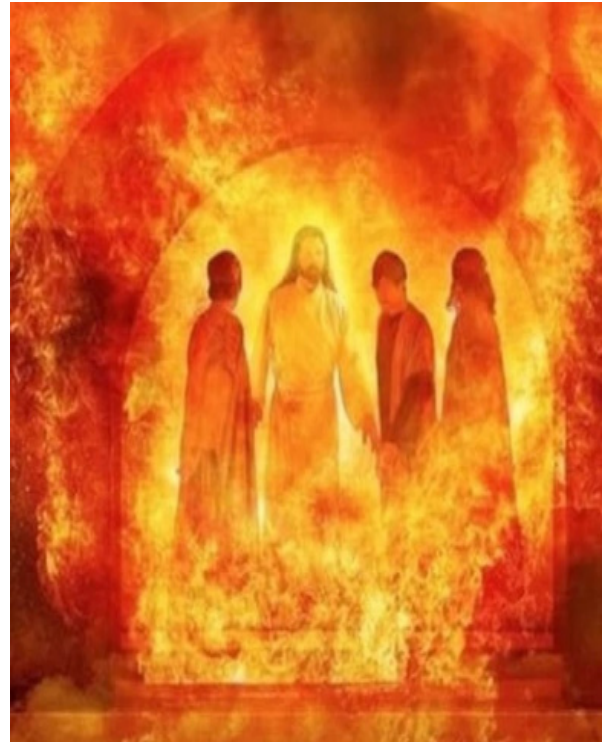


Startled and amazed as he watched, Nebuchadnezzar couldn't believe what he saw next. Thinking that his eyes had deceived him, he asked his advisors to confirm how many **men** they had thrown into the **fire** (v. 24). "Was it not just **three**," he inquired? So, the king demanded that they look together into the kiln where they would see **four men loose** and **walking in the fire** without any harm coming to them (v. 25). Only the ropes that once **bound** them had completely burned; they themselves suffered no other ill-effects from the extreme heat! As he peered into the blazing **furnace**, Nebuchadnezzar described the appearance of the **fourth** man like **a son of the gods**.

In Hebrew, the word *elohim* can be translated as "the" God (Yahweh) or as "gods" in the plural depending upon the context. Both the KJV/NKJV, for example, translate the last phrase of verse 25 as **the Son of God** while most other modern translations interpret it as "**a son of the gods**." Which one should it be? From our perspective both as an informed reader and a Christian, we know this **fourth** Man is the preincarnate Jesus. Such appearances of the preincarnate Jesus in the Old Testament are commonly called Christophanies. Jesus—God Himself—had come to **deliver** this trio personally!

## Instruct

From Nebuchadnezzar’s perspective living in a polytheistic culture, however, this **fourth** man is simply a “divine” being or an **angel** (see v. 28). Even though Nebuchadnezzar may call Yahweh “**the Most High God**” later (v. 26), he still does not worship Him exclusively as the *only* God. He does not have a personal relationship with the Lord. He simply adds Him to his collection of false gods. So, from the king’s perspective who utters the phrase, the translation “**a son of the gods**” is correct. But based on our own understanding and insight regardless of how we translate the phrase, we know it refers to none other than Jesus—the one and only living God who can save and who has saved these three youth from the **fire**.



Question  
# 7

Based on the king’s (or even our culture’s) understanding of “god,” why is it important how one defines who Jesus is?

Still baffled, Nebuchadnezzar approached the bottom of the kiln at a safe distance and called to the trio using their Babylonian names (v. 26). Referring to them as **servants of the Most High God**, he ordered them to **come out** of the **furnace** and **come over** to where he stood. The king and all the officials who had sought to condemn them now visibly **saw** that no harm had come to them at all from the raging **fire** (v. 27). **Not** a single **hair on their head was singed**, not one thread of fabric on their clothes burned, **nor the smell of smoke on them**. The last in the list should at least make an impression on any one of us who has ever been around a campfire. It is impossible to avoid **the smell of** smoke on our hair or skin even simply being within a few feet of the **fire**! Now, at last, Nebuchadnezzar had an answer to his question of what **god** could **deliver** them **from his hands** (v. 15). It was the Lord God of Israel whom these youth served!



**THE CONFESSION ABOUT GOD:**

Nebuchadnezzar broke into spontaneous praise for **the God** who **delivered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego** (v. 28). Despite the threat of death (i.e., **yielded their bodies**) against them for defying the king's command, these Hebrew youth **trusted in** God alone. And **their God delivered** them because they refused to **serve or worship any god except their own God** (v. 29). Consequently, Nebuchadnezzar made **a decree** that no one should disparage or speak **against their God** unless they wanted to risk their own lives. In the end, he **promoted** these three men to even greater positions of service in his administration.

While Nebuchadnezzar did recognize the power of the Lord to deliver, he stopped short of trusting in Him like Daniel and these three men. He did acknowledge and praise

"Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who sent His Angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him, and they have frustrated the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they should not serve nor worship any god except their own God!"

Daniel 3:28

**their God** for this miraculous feat. But **their God** was not *his God*. This demonstrates that the world can "know" God cognitively and even see Him at work, but still not have a relationship with Him which leads to life. This even happens in the New Testament with Jesus. People saw the works He did and even revered His teaching, but they stopped short of completely trusting Him. They simply added Him to the things they already believed without conforming to His teaching or they regarded Him solely as a source of physical blessing rather than the source of life through spiritual transformation. God wants our complete trust and devotion; He wants it in Him alone and no one or nothing else. He wants a personal relationship with each one of us!

So, what does this mean for us? As believers, we must ensure our confidence fully lies in God. We cannot trust our own strength, our own wisdom, or any other human source and expect success. We may say we trust God, but if we were to face a trial like this trio, would our confidence remain firmly rooted in the Lord or would we would

## *Instruct*

we compromise our faith to go along with the culture? When we face difficulties, the source of our confidence will become evident to all by what we choose to do. If we choose to trust the Lord, He will glorify Himself irrespective of the outcome—that is how He chooses to resolve the situation.

We must always view our service of the Lord as an opportunity to declare His greatness and promote the gospel no matter the outcome. Some in our culture will see God working through us and turn to Him—completely trusting in Him alone for salvation. At other times, people in our culture may be like Nebuchadnezzar. They may acknowledge God casually and even marvel at His power, but they may truly fail to make Him Lord of their lives. How they respond to God working through us is not up to us. God has only called us to be the conduits of His grace, love, and power by confidently trusting in Him alone so that people can see Him working in our lives. If we trust Him completely, God will take care of the results according to His sovereign plan.

Question  
# 8


How has God used difficult circumstances in your life to allow you to share the gospel with others?

## *Inspire*

“In God We Trust” is prominently printed on all our currency. But can we say that we confidently trust Him as a nation? Even more importantly, can you individually say that you confidently trust in the Lord alone no matter what may happen or how things may turn out? Many of us say our trust resides in the Lord, but sometimes our actions prove otherwise. Many different sources vie for our dependence and trust, but none of them can deliver like the Lord can. As believers, we must resist the temptation to become complacent and look elsewhere for solutions. We must rely upon the Lord, expecting that He will deliver us however He sees fit, so that others around us might see and declare: “There is no other God who can deliver like this!”

## *Incorporate*

In times of uncertainty and trial, what do you do to ensure your confidence remains squarely on the Lord and you don't become discouraged or falter?



As believers, how can we participate in politics and still maintain the right perspective on the gospel?

How have you seen God work in other people's lives where you could clearly see that they placed their full confidence in Him? How did this inspire or encourage you?

*July 28, 2024*



# *Conquering through Contrition*

## *Daniel 4:1-37*

Focal Verse:

"Therefore, O king, let my advice be acceptable to you; break off your sins by being righteous, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor. Perhaps there may be a lengthening of your prosperity."

Daniel 4:27

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## Introduce

Most of us have probably never heard of Waco, Nebraska—a tiny town of 200 residents forty-five miles west of Lincoln. In a downtown dotted with only a few public buildings along with a café and a towering skyscraper of the Great Plains—a grain elevator—a small, unassuming brick building on Midland Street housed the Cornerstone Bank. Characteristic of any small Midwestern town, Waco certainly didn't bustle with frenetic activity and most people likely would have greeted each other on a first-name basis. So, one would hardly expect anything out of the ordinary to occur just five days after Thanksgiving. November 27, 2012, undoubtedly began like any other typical day until the alarm sounded at the Cornerstone Bank alerting authorities to a robbery in progress.

Even though a rare occurrence in such a small town, bank tellers still receive copious training on how to deal with situations like this. They are taught to comply with the demands of the robber while at the same time committing everything about his or her appearance to memory in order to provide authorities with a detailed description



of the suspect. In order to track down the perpetrator, police will also review security footage and then circulate, usually grainy images, to the public in hopes that someone might somehow identify the assailant. Although an ex-husband and ex-mother-in-law immediately recognized this bank robber and contacted authorities, police had already found more than enough evidence on YouTube to arrest a nineteen-year-old woman in connection with holding up the Cornerstone Bank in Waco, Nebraska at gunpoint!\*

Under the title “Chick Bank robber [sic],” the woman herself posted a video bragging about her exploits. In her own words as a description to the video, this modern Bonnie Parker writes, “I just stole a car and robbed a bank. Now I’m rich, I can pay off my college financial aid and tomorrow i’m [sic] going for a shopping spree.”\*\* After engaging in illicit drug use on camera, the woman, who never speaks, begins holding up hand-written notes which boast about her crimes. First, she declares, “Then I stole a car,” before gleefully dangling keys in her hands. Through graphics on the video,

## Introduce

she explains, “The shiny new car is a Pontiac Grand Am. Of course I already took the plates off and threw them out [sic].”

The next hand-written note reveals, “Then I robbed a bank” as she grabs a stack of cash, \$6,256 to be precise, off her bed. Returning to the use of computer-generated graphics, she poses the question, “Why?” As she continues smiling, she blames the government. She declares that she was a “victim” because they took her child away on the basis of neglect. Throughout the video, she continues to express pleasure in what she had done by blaming others and the system. She never offers any contrition, recognizes the repugnance of her sin, or takes responsibility for her own actions. When police arrived at her home in nearby Stromsburg, they recovered the money and found the plates for the car among other evidence. In an interview with ABC News, Sherriff Dale Radcliff remarked, “Never seen anything like it. Really makes you wonder if she was trying to get caught.”\*

King Nebuchadnezzar didn’t post a YouTube video, but as he surveyed his kingdom from his palace he reveled in his might and accomplishments. In his pride, he omitted God, thinking that he had achieved all these things on his own. Prior to this defiance by Nebuchadnezzar, God had given him a chance to repent. He allowed the king to have a dream and then sent Daniel to interpret it. Daniel, therefore, expressly warned him to “break off [his] sins by being righteous” ([Dan 4:27](#)). But the king refused. He continued in his hubris and sin, so God took his kingdom ([Dan 4:25, 31](#)). Unfortunately, our world often boasts in its exploits, fails to recognize its sin, and attempts to blame others for the problems caused by its own choices. To have true life, however, we must express contrition over our sin—not defiance and arrogance. We must repent and submit to the Lord and only then can we find true value and purpose in Him!

Key  
Question

In what ways do we see the world today boasting in its “achievements” when it should be expressing remorse and repentance?

## In Reference



\*Joshua Gardner, “Nebraska Woman Jailed After ‘I Robbed a Bank’ YouTube Video,” (December 5, 2012), available from [abcnews.go.com](#) (accessed April 29, 2024); \*\*see “Chick Bank robber” available from [youtube.com](#) (accessed April 29, 2024).

### **THE CONFIDANT TO THE KING:**

This chapter begins in a rather unusual and most unexpected way with an announcement from King Nebuchadnezzar to all his subjects praising **the Most High God** (vv. 1-2). In fact, most of the chapter is written in the first person from the king's point of view likely toward the end of his reign (562 BC) as he reflects on all the things that had transpired over the years. As such, the text doesn't really indicate how much time had elapsed between the fiery furnace and the king's second dream. But it, along with all the other ways Nebuchadnezzar had seen God working in the lives of His people, had a profound impact on him. It made such an impression that it caused him to **declare** throughout the empire **the signs and wonders the Lord had worked before** him (v. 2). The king had already witnessed God interpret a dream through Daniel, three youth escape the death-sentence of a fiery furnace, and he may have even been privy to their special diet determined by God in which they far exceeded everyone else in their training. But more than likely, he had also seen God at work in His people's lives in many other ways not recorded in Scripture, leaving him in awe of **His great signs** and **mighty wonders** (v. 3).

Although these extraordinary events made an impression on the king, they did not change the course of his life. They did not cause him to repent and live a transformed life through the Lord. Nowhere in Scripture does it give clear indication that Nebuchadnezzar ever repented of his sin and rejected the false gods he worshiped to serve Yahweh exclusively. Despite his awe over God's deliverance of His servants from the fiery furnace, the king merely claims, "There is no other god who can deliver like this" ([Dan 3:29](#)). Far from worshiping Yahweh alone, the king simply adds the Lord God to his pantheon of gods—albeit describing Him as

For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.

Joshua 2:10-11

the greatest among them.

To have eternal life, we must have a relationship with God where we worship and serve Him exclusively. The entire trajectory and focus of our life will change! We won't simply add Him to our beliefs, practices, or traditions. He will become the very center of our life. Then, we will experience verifiable life-change in the way we think and act. Life will not simply continue in the way it had before. Even though Nebuchadnezzar offered sincere praise to the Lord for His **signs** and **wonders**, the king did not have a personal relationship with Him. If he had, it would have shown through his transformed character. He would have repented of his pride and sought to honor the Lord through his governance of Babylon. But instead, he continued unabated in his pride and arrogance, proving that he only knew about God mentally and not personally. While we can still sin at times as believers when we give in to our desires, we will not live in a habitual state of sin. We will repent when God warns and convicts us. However, we see no such conviction or contrition whatsoever in Nebuchadnezzar at this time.

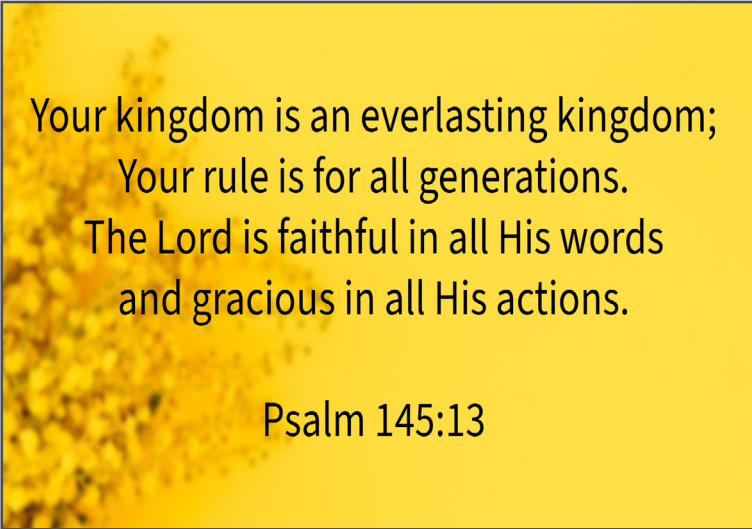
Many people still live like this today. They know about God mentally and never really question His existence, but He has no impact on their lives. They don't have a personal relationship with Him. They may marvel at His work in the world and even praise Him for something miraculous they have seen or experienced. But they still truly do not know Him. They may even pray or ask for prayer; yet, such prayer is little more than wishing the best for someone because they don't have a relationship with the Lord. They merely fit God into their lives where it seems convenient. They add him to their own personal beliefs. Nothing ever changes. They continue to live as they always have—doing the same things that they have always done. To them, therefore, God is some distant being who acts upon a whim. They only call upon Him when they need help. He does not have any involvement in or impact upon their daily lives. As believers, we cannot allow ourselves to ever become complacent and fall into such a trap. We must make God the center of our daily lives and part of every decision.

Question  
# 1

In what ways does the world seem to “know” God mentally, but then fail to exhibit evidence that they have a personal relationship with Him?



Having praised the Lord for the **signs** and **wonders** he had witnessed, Nebuchadnezzar now exalts Him for His **everlasting kingdom** and reign which will not end. Perhaps as the king had grown older, it spurred him to start contemplating his own mortality. He had begun to realize that he would not live forever and his own kingdom would one day come to an end. Nothing in this world will last forever. But as the king reflected on his fleeting life, he now began to understand that God's **kingdom is everlasting** and his rule, or **dominion**, will last **from generation to generation**. Most of us fall into this same pattern of thinking when it comes to the longevity of life. Earlier in life, we rarely think about death. We focus on making a name for ourselves and living in the moment. But as we grow older, having fewer years ahead of us than behind, our mortality becomes more of a reality. So, we begin to reflect on our lives—our accomplishments, our accolades, our legacy, and our relationships. Nebuchadnezzar seems to adopt this same approach as he looks at everything that he has apparently accomplished in life which will become more evident as this chapter progresses ([Dan 4:30](#)).



Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom;  
Your rule is for all generations.  
The Lord is faithful in all His words  
and gracious in all His actions.

Psalm 145:13

Regardless of our age, we must maintain the right perspective about our mortality as we carefully reflect on the legacy we're leaving. Many people find themselves in a similar position to Nebuchadnezzar. They mention God only as an afterthought and then primarily focus on the things they have supposedly achieved. They celebrate the things that went right and garnered them success and recognition. Rarely, do they pause to reflect on the things that went wrong and the lessons they learned. Many will aspire to have others remember them as a "good" person, focusing on their personal achievements. In fact, our obituaries are often filled only with our accomplishments in our education and careers along with an extensive list of hobbies and interests. But where is God in all this? Usually, we relegate Him to a few lines at the end denoting church membership or, perhaps, faithful service. Nebuchadnezzar does just that! He briefly praises God, but then focuses on himself.

The legacy we leave, however, should center on God's eternal reign. Rather than being identified merely as a "good" person or any other flattering description, we should aspire that others see Christ in us ([Eph 5:1-2](#)). We should desire others to see His love, grace, holiness, and character visibly evident in our lives. Rather than list all our achievements, we should strive to leave a legacy which highlights what Christ has accomplished through us. Our personal secular achievements will pass away and our rewards will be surpassed with time. Others will eventually forget what we have done. But not so when we faithfully serve our Savior; He will remember, recognize, and reward based on our faithfulness to Him. Nebuchadnezzar was about to learn this lesson the hard way. If he didn't repent of his self-centeredness and pride, God would take all his so-called achievements away from him!

### Question # 2

Why is it important to help people reflect on their own mortality, especially a culture that lives in the moment?

At the height of his empire's strength and prosperity, Nebuchadnezzar once again became greatly **troubled** by a **dream** (v. 5). The king described himself as **at rest** and **flourishing in his palace** when suddenly this **dream** broke the tranquility and caused him great fear (v. 4). The Aramaic word translated as **at rest** here, however, refers to being content or at peace rather than the notion of relaxing or sleeping. In more modern terms, we would say, "All was well." Nebuchadnezzar had it all. He didn't have a care in the world. Thus, together with the word **flourishing** it pictures prosperity. In other words, the king had everything he needed and was living a trouble-free life. Even so, this relative comfort and security didn't prevent him from having a nightmare.

Just as he had done previously, the king summoned all the Babylonian mediums (i.e., **wise men**) to reveal **the interpretation of the dream** (v. 6). While he did not threaten his advisors with death this time if they failed,



none of them could still interpret his dream (v. 7). Finally, Daniel **came** to appear before him (v. 8). But Nebuchadnezzar referred to Daniel by his Babylonian **name, Belteshazzar**, which alludes to **the name of his god**—providing further evidence that the king did not exclusively turn to the Lord even though he sent a proclamation of praise throughout the empire. As the overseer of all the mediums, Daniel perhaps appeared last because he only dealt with the cases that the others could not resolve. In any case, the king now rejoiced that Daniel had arrived because he knew that he could interpret the dream (v. 9).

The king recognized that something was different about Daniel from all the other mediums. He attributed that difference to **the Spirit of the Holy God** living in him which would enable him to interpret the **dream** without any trouble. Whereas the NKJV interprets the phrase as **the Spirit of the Holy God** in reference to Yahweh, the KJV and every modern translation interpret it as “the spirit of the holy gods.” Which one is correct? This harkens back to our discussion we had last week about the word *elohim* in Aramaic. Depending on the context, including the point of view of the speaker, *elohim* can refer to God (Yahweh) or gods in the plural. As believers and modern readers of this text, we know how Daniel could interpret such dreams: Yahweh—the one and only God—had made known **the interpretation** to him. From Nebuchadnezzar’s perspective who believed in many gods, however, it was simply a divine being with whom he had no personal relationship. In other words, it was just one of the gods who had revealed the meaning to Daniel—not Yahweh specifically.

Interestingly, the king adopted the same approach he had employed to ascertain the interpretation of his first dream and, unsurprisingly, he had the exact same results. He started with the Babylonian mediums who had no suitable answer before he confided in Daniel whom God had given insight. Why do so many find themselves stuck in this same routine? They return to the same methods which failed them in the first place, naively hoping somehow they will produce different results this time. So, they keep finding themselves repeatedly in the same predicament. One Source always has the correct answer. He never fails. Even though some people see God miraculously at work in the world around them, they still refuse to trust in Him. They foolishly try everything before turning to Him and seeking the advice which He gives. Regardless of the circumstances or even how confident we may feel on our own, God should always be the first Source to whom we turn when we need answers to life’s nagging questions.

## Instruct

He will always give us the answers we need at the right time according to His divine plan. He will never lead us astray.

Question  
# 3

In what ways have you seen the world repeatedly try the same solution to a problem and fail?

### Daniel 4:10-18

#### **THE CONTENT OF THE DREAM:**

Vividly describing the content of the dream, the king recalled seeing a large, tall **tree** that stood in the middle of **the earth** (v. 10). As he continued to look intently, the **tree became** even stronger until it **reached the heavens** and **filled the earth** (v. 11). Its **leaves** looked **lovely** or beautiful and were filled with **abundant fruit**, attracting both animals and people because of the protection and provision it offered (v. 12). Cattle **found shade under** its **leaves**, **birds** nested **in its branches**, and every living creature used it for food. As he continued to dream, the king saw **a watcher**, or messenger, descending **from heaven** to make an announcement (v. 13). The Aramaic translated **watcher** literally means “one who is awake” and is only used here in this chapter in all Scripture. In this context, therefore, **watcher** simply refers to an angel sent to deliver a divine message, so we should not read into it any more significance than the text itself provides.

In a startling turn of events, the herald then commanded that **the tree** be chopped **down**, **its branches cut off**, and both **its leaves** and **fruit** stripped away (v. 14). As a result of this horrific scene, both the cattle and **birds** fled from the remnants of this once mighty **tree** which offered great stability and provision. However, the messenger now specifically demanded that **the stump** along with its **roots** be left intact in the ground, but **bound** with **iron** and **bronze** to prevent its complete annihilation (v. 15). Thus, from a modern perspective,



it would have something like a wrought iron fence around it for protection. With only **the stump** of the formerly mighty **tree** remaining, **the grass** began to flourish in **the field**.

Suddenly, we learn that **the tree** represented a yet-to-be-identified man referenced by the messenger's declaration to **let him be** soaked **with dew** and **graze with the** animals **on the grass of** the field. The man not only lived like a wild beast in nature, but **his heart** was also **changed from that of a man** to one of an animal (v. 16). In antiquity, the **heart** did not symbolize the seat of emotion like it does today. It indicated primarily the capacity to think and reason. Today, we would refer to it as our "mind." So, in this sense, the man became unstable and insane. He had "lost his mind!" This period of insanity, however, would only last for a total of **seven** years (literally, **times**) before he would regain his senses.

Directed to deliver this divine message by the Lord, **the watchers**, or **holy ones**, could speak with absolute authority. The purpose of **the decree** was to let every **living** being **know** that **the Most High** (Yahweh) sovereignly reigns. He has complete control over the affairs of

**men**. He alone **rules** over their kingdoms, appointing **whomever** He desires to positions of leadership. While we individually have the ability to make autonomous decisions, the Lord still orchestrates whatever we may individually choose to do



according to His sovereign plan. After describing the content of the dream, Nebuchadnezzar reaffirmed his belief that Daniel could **make known this interpretation** because **the Spirit of the Holy God** lived in him—something none of the other Babylonian mediums obviously possessed.

So, what does all this mean for us? While the content of the dream demonstrates God's sovereign control over the world, it's more important to notice how the king saw God working through His servant as reflected in Daniel's character. Others must visibly see a difference in us from that of the world. We should be beacons of light that reflect Christ. Nebuchadnezzar could visibly see the difference

## *Instruct*

in Daniel which set him apart from every other Babylonian medium. But sometimes, it's not enough for them just to see the difference. We must tell them why we are different because misguided people in the world can attribute it to any number of factors. Nebuchadnezzar did. Even though he had seen God work and recognized the difference in Daniel, he still attributed this ability to interpret dreams as originating from one among the many gods—not from the only true living God.

We need to be crystal clear why we are different. The concept of “God” can mean many things to many different people. Therefore, we must be absolutely clear who God is. We must specifically proclaim that Christ Jesus is the One—and no one else—who has made the difference in our lives. He alone saved us and transformed us. We must both tell people verbally as well as show people visibly by the way we live. They must see the difference in our character. There should be a stark contrast between us and the world. Even though we cannot force them to change their beliefs—and some won't—we must leave no doubt that only one God exists who can save when we follow His plan and show contrition for our sins.

Question  
# 4

How do people view the concept of God in our society? Why is it important that we verbally demonstrate that our life-change comes through Jesus?

**THE CONDEMNATION OF THE KING:**

Upon hearing the content of the **dream**, Daniel became greatly alarmed (i.e., **astonished**) and **troubled** because he immediately understood the full implications for Nebuchadnezzar (v. 19). Whether Daniel feared retribution from the king for revealing “bad news” or he simply feared what might happen to the country in which he now lived because of the demise of its king is not clear from the text. Nonetheless, the king—who himself was terrified by the **dream** and never received negative news well—ironically tried to calm and comfort Daniel, reassuring him that he had nothing to fear. With great trepidation, however, Daniel begins to interpret the **dream** by expressing regret that he must be the bearer of bad news. He even goes so far as to say that he wished this **dream** would have been about the king’s **enemies** or **those who hate** him rather than the king himself!

In short order, Daniel then reveals the meaning of the **dream**. The great and mighty **tree** which offered protection and provision for all the inhabitants of the earth represented **the king** (vv. 20-22). As Daniel makes clear in verse 26, God alone had blessed the king with the ability to command such a great and mighty kingdom; Nebuchadnezzar hadn’t achieved these things on his own. But because of the king’s pride, self-centeredness, and ignorance of the source of his blessing from Yahweh, the God **Most High** has now issued a decree of judgment against him as symbolized by the felling of the **tree** (vv. 23-24). The Lord had determined that Nebuchadnezzar would lose both his kingdom and his sanity in an instant unless he repented of his wickedness. God wanted him to know from whence the true source of his blessing came and the importance of having a relationship with Him through repentance of **sins** and subsequently characterized by righteousness (v. 26).

Despite this threat of imminent judgment, God still generously offered the hard-hearted king numerous chances to respond to his invitation to repent. Even if he persisted in his prideful and arrogant ways, God would not completely destroy his kingdom yet. He would allow the king to return to power after a period of **seven** years—hopefully having learned a valuable lesson during his experience that would ultimately lead him to repent and turn to the Lord alone. Like the Assyrians in Nineveh when God sent Jonah (Jonah 3), the king could avert this judgment right now if he

## Instruct

would only repent of his sins and act righteously by **showing mercy to the poor** (v. 27). If Nebuchadnezzar would amend his ways, Daniel politely suggests that God **may** lengthen the time of his **prosperity**.

The way Daniel interprets the king's **dream** has two significant theological implications for us as well. First, God always uses something or sends someone to correct us before applying judgment.

God doesn't just zap us as some portray it or punish us without

warning. He always lovingly sends correction or conviction before enacting judgment. He does this with Israel as well as every other non-Jewish nation or individual. Second, God graciously gives us repeated chances to respond and repent of our **sins**. At a point when He chooses, however, those chances will end and judgment will come ([Heb 9:27](#)). After that, we will no longer have a chance to respond and the decisions that we have made on earth, especially in relation to His Son Jesus, become final. So, we must ensure that we have made the right decision and respond to the Lord while we have the chance! When we take our final breath in this life, we will receive no "second" chance because God has graciously given us hundreds and thousands of chances to respond to Him over the years.

So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them.

Jonah 3:5

Question  
# 5

Although God affords us many opportunities to repent, why is it important to help people still understand the consequences of poor decisions?



**THE CORRECTION BY GOD:**

Although Daniel made the implications of the dream very clear, King Nebuchadnezzar stubbornly persisted in his ways and hardened his heart against the Lord. Hence, everything in the dream came true (v. 28). It happened just like Daniel had foretold. In all, God had given the king **twelve months** to repent (v. 29)! At times, from our human perspective, it may look like injustice and unrighteousness win. It may even seem that sin goes unnoticed and evil goes unpunished. Yet, this is God displaying His grace and mercy. He is giving a wayward person time to respond to His call to repent and His invitation to trust in Him! Rather than decry the lack of seemingly swift justice in our world, give thanks to the Lord next time for benevolently bestowing great patience—especially because He has shown that same great patience when He deals with both you and me!

Question  
# 6

How has God shown you patience? How can you help others see God’s patience with them as an invitation to turn to Him?

Even though God has the right to punish swiftly in His righteousness, He is patient, giving us time to respond. But when the clock runs out, His judgment will assuredly and swiftly come. Although not a perfect example, think of God’s judgment like a game clock in basketball or football. We can make a “mistake” during the game—and at some point even the best athlete will err. As long as time remains on the clock, however, we can “atone” for that mistake by adjusting the way that we play. But once the buzzer sounds, we can no longer do anything about the mistake we made if we fail to learn from it and change the way we play. The game will end and the result will become final. The same principle applies with God. While God gives us breath in life, we have the ability to correct our mistakes by turning to Christ. We don’t atone for ourselves; Christ has provided that for us. We must simply trust Him, repent of our sins, and live in the transformed way to which He has called us. And we must do this before the game



## Instruct

clock in life runs out.

Nebuchadnezzar's time was up. The figurative buzzer had sounded as he walked around his **royal palace**, reveling in all his perceived accomplishments. Although he had received ample warning, the king continued arrogantly, pridefully, and ignorantly thinking that he had achieved all this on his own. Notice how he describes Babylon as **great** and attributes its greatness to his leadership by comparing it to the **palace** he had "**built**" by his **power for** his own glory (v. 30). No sooner had these words come from **the king's mouth**, than **a voice from heaven** delivered the news that his **kingdom** had **departed from** him. His dream had literally come true. People drove Nebuchadnezzar from his **palace** and he lived for **seven** years like an animal in the fields, feeding on **grass** and having his body drenched with **dew**. Rather than look like a regal royal who governed the most-powerful nation in the world at the time, he had an unkempt appearance with long **hair** and **nails** (vv. 32-33).

### In-Depth Information



While scholars all agree that Nebuchadnezzar suffered a debilitating mental illness. They are divided as to whether he actually viewed himself as an animal. Some, for example, attribute his condition to a documented mental condition called "lycanthropy" in which people regard themselves as literal animals. Others, however, suggest that the king's insanity merely caused him to neglect his appearance, hygiene, and nutrition. In either case, the king lost everything and a once-powerful man was humbled by the Lord. For a discussion, see Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), p. 133-135; Tremper Longman, III, *Daniel*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), p. 121-122.

Lest we follow in Nebuchadnezzar's footsteps, we must understand how easily we can become distracted by "our" success in life and fail to realize that we owe everything to the Lord. We live in a country that affords us with unparalleled opportunities provided that we work hard. Our country provides a high standard of living, offering any amenity that we could imagine even in the midst of rampant inflation. We have the ability to live relatively comfortably. Comfort often leads to complacency where we regard ourselves as independent and self-reliant. In such a state, many leave God out of

their decisions. They errantly think they don't need Him—even if they don't verbalize it. They believe that they can navigate life on their own. They rely on their own strength and intelligence, falsely perceiving that they achieved “success” on their own. Such a condition is not unique to Nebuchadnezzar. It can happen to any one of us if we don't maintain the right perspective about the Lord and depend upon Him alone for everything!

Question  
# 7

In what way does pride disrupt our fellowship with the Lord? How has pride, at times, specifically disrupted your fellowship with Him?

While we may not suffer mental illness like Nebuchadnezzar, something just as bad and something just as destructive can happen to us. We can leave God completely out of our lives. We can look at our bank accounts and believe that we achieved all that through our hard work. We can look at all the degrees hanging on our walls and wrongly surmise we accomplished this through our efforts alone. We can look at the trophies in our cases or commendations in our work portfolios and attribute it to our “talent.” We can take credit for the success of our families. We can look at the places we've been and the things that we've done and revel in our feats. But we must realize that without God in our lives, we have nothing. We would not have been able to achieve any of these things on our own. All our blessings come from the Lord!

*Daniel 4:34-37*

### **THE CONFESSION OF THE KING:**

After the **seven**-year period ended, Nebuchadnezzar's sanity **returned** to him and he began to praise and honor the Lord **Most High** (v. 34). Whether the king truly repented at this time and trusted in the Lord God alone, we cannot say for sure. The text simply does not state that Nebuchadnezzar forsook all his false gods to follow Yahweh alone like Abraham did ([Josh 24:2](#); [Gen 15:6](#)). Based on Scripture, we can say for sure, however, that if the king did genuinely repent of his sins and trust the Lord, then he had a relationship with Him and is in heaven today. If he did not repent and continued serving his many false gods or even added the Lord God to his pantheon of gods, then he did not have an authentic relationship with the only God who gives life. Therefore, he is in hell today based on his own choice to reject God's call to repent.

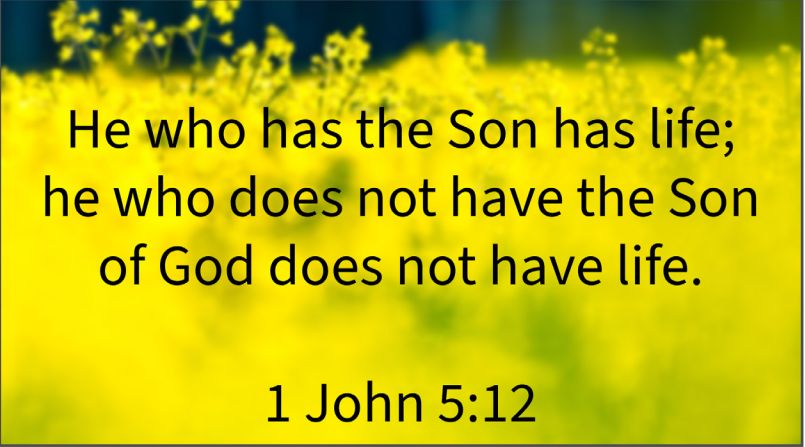
## Instruct

While we should be burdened that others have a relationship with the Lord, we must remember that it is a personal decision that only they themselves and the Lord can know for sure. We should speak the truth in love and consistently point them to Scripture, but we should primarily concentrate on our own relationship and ensure that we ourselves are in right standing with Him rather than focusing on others.

In any case, the king praises God and now understands His **dominion is everlasting** and His **kingdom spans generation to generation** (v. 34). Nebuchadnezzar now realizes that God is sovereign over all the affairs of human beings (v. 35). The phrase **the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing** thus

signifies that we owe everything to God: our existence, our health, our possession, our prosperity, our salvation, or anything that we have received. Without God, we have nothing. He is in complete control. **No one can restrain His hand**, thwart His **will**, or question why He does what He does. Nebuchadnezzar found this out the hard way when he lost his kingdom and then God graciously restored it to Him just as He had said He would (v. 36). As a result, the king now understands that God is able to humble **those who walk in pride** (v. 37). Nebuchadnezzar now knows **the truth** about the source of His blessings. Everything he had and everything he had attained came from the Lord!

In order to be in right standing with the Lord, we must show contrition for our sins when He convicts us and confess our complete dependence upon Him alone. Human pride makes this difficult. Like Nebuchadnezzar, we tend to view ourselves as capable, independent, and self-sufficient. We take pride in our accomplishments and achievements as if God had nothing to do with the blessings and benefits we received. Nothing could be further from the truth! May we not follow in Nebuchadnezzar's footsteps. Instead, may we conquer pride through contrition and rightly see the world from God's perspective, acknowledging that we owe everything to Him!



He who has the Son has life;  
he who does not have the Son  
of God does not have life.

1 John 5:12

In the introduction, we met “The Chick Bank Robber”—the epitome of arrogant stupidity. In her arrogance, she boasted in her illegal exploits online and lost her freedom for the crime she committed. Whether she repented of her crime and learned her lesson in the nearly twelve years since robbing that small community bank, we do not know. Nonetheless, we can see how sin, lack of self-control, and “victimhood” all contributed to her downfall—to which she has not ever to my knowledge expressed contrition for committing. Although most of us likely would never rob a bank and boast about it on YouTube, we all have the tendency to engage in pride on some level. And pride always disrupts our fellowship with the Lord. Instead of being prideful, arrogant, and independent, we need to depend upon the Lord for everything. After all, all that we have and who we have become in Christ depends solely upon Him. Therefore, may we have the right perspective, expressing contrition over our sins through repentance and learning to depend upon the Lord daily for all that we need.

## *Incorporate:*

Who do you consider a confidant in your life to whom you might turn for counsel? Before you go to them for counsel, what process do you use to evaluate God's will for your life?

Why is pride so difficult to overcome? How do you ensure you maintain the right perspective in life? If sidetracked by pride, how can we get back on course?

When have you been corrected by God for being prideful? What did you learn from that situation?

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