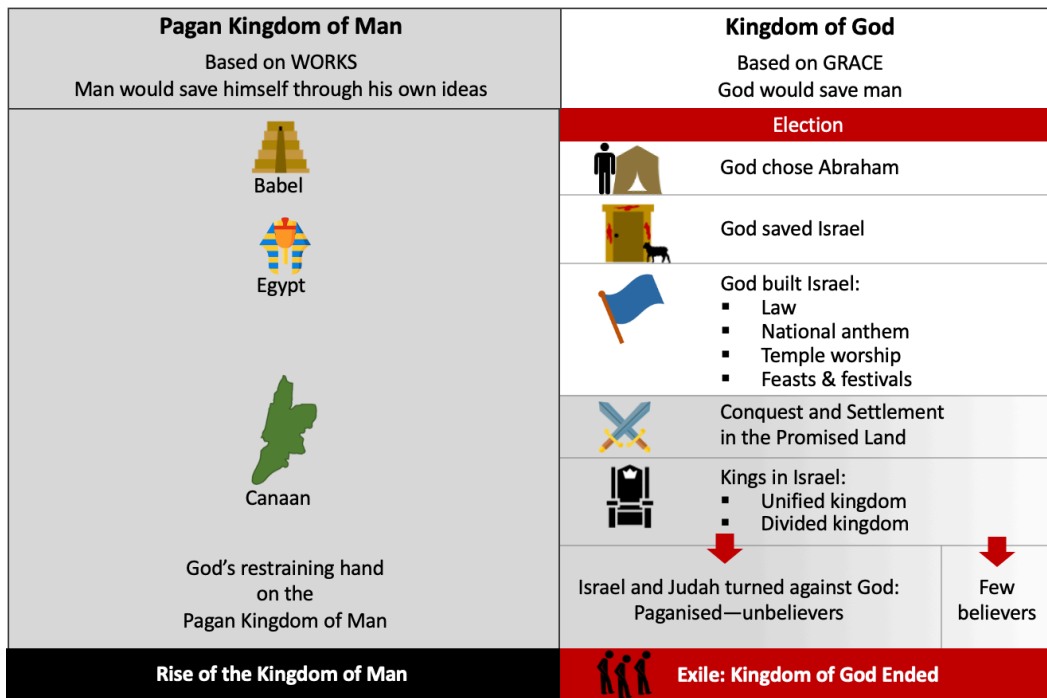


Lesson 27: Living as Believers in a Pagan Culture

Previously...

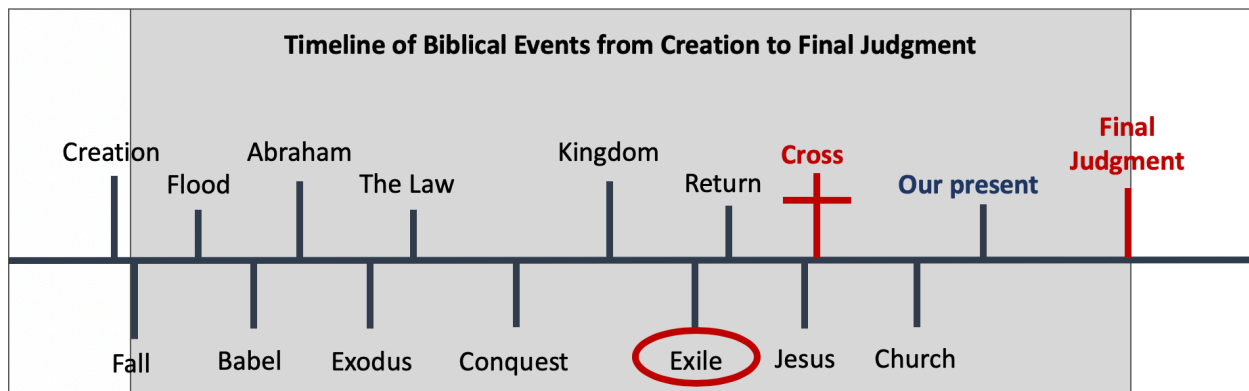
Despite God’s faithful love and care for His people, both Israel and Judah rebelled and became paganised. So Yahweh started the fifth and final stage of cursing that He promised under the Sinaitic Covenant: exile.

At this time, God handed political power of the world over to the Gentiles. And the exiled Jews ended up in Babylon.



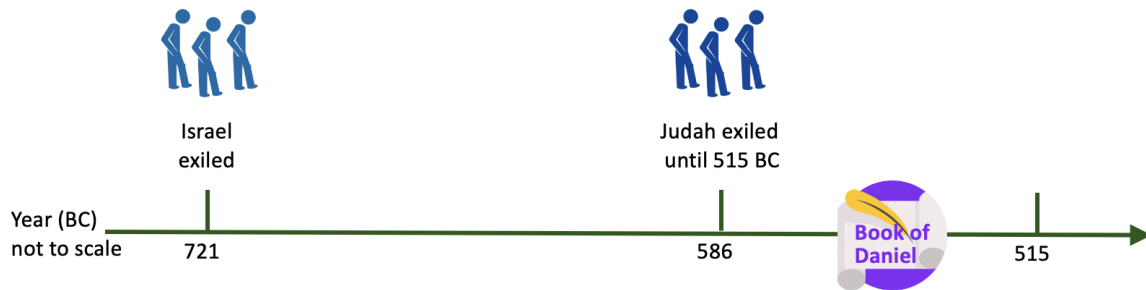
Grey shows paganisation

It was a new season for them where they had to live in the Kingdom of Man under pagan laws. But how were they to live? God didn’t leave them without guidance.

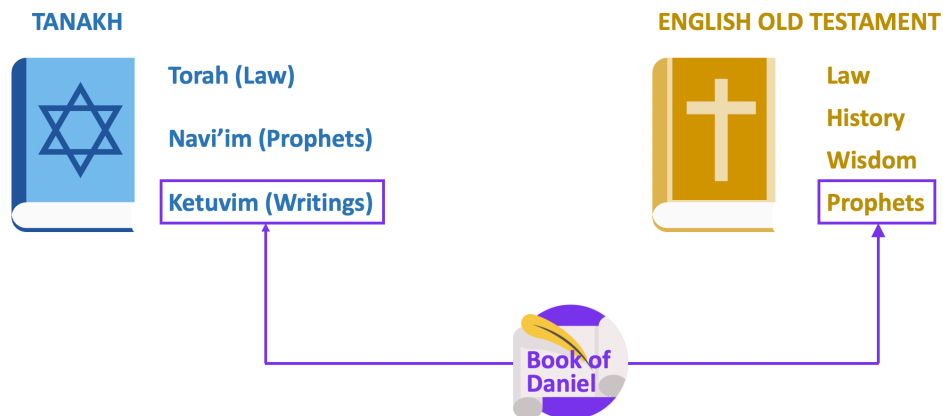


The book of Daniel is a “wisdom” book

The book of Daniel was written by Daniel during the time of the exile.



In translations of the Bible, it is found in the “prophets” section. However, in the Hebrew Bible, it is in the “writings” section. The Hebrew Bible is divided into three sections, (i) the law, (ii) the prophets and (iii) the writings. Daniel is in the “writings” section together with other wisdom books like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

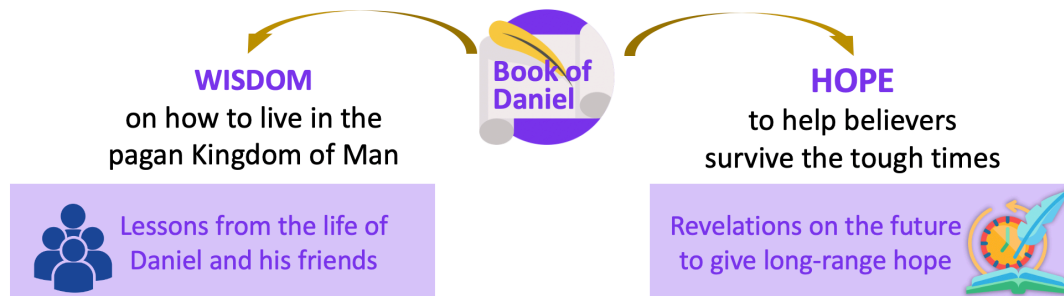


Why is it in the “writings” or wisdom section?

Though it contains prophecies, the main purpose of Daniel is to give believers **wisdom** on how to live in a world ruled by the pagan Kingdom of Man. Daniel and his friends are models for believers on how to live when Gentiles rule the political world and where Satan remains the “god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4).



The prophecies in Daniel are meant to assure believers about the future: the Kingdom of God will ultimately return and win. This is to give the isolated, suffering and persecuted believers **hope** during the period when the pagan Kingdom of Man seems to be stronger.



Life for the Young Exiles in the Pagan Kingdom of Man

Exiled to Babylon, the Jews had to live in a foreign land under a pagan government who had different religions and values. They had no Jewish temple to worship in. They could not make sacrifices and they were cut off from the prophets of God. They were truly isolated.

In addition, King Nebuchadnezzar planned to strengthen his kingdom by raising a generation of talented young Jews to serve in his Babylonian government.

Daniel 1:3–7

³ Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, his chief of staff, to bring to the palace some of the young men of Judah’s royal family and other noble families, who had been brought to Babylon as captives. ⁴ “Select only strong, healthy, and good-looking young men,” he said. “Make sure they are well versed in every branch of learning, are gifted with knowledge and good judgment, and are suited to serve in the royal palace. Train these young men in the language and literature of Babylon.” ⁵ The king assigned them a daily ration of food and wine from his own kitchens. They were to be trained for three years, and then they would enter the royal service.

⁶ Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were four of the young men chosen, all from the tribe of Judah. ⁷ The chief of staff renamed them with these Babylonian names: Daniel was called Belteshazzar. Hananiah was called Shadrach. Mishael was called Meshach. Azariah was called Abednego.

The king’s plan was to change the Jewish boys into Babylonian citizens by:

- i. Giving them a pagan education
- ii. Immersing them in pagan culture and
- iii. Erasing their identity and public testimony.



The boys were separated from their parents and put in a public school system grounded in pagan principles. The objective was to re-educate them to Babylonian values and beliefs so they could fit into Babylonian culture. Their three-year curriculum probably included Babylonian cuneiform, astrology, divination, books of symbols, astro-deities, mythology, algebra, Aramaic, etc.

The Babylonians also planned to destroy the boys' loyalty to Yahweh by changing their names and hence their identities and public testimony. These boys all had names after Yahweh's character. The Babylonians humiliated them by throwing away the names their parents gave them and replacing them with names that honoured Babylonian gods instead.

Their original names and meaning	Their Babylonian names and meaning
Daniel ("God is my judge")	Belteshazzar ("May Bel protect his life")
Hananiah ("Yahweh is gracious")	Shadrach (possibly referring to the idol Marduk)
Mishael ("Who is like God?")	Meshach ("Who is Acho?", the moon god)
Azariah ("Yahweh is my helper")	Abed-nego ("Servant of Nebo", a false god)

- Every time Daniel wrote his Babylonian name, he was saying: "May Bel protect my life". (Note: Bel is the Babylonian word for "lord". It refers to one of the Babylonian gods.)
- Every time Hananiah was called Shadrach, he was reminded of the idol Marduk and not Yahweh.
- Every time Mishael used his Babylonian name, it testified to the moon god and not the Creator-God of the whole universe whom he worshipped.
- And poor Azariah had a name which made him a slave of a false god instead of being reminded that Yahweh is his helper.

The Babylonians wanted them to forget their God and who they were.

It is estimated that Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were about 14 years old when they were exiled. The Babylonians tried to brainwash them and change their hearts and souls.

However, these Jewish boys remained firm in their loyalty to Yahweh and instead impacted the Kingdom of Man around them.

A. How Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah lived and the biblical principles guiding them.

Even though Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were political hostages in a foreign land, they not just survived, but thrived.

How did they do it?

Here are some general principles that drove their words, actions and choices.



Principle 1: Choose the battle.

As political prisoners, there were many things Daniel could have protested against.

- He could have protested over the pagan curriculum and argued that he didn't want to study astrology or divination. But he didn't.
- He could have protested the insulting new names that they had been given. But he didn't.
- The one thing he did protest was the food.



Daniel 1:8

But Daniel was determined not to defile himself by eating the food and wine given to them by the king. He asked the chief of staff for permission not to eat these unacceptable foods.



Why food? What was it about the meat and wine that made Daniel want to protest? Jews were not vegetarians and wine was not forbidden under Mosaic Law.

But Yahweh had made His people distinct in their culture and that included their diet. Now the officials were forcing Daniel to eat a Babylonian diet. Daniel probably wanted to maintain his Jewish distinctiveness and was possibly protesting against their food because it was linked to the worship of Babylonian gods.

The apostle Paul gives some perspective on this.

He says in general, it is fine for believers to eat food even if it has been offered to idols, because idols mean nothing.

1 Corinthians 8:4–6, 8

⁴ So, what about eating meat that has been offered to idols? Well, we all know that an idol is not really a god and that there is only one God. ⁵ There may be so-called gods both in heaven and on earth, and some people actually worship many gods and many lords.

⁶ But for us, There is one God, the Father, by whom all things were created, and for whom we live. And there is one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things were created, and through whom we live. ⁸ It's true that we can't win God's approval by what we eat. We don't lose anything if we don't eat it, and we don't gain anything if we do.

However, Paul has different instructions in cases where the food is part of a religious ceremony such as in communion.

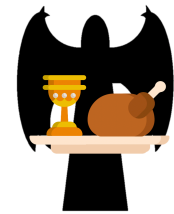
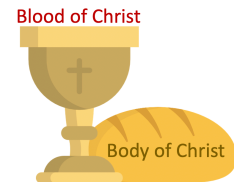
He says that while idols are not real gods, food involved in religious rites are offered to demons. In eating such food, people are willingly submitting their spirit to the demonic spirits and this will anger God.

1 Corinthians 10:14–22

¹⁴ So, my dear friends, flee from the worship of idols. ¹⁵ You are reasonable people. Decide for yourselves if what I am saying is true.

¹⁶ When we bless the cup at the Lord's Table, aren't we sharing in the blood of Christ? And when we break the bread, aren't we sharing in the body of Christ? ¹⁷ And though we are many, we all eat from one loaf of bread, showing that we are one body. ¹⁸ Think about the people of Israel. Weren't they united by eating the sacrifices at the altar?

¹⁹ What am I trying to say? Am I saying that food offered to idols has some significance, or that idols are real gods? ²⁰ No, not at all. I am saying that these sacrifices are offered to demons, not to God. And I don't want you to participate with demons. ²¹ You cannot drink from the cup of the Lord and from the cup of demons, too. You cannot eat at the Lord's Table and at the table of demons, too. ²² What? Do we dare to rouse the Lord's jealousy? Do you think we are stronger than he is?



So, there are actually different categories of eating food:

1. Buying and eating food from the meat market is okay for believers, even when it is offered to idols.

1 Corinthians 10:25–26

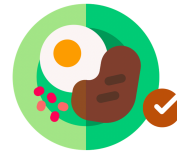
²⁵ So you may eat any meat that is sold in the marketplace without raising questions of conscience. ²⁶ For "the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it."



2. Eating food that has been offered to idols at a regular dinner invitation is okay.

1 Corinthians 10:27

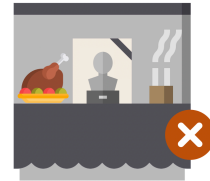
If someone who isn't a believer asks you home for dinner, accept the invitation if you want to. Eat whatever is offered to you without raising questions of conscience.



3. However, it is not all right to eat food that has been offered to idols in a religious ceremony, or food that is closely identified with religious beliefs. This is where believers need to make a stand and refuse to participate.

1 Corinthians 10:28–29a

²⁸ (But suppose someone tells you, "This meat was offered to an idol." Don't eat it, out of consideration for the conscience of the one who told you. ²⁹ It might not be a matter of conscience for you, but it is for the other person.)



This is perhaps why Daniel chose to focus on the food because he refused to compromise his own worship of God.

Thought to ponder

Some believers think we have to fight the pagan system at every point. However, this is not how Daniel approached it. Even though he disagreed with many things within the pagan system, he went along with much of it. For example:

- **Curriculum:** Perhaps he reasoned that his strong foundation in God's Word would help him know truth from lie. He would learn what was being taught, give the teachers what they wanted on the final exam but retain his own solid belief in God. Education would not change his soul because he had God's Word firmly planted in his heart.
- **Name:** Perhaps Daniel understood that a bad name doesn't change a person's true character, especially if he were rooted in God. So this wasn't worth protesting.



He saved all his energy for the issue that mattered, the one that would impact his soul and his fellowship with God: the worship of idols.

Daniel didn't have enough resources to fight everything in the pagan system. If he had tried, he would not have been able to survive in the Gentile world.



This is perhaps why God recorded the model of Daniel for believers to learn. We see in him a principle of being cooperative without compromising faith in God. This encourages us to do likewise:

- be discerning
- know when to tolerate and keep our peace
- know when to stand up against the system
- choose carefully and prayerfully which battles to fight.



Principle 2: Protest as peacefully as possible by submitting to authority.

Daniel respected the authority God had placed over him, so he made a request through official channels. He didn't stage a hunger protest nor start a huge uproar. He was submissive to authority.

Daniel 1:8–9

⁸ But Daniel was determined not to defile himself by eating the food and wine given to them by the king. He asked the chief of staff for permission not to eat these unacceptable foods. ⁹ Now God had given the chief of staff both respect and affection for Daniel.

Daniel's approach was one of peace. Paul also talks about this in the New Testament.

Romans 12:18

Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.

God blessed Daniel for this approach by giving the chief of staff affection for him. God caused the man to recognise that Daniel was not a trouble-making brat, but a boy with character.





? Thought to ponder

If God puts in place official channels where we can be firm in our stand and yet submissive and respectful to authority, we should use them. This choice would allow us to voice our concerns and protest with grace and truth, and be a good testimony for God with our good conduct.



Principle 3: Use practical arguments.

The chief of staff could have responded in three ways to Daniel's request.

	May we have permission not to eat the food we have been given?		
YES ...you don't need to eat the food we provide.	NO ...you must eat whatever we give you!	MAYBE...?	

In this case, he didn't say yes or no, it was more like a "maybe".

He told Daniel his fear, that he would be beheaded by the king for not carrying out his duty responsibly.

Daniel 1:10–16

¹⁰ But he responded, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has ordered that you eat this food and wine. If you become pale and thin compared to the other youths your age, I am afraid the king will have me beheaded."

¹¹ Daniel spoke with the attendant who had been appointed by the chief of staff to look after Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. ¹² “Please test us for ten days on a diet of vegetables and water,” Daniel said. ¹³ “At the end of the ten days, see how we look compared to the other young men who are eating the king’s food. Then make your decision in light of what you see.”

¹⁴ The attendant agreed to Daniel’s suggestion and tested them for ten days. ¹⁵ At the end of the ten days, Daniel and his three friends looked healthier and better nourished than the young men who had been eating the food assigned by the king. ¹⁶ So after that, the attendant fed them only vegetables instead of the food and wine provided for the others.

Daniel empathised with the concerns of the Babylonian staff: they needed the students to be healthy and look well-nourished. Daniel knew they didn’t care for his religious reasons, so he didn’t say:

- “My God forbids me to eat food offered to idols”,
- “You are going against my belief” or
- “Vegetables are okay for me because they have not been offered to idols”.

Instead, Daniel simply proposed a practical solution. “Test to see if what I’m asking for will still get you what you want: healthy, well-fed students.”

Daniel was trying to change the attendant’s answer from “Maybe... because I’m afraid” to “Yes, because you still look well-fed”.

God honoured Daniel’s approach and he won his first confrontation with the Kingdom of Man.

God blessed the boys by the way they chose to live. He gave them mastery over their Babylonian studies. And God helped them stand firm in their faith. At about the age of 17, these godly young men entered the Babylonian government service.

Daniel 1:17–20

¹⁷ God gave these four young men an unusual aptitude for understanding every aspect of literature and wisdom. And God gave Daniel the special ability to interpret the meanings of visions and dreams. ¹⁸ When the training period ordered by the king was completed, the chief of staff brought all the young men to King Nebuchadnezzar.

¹⁹ The king talked with them, and no one impressed him as much as Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. So they entered the royal service. ²⁰ Whenever the king consulted them in any matter requiring wisdom and balanced judgment, he found them ten times more capable than any of the magicians and enchanters in his entire kingdom.



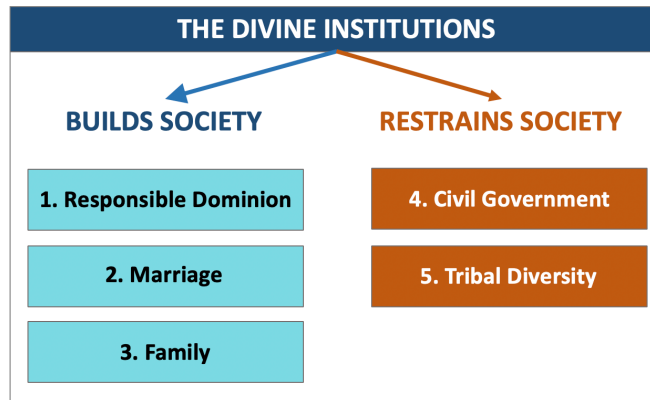
Thought to ponder

We may have our own biblical beliefs on why something is right or wrong. However, most unbelievers are not interested in our religious reasons, our morals or God’s morals. When we live among unbelievers, it would be wise for us to propose, whenever possible, practical reasons and focus on what works rather than what is “right” or “wrong”.



But what if the Gentile government demands something that is outright anti-God?

The fourth divine institution that God introduced was civil government.



Believers are told to obey the civil government God puts in place (Mark 12:17; Romans 13:1–7; Titus 3:1).

1 Peter 2:13–17

¹³ For the Lord's sake, submit to all human authority—whether the king as head of state, ¹⁴ or the officials he has appointed. For the king has sent them to punish those who do wrong and to honor those who do right. ¹⁵ It is God's will that your honorable lives should silence those ignorant people who make foolish accusations against you. ¹⁶ For you are free, yet you are God's slaves, so don't use your freedom as an excuse to do evil. ¹⁷ Respect everyone, and love the family of believers. Fear God, and respect the king.

But what if the government demands idolatry, which God vehemently forbids (Exodus 20:3–6)? This is one of the worst kinds of threats to a believer: when civil government gives instructions for idolatry or passes laws that go against Yahweh.

What should a believer do? Obey or disobey?

Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah faced different situations where they had to decide if they were going to follow the laws set out by the authorities or rebel against them.

Situation 1: Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah in the fiery furnace under King Nebuchadnezzar

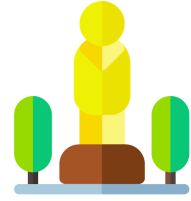
During his reign, King Nebuchadnezzar erected an idol and commanded everyone to worship it. All the Jews bowed to the idol, but Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah refused to.

Daniel 3:4–7 (NIV)

⁴ Then the herald loudly proclaimed, "Nations and peoples of every language, this is what you are commanded to do: ⁵ As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre,

harp, pipe and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. ⁶ Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.”

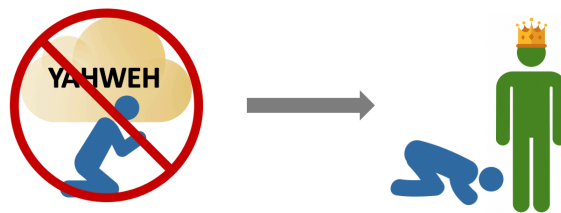
⁷ Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the nations and peoples of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.



Situation 2: Daniel in the lion’s den under King Darius

Daniel was one of only three high officials in the entire Persian kingdom. He was doing so well as a leader that it made the other leaders jealous. So they conspired to find fault with him, but couldn’t.

Finally they went behind Daniel’s back and tricked King Darius into believing that all the leaders agreed that he should give a command to ban prayer! They were to worship no other god except for the king himself.



Clearly, Daniel had not agreed to this. They lied in order to manipulate the king to trap Daniel.

Daniel 6:6–7

⁶ So the administrators and high officers went to the king and said, “Long live King Darius!








⁷ We are all in agreement—we administrators, officials, high officers, advisers, and governors—that the king should make a law that will be strictly enforced. Give orders that for the next thirty days any person who prays to anyone, divine or human—except to you, Your Majesty—will be thrown into the den of lions.

In both these situations, the men chose to defy the government.

Under any circumstance, disobeying the government that God put in place is a very serious matter.

However, the way that Daniel and the three men did it gives us good principles on their motives and how it can be done.

B. Principles to consider regarding disobeying the government

1		Disobedience is legitimate when we are prevented from worshipping Yahweh.
2		Lean on God and His Word to guide our words and actions.
3		When disobeying, the most powerful witness to God is an act of trust followed by clear explanation of the motive.
4		In disobeying the government, show respect and submit to the required punishment.
5		Know the sovereignty of God and know the believer's role within the pagan Kingdom of Man.
6		Maintain integrity and continue to pray.
7		Pray for the pagan city.



Principle 1: Disobedience is legitimate when we are prevented from worshipping Yahweh.

Believers are citizens of the Kingdom of God first and our loyalty must first be to Yahweh.

Philippians 3:20

But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior.

<p align="center">Pagan Kingdom of Man</p> <p align="center">Based on WORKS Man would save himself through his own ideas</p>	<p align="center">Kingdom of God</p> <p align="center">Based on GRACE God would save man</p>
	 <p>Believers are citizens of the Kingdom of God</p>

As awful as the exile was, it was part of God's sovereign plan for His people to live outside a literal, political Kingdom of God.

And God's instruction for them was not to rebel against Him or the authorities He put in place (Jeremiah 27:4–8). The Bible records that Daniel and the three men kept all the laws of the Babylonian government except:

- Eating food offered to idols in religious ceremony, which is idolatry. (Daniel 1:8)
- Bowing before a government sponsored idol. (Daniel 3:7)
- Ceasing to pray to Yahweh. (Daniel 6:7)

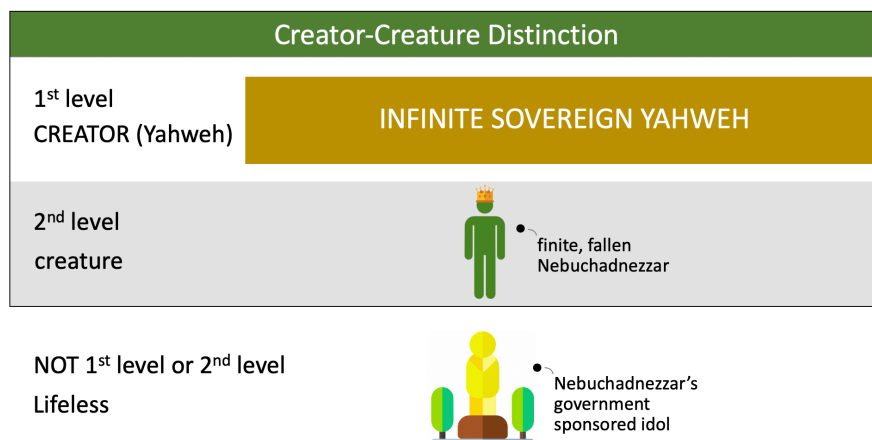
This is because those laws commanded them to stop worshipping God and start worshipping mere man and idols.

Moreover, Nebuchadnezzar directly challenged Yahweh and His character. He believed he had more power and authority than the God of the Jews.

Daniel 3:15

I will give you one more chance to bow down and worship the statue I have made when you hear the sound of the musical instruments. But if you refuse, you will be thrown immediately into the blazing furnace. And then what god will be able to rescue you from my power?"

This gave the men even more legitimate reason to defy Nebuchadnezzar. This issue was clearly about the worship of Yahweh.



? Thought to ponder

Before believers defy the government, we need to clearly understand God's Word with regards to the issue we are defying:

- Are the authorities preventing us from worshipping God?
- Do the laws interfere with areas that believers do not compromise on such as our freedom to pray, teach the Bible, gather in church, conduct baptism or communion?



- Are the authorities overstepping their legitimate authority by attempting to control areas that God did not mean for them to control (for example: civil government trying to control marriage and family)?

If the answer is yes, then we next need to carefully search our heart for our motives.

➔ Are we doing this out of loyalty to God or for some ulterior motive?



Civil disobedience is never something we should take lightly or casually but with care and much prayer. If the Holy Spirit keeps burdening us to make a stand on a certain issue, then we need God's Word, prayer, the Holy Spirit's guidance and godly counsel before we decide to defy.



Importantly, we should also pray that the nations we live in do not use their authority to force believers into idolatry. We need to pray that our religious freedom is not taken away. We need to pray that the authorities do not force a pagan state religion on their citizens.

But if it comes to that, the book of Daniel is God's provision for us on how we are to live during those times.



Principle 2: Lean on God and His Word to guide our words and actions.

Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were "all alone".

- They didn't know what Yahweh would do about Nebuchadnezzar's command for all people to bow to the statue.
- There was no prophet to tell them how this would turn out.
- Their parents weren't there so they couldn't ask them.
- Daniel was also not around. They could not lean on him for support and help.

So they relied on God and the Scripture they knew. The Mosaic Law stated very clearly that they were to worship Yahweh alone and not idols. Based on this very critical truth, they acted accordingly and trusted God with the results.

Daniel 3:17–18

¹⁷ If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. ¹⁸ But even if he doesn't, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up."

They were calm and showed tremendous faith though they didn't know if Yahweh would deliver them.

- Perhaps they reasoned that if they died, they were assured of eternal life with God. And they would be glorifying God in their deaths.
- And if they lived, they would glorify God through their lives.

Either way, they were certain of glorifying God, so it didn't make a difference to them.

In any case, they were firm. Nothing, not even death, would make them change their minds about bowing to idols.



Thought to ponder

Some of our worst trials may come when we are isolated from other believers and when we don't have access to godly counsel like our pastors. Sometimes God allows such trials so we will learn how to lean on Him and not on anyone else. So what should we do? Look at God's Word, be obedient to it and have confidence in the One in whom our trust rests.



Principle 3: When the choice is to disobey, the most powerful witness to God is an act of trust followed by clear explanation of the motive.

- Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah showed their trust in God by saying, "The God whom we serve is able to save us" (Daniel 3:17).
- Then they told the king their reason for disobeying him: "We want to make it clear to you... we will never serve your gods" (Daniel 3:18). The men didn't want the king to misunderstand their motives.



Thought to ponder

If in defying authority, we intend to be a witness to God, we need to articulate our faith in a clear and straightforward way without religious jargon. We can only be a witness to God if the government we are defying clearly understands our motives.

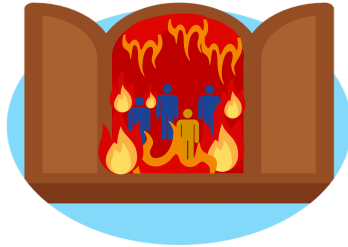


Principle 4: In disobeying the government, show respect and submit to the required punishment.

Even in the rare case where there was very good biblical reason to disobey the government, Daniel and his friends were not rude. They continued to be respectful and honoured the king by greeting both Nebuchadnezzar and Darius with "Long live the king!" (Daniel 3:9, 6:21).

Also, they recognised the government's authority and submitted to the required punishment for their disobedience.

- The three men didn't fight the punishment of being thrown into the furnace.



- Daniel didn't protest going into the lion's den.



Instead, Daniel acted in faith even when he was tossed into the dirty, smelly cesspool of a den, filled with the remains of dead victims. The Bible says that it was due to his faith that God shut the mouths of the lions.

Hebrews 11:33

By faith these people overthrew kingdoms, ruled with justice, and received what God had promised them. They shut the mouths of lions,



Thought to ponder

An important part of choosing disobedience is that we must be prepared for the consequences. If the consequence is jail time or a large fine, we need to accept that.

While God has the ability to save us, following His sovereign plan, He may not. It is He who has given the authorities the power to impose law. So we need to be ready to submit to any penalty for disobedience.



Principle 5: Know the sovereignty of God and know the believer's role within the pagan Kingdom of Man.

Daniel's trial did not end when he got out of the lion's den. He had to watch as King Darius put the conspiring leaders and their families to death for falsely accusing Daniel and manipulating the king.

Daniel 6:23–24


²³ The king was overjoyed and ordered that Daniel be lifted from the den. Not a scratch was found on him, for he had trusted in his God. ²⁴ Then the king gave orders to arrest the men who had maliciously accused Daniel. He had them thrown into the lions' den, along with their wives and children. The lions leaped on them and tore them apart before they even hit the floor of the den.

No doubt this violent act disturbed Daniel. What King Darius did was totally against Mosaic Law. In Yahweh's law, children are not to be put to death for the sins of their parents.

Deuteronomy 24:16

Parents must not be put to death for the sins of their children, nor children for the sins of their parents. Those deserving to die must be put to death for their own crimes.

Daniel had to stand by quietly and watch King Darius carry out this unjust act. His own beliefs disagreed with it. But Daniel didn't intervene. He knew he wasn't the authority in this situation—King Darius was.



? Thought to ponder

How does a believer apply the Word of God while living in the Kingdom of Man? What should a believer do when he sees unjust laws being applied?

From the example of Daniel, it appears that while believers should try to influence the law to be in line with God's wise laws, we should do it only to the limits of our authority.

As regular citizens, we can use our vote and petition through official channels, but ultimately, we need to recognise that there are higher authorities put in place by our sovereign God. We don't know, see or understand all things the way He does. This means that, if for whatever reason God allows our petition to be overruled, we need to step aside knowing that He is sovereign even over wicked nations.

(Note: In the book of Acts, we can also learn from the apostle Paul how to handle government authorities. In Acts 21, the local Roman authorities arrested Paul after a Jewish mob accused him of trying to destroy the Jewish faith. But Paul used his rights as a Roman citizen to appeal to higher Roman authority and in this way, escape from the false accusations of the Jews. The lesson here is that when there are different levels of civil authority with conflicting rules, believers can try to appeal to the rules of the highest authority as Paul did in Acts 16:16–40, 23:1–25:27.)

**Principle 6: Maintain integrity and continue to pray.**

Daniel wasn't embarrassed by his regular practice of praying three times a day. Neither was he intimidated by the threat against him for doing so.

After the law against praying was given, many believers would have been tempted to hide and pray secretly. But Daniel was a man of high integrity and great courage.

Daniel 6:10

But when Daniel learned that the law had been signed, he went home and knelt down as usual in his upstairs room, with its windows open toward Jerusalem. He prayed three times a day, just as he had always done, giving thanks to his God.

Daniel had such great confidence in God and His Word that he risked his entire career, reputation and life to remain loyal to Yahweh. He trusted God to take care of the results.

**? Thought to ponder**

The Kingdom of Man always tries to intimidate believers. If Satan cannot get the believer to deny Jesus openly, he will try to get the believer to avoid confrontation by submitting to evil. Either way, Satan would have won.

Do we have enough faith in Yahweh to risk our home, wealth, status, reputation or children so as to remain loyal to Him? Or is it too high a price to pay?

Also, Daniel was a very busy man. He was the equivalent of the Secretary of State. Yet he prayed three times a day. Daniel had a lifestyle of prayer that gave him the spiritual muscle to stand alone against King Darius and his whole administration.

Often, we fill our lives till we are too busy to pray even once a day. If we want to thrive while in the pagan Kingdom of Man, we need to prioritise time with the One who can give us all the resources we need to honour God in the way we live.

**Principle 7: Pray for the pagan city.**

God told the prophet Jeremiah to tell the exiled Jews that they were to seek the welfare of their captive city.

Jeremiah 29:7

And work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, for its welfare will determine your welfare.”

Daniel did just that. He was a very hardworking and responsible leader in Babylon.

**? Thought to ponder**

God wants believers to pray for the pagan land. He wants us to ask for peace so that even if the people aren't believers, His divine institutions are working well.

And God wants us to actively work in it. Be involved, participate, use the wisdom He gave to contribute to society. God will bless believers through the pagan city: “Its welfare will determine your welfare.”

Therefore, as believers in a pagan land, we should pray for our land, our government and seek to contribute to its overall welfare. In this way, believers can be a good testimony to unbelievers.

Choices that believers have living in the pagan Kingdom of Man

When faced with pagan law, government, institutions, beliefs and values, believers have several responses to choose from:

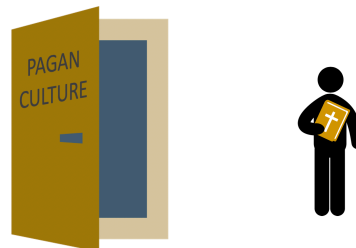
1. **Give in:** some believers fully accept the value system of the pagan society and give up on godly values.



2. **Accommodate:** when there is disagreement between what the world says and what the Bible says, some believers choose to reinterpret Scripture. They take on the “buffet” approach to the Bible: they take what they can “fit” into the world’s beliefs and they leave out, ignore or reinterpret the obvious conflicts.



3. **Physical separation:** some believers choose to separate themselves physically by living a hermit or monastery-like life. Others try to freeze time and culture to a past period that they deem better than the current (for example, the Amish). This physical separation does not get rid of the problem of sin and evil because sin still lives in their own hearts. Also, this destroys any opportunity to share the gospel with the pagan world.



The Bible doesn't recommended any of these choices.

This is what Scripture says:

- 4. **Real separation of the mind and heart:** God wants us to physically live in the world, among the pagans. But He wants us to have a real separation from them in our mind and heart.

Romans 12:2

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.



First, God does not want us to copy the behaviour and customs of the pagan world.

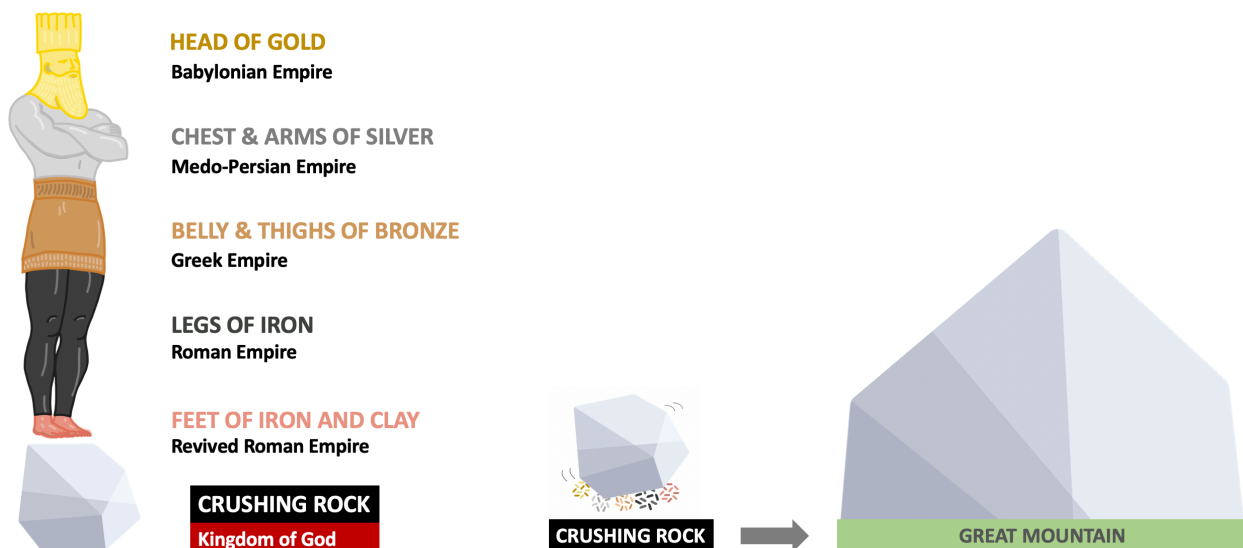
God wants us to know the dangerous influences the pagan world can have on us. He doesn't want us to thoughtlessly and blindly follow their ways.

Second, God wants to change our thinking.

If our minds are influenced by the teachings of the world and by peer pressure, our behaviour will soon become very pagan as well. But if we focus on God's thoughts, His truth will change our minds, hearts, choices and behaviours. Notice that the focus in the verse is not on where we live or what we are doing. It is on how we think.

Successful mental separation also includes focusing on the future that God told us about in the apocalyptic literature.

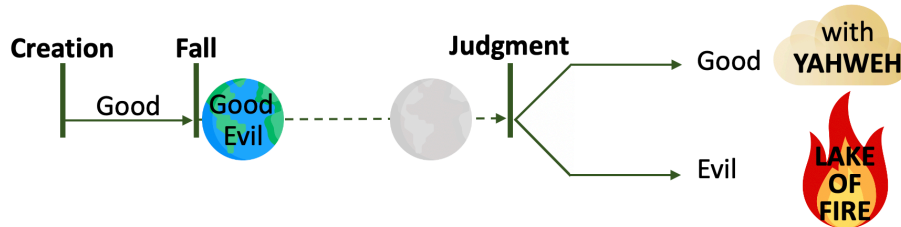
Daniel understood the vision that God had given King Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2:31–45). The "stone not cut by human hands" that crushes the statue means God will crush the pagan world and rule in the end. Daniel knew that God's judgment will come on the pagan nations. Yahweh will bring in His good end for all history. It will be God's work, not man's, not believers, not the church. He is the only Saviour.



In the New Testament, the apostle John tells us that this pagan world has already started fading away. God is working toward His ultimate victory.

1 John 2:16–17

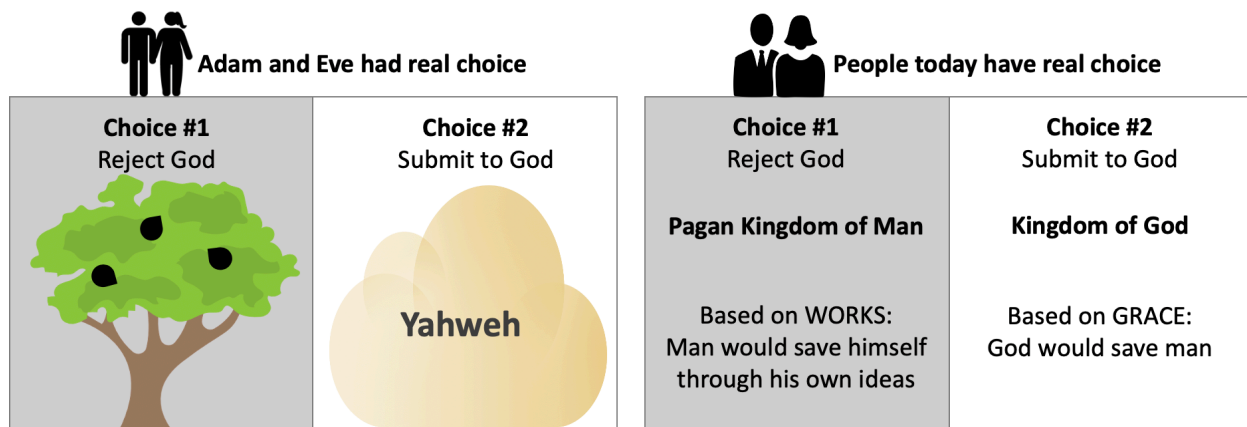
¹⁶ For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world. ¹⁷ And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave. But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever.



If we know how the story ends, we can view our current problem in light of that final picture. Long-range faith makes people very tough. We will have a total world and life view that no one can dislodge.

While living as believers in a pagan world requires a lot of prayer, discernment and guidance from God and His Word, we should not resent it.

Just as the tree of knowledge of good and evil gave Adam and Eve a real choice of rejecting or submitting to God, the presence of the pagan Kingdom of Man gives people a choice of rebelling against or obeying God.



Let us lean on God to know how best to live in the pagan Kingdom of Man for His glory.

Should our children be shielded from all unchristian influences because it will destroy their faith?

Believing parents have different ways of bringing up their children. Some parents:

1. **Don't train their children in God's Word.** They make no effort to build their children's faith and rely on the church or Christian schools instead. Their children know so little about God that when they go out into the world, they are immediately overwhelmed by pagan culture.



2. **Train their children in God's Word alone.** These parents take personal responsibility. They put in time and effort to build their children's faith. But they don't teach their children how to respond to the deeply unsatisfying beliefs and behaviours of pagan society. Not training them about pagan society is like training soldiers but then never giving them experience in successfully using their training against the enemy. The risk is high that when they go out into the pagan world, they will lose their first battle (and many more).



3. **Shield them from the pagan world but with no Bible training.** These parents don't bother with much Bible training but build a bubble around their children. They limit exposure to non-Christian books, music, movies and pop culture. They think they can prevent the world from corrupting their children's minds. The problem is that evil resides in our children's hearts. Without any training in God's Word, their own sin nature will overwhelm them.



4. **Train them in God's Word and shield them from the pagan world.** This may work if the children never leave the safety of home. But God has instructed us to go into all the world to make disciples (Matthew 28:18–20). We would be disobedient to God's Word if we prevented our children from going out and intentionally engaging with unbelievers.



5. **Train them in God's Word and train them to understand the ways of the pagan world.** These parents aim to teach their children how to use God's Word to disarm and dismantle the pagan worldview. They believe that careful training in God's Word and guided, age-appropriate exposure to pagan culture will help their children learn how to be discerning. Their aim is to firmly ground them in God's Word and still ensure they would be fully capable of engaging the pagan world.



Which is the best approach?

Let's look at some biblical examples.



Daniel is one of the most famous examples of how a child trained in the Word of God can survive alone in a very pagan world even when he is immersed in non-biblical training.



Joseph is another. He was carted away from his home and family as a young boy and left in Egyptian culture, but he never lost his identity and loyalty to Yahweh (Genesis 41:37–52).

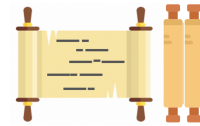


Moses grew up learning Egyptian beliefs, values and worldview in Pharaoh's household (Acts 7:22), yet he became one of the most outspoken teachers of God's Word.

How did this happen? Why didn't the unbiblical content ruin these boys' faith in Yahweh?

Training in the Word of God in their early years

All three boys had firm and deep knowledge of Yahweh from a young age. The way they spoke and acted even when they were torn from their homes and placed in a foreign culture showed their parents must have taught them about God, how to pray and how to apply their faith in God to everyday life. Getting to that stage of faith in God was not a small thing. Their parents must have been very diligent teachers.

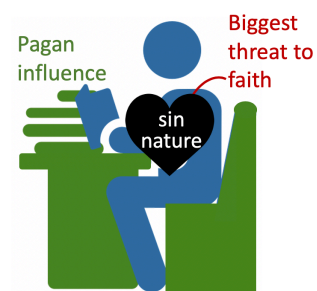


The examples of these believers show us that pagan culture does not necessarily ruin a person's faith.

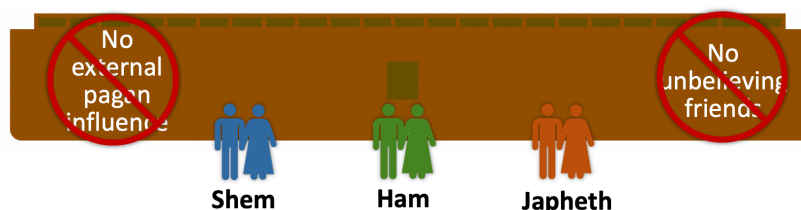
It is the lack of Scripture training that ruins their faith.

Believers who have never developed obedience to God's teaching are likely to fall, with or without pagan content. Why?

This is because the biggest threat to our faith doesn't come from external influences. It is internal: it is our sinful hearts. Our sin nature is what influences us toward rebellion and unbelief.



God showed this through the lives of Noah, his children and grandchildren. Noah's family did not have "outside" influence. They didn't have unbiblical content or unbelieving friends to pollute their minds and lives. Yet, Noah's family degenerated very quickly into full-blown sin and rebellion as we saw in the incident at Babel.



God-loving parents who understand that their children's own sin nature is the biggest threat to their children's lives, will make great effort to ground their children in God's Word. The Holy Spirit uses God's Word to build faith in a child's heart. Faith grounded in the truths and promises of God is what enabled Daniel, Joseph and Moses to stand against external pagan influences.



If their parents had not focused on building up their faith, no amount of shielding while under their parents' care would have prepared them for the pagan influences which they had to live under at a later age.

Another lesson we can learn from Daniel and his friends is that they made the most of their pagan education but knew how to distinguish it from God's Word.

Daniel was an excellent student. He and his friends topped their classes. This meant they were the best in their classes in subjects such as astrology and divination, content that most believers today would avoid.

However, just because they could repeat and regurgitate what they had been taught in class did not mean they believed in it. It just meant they diligently learnt the Babylonian beliefs and could clearly and reasonably articulate them. They knew how to separate being a good student in the pagan system from their own personal beliefs.

What did God think about this? Did God think doing this was dishonouring to Him in any way? It doesn't appear to be the case. In fact, God honoured their attitudes by putting Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah in leadership positions. For Daniel and Joseph, this also meant positions of great influence within the pagan government.

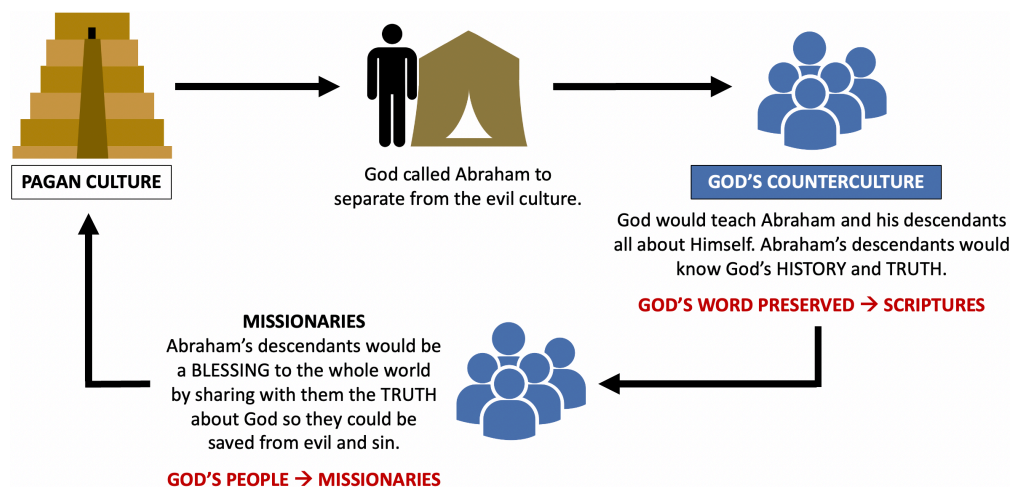
They used their "pagan training" for God's glory.

- Moses was taught to write in Egypt and later used his literacy training to write the Mosaic Law as God instructed him.
- Daniel used his learning, good reputation as a leader and exemplary witness to win Nebuchadnezzar's favour and to lead him to belief (Daniel 4).
- In the New Testament, the apostle Paul quoted pagan literature when defending and spreading the gospel. He studied all kinds of pagan literature so that he could expose wrong beliefs and also build bridges to better present the gospel to unbelievers. (Some examples: Paul quoted the Greek poet Menander in 1 Corinthians 15:33, and the Cretan philosopher Epimenides in Titus 1:12).
- In fact, the early Christians were so knowledgeable about pagan literature that the Roman Emperor, Julian the Apostate (reign: AD 361–363), who hated Christians, tried to put in place a law to forbid Christians from studying non-Christian literature. He said the Christians used their knowledge of the pagan arts and sciences to argue and win against them. This is an amazing testimony of how the early believers used all their learning, both Christian and non-Christian, for the glory of God.

These examples show that it is possible to have strong faith even if we study non-Christian content. No matter how anti-Christian we believe our system is, Joseph, Moses and Daniel faced worse but were able to stay firm in their faith. They could do it and they worship the same God we do. Pagan content doesn't ruin a person's faith. Lack of Scripture ruins faith.

Looking at the lives of these men, here is a thought to ponder.

God's plan for the Jews was that they go back to the pagan world with the message of His history and truth.



Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah, Joseph and Moses were highly respected as well as successful in being a witness to God while living among pagans.

As God would have it, their early upbringing and training consisted of both grounding in the Word and training in pagan content and literature.

Christian parents can learn from their examples.

1. They should recognise they are the primary or main teachers for their children, especially when it comes to God's Word. They cannot hand off this responsibility to the church or Christian schools.
2. They should prepare their children on how to live in a pagan society. Again, they are the main trainers in this area. They cannot hand off this responsibility to someone else.



This method is number 5 in the list above. Training them in God's Word and training them to understand pagan culture will prepare them for life in a pagan society. Training in these two areas will prepare our children to obey Jesus' instruction of going into the world to share the gospel, train disciples and to be salt and light in society.

We need to apply wisdom when exposing our children to the music, pop culture, movies, books and more of the pagan world. But careful exposure through the lens of God's Word can develop children who are firm in their faith, wise in their thinking and discerning in how to engage the world.

They will also be able to engage in arts, science, music, etc., instead of avoiding all these areas. If we don't engage with pagan culture, we will have no Christian artists, scientists, musicians, etc. We won't be able to be influencers and we lose all the unbelievers in these fields.

If we run from pagan culture or shield ourselves from it, we will be unable to share the gospel with unbelievers because we lose the opportunity to be in their lives. We won't understand their lifestyles, experiences and worldviews. And then we lose the ability to communicate with them in ways that they intimately understand. Even if we had the chance to, we risk speaking to them using Christian jargon. It would be like speaking two different languages.

Instead, we need to follow the example of Daniel who, rooted in the faith, was not afraid of engaging and living in the pagan world. It was his involvement with the pagans that gave him the opportunity to lead King Nebuchadnezzar to become a believer in Yahweh.

Our children need to know how to engage with society. They need to know how to relate to unbelievers and speak in ways that will engage them. Properly trained, they will be able to influence others towards God and be true salt and light in a world that desperately needs God.

Discussion Questions

Discuss the following questions as a group or use them for personal reflection.

1. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah made a substantial impact on the pagan world they lived in. Thinking of our own lives, what kind of impact do we have? Do we engage or withdraw from our community? Do we have a positive or negative influence?
2. Daniel and his friends thrived in a pagan education system. How about us or our children? How do we ensure that we (or our children) can benefit from the best education possible and yet not be swallowed up by the pagan worldview? In addition, how do we engage in the culture around us without compromising, mixing up or diluting our faith in God?
3. Following the example of Daniel and friends, how would engaging with our government look like? How should it not look like? What methods can we use to make our voices heard in a respectful way?



Pre-reading for next lesson: Daniel 9