***“Contend for the faith…”* against Secularism.**

Daniel 1:1-21; 2 Timothy 3:1-7; John 15:18-23 February 11, 2018 ROL&BLC

INTRODUCTION:

In 605 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, conquered the Southern Kingdom, Judah and with the conquest took into captivity a group of bright young future leaders of Judah. Among these captives were four young men, Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah and Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar had great plans for these young men. His intent was to literally brainwash or reeducate these young men thereby transforming them into agents of the Babylonian Empire. He would then be able to send them back to their homeland of Judah to govern Judah as loyal subjects of Babylon.

What Nebuchadnezzar sought to do is not unlike what is taking place by Satan through the secular humanists of our day. They seek to captivate the Christian community, especially our children and youth in order to brainwash and corrupt them in order to subjugate them to the prince of this world’s reign and power. <https://www.secularhumanism.org/>

In order to accomplish the brainwashing of the Hebrew youth, Nebuchadnezzar aimed at **four areas of retraining**. He sought to change their **language**, their **literature**, their **lifestyle**, and their **loyalty**.

**I. Babylon’s Prince’s Plan of Pretty Persuasion: He sought to change….**

# 1. What they said - their Language - Daniel 1:4

A. In ancient Babylon, three languages were used. There was the Aramaic of ordinary business and diplomacy sometimes referred to "the Syrian language".

B. Then there was the Assyrian, a Shemitic tongue. This was the language of historic and legal documents. It was eminently a monumental language. Lastly, there was Accadian, the sacred tongue in which the bulk of the magical formulae and ritual directions of Babylon and Nineveh were written. It was most likely that this language that they were taught.

C. Nebuchadnezzar knew that long before he can make them to behave like Babylonians, he must make them think like Babylonians. The first step in making them think like Babylonians was to make them learn the Chaldean language, Chaldean customs, and Chaldean ways of thinking He had to change their heart language.

D. Today we see a shifting in language - a redefining of terms, a political correctness that indoctrinates the mind to the secular humanist’s way of thinking. i.e. –

? sodomy and homosexuality = alternative lifestyle (those opposing are called homophobes)

? homosexuality = “gay”

? abortion and infanticide = pro-choice, or better yet, reproductive rights

? drunkenness = chemical dependency or substance abuse

? killing embryos = stem cell research

? The mention of "God" = removed from every reference in our education and political arenas. “No prayer in public school” “Under God” “In God we Trust”

? Ten Commandments removed from county court houses.

? The terms used for God gender neutralized.

# 2. What they read - their Literature - Daniel 1:4. <https://www.secular-humanism.com/>

A. Nebuchadnezzar sought to fill their minds with Babylonian philosophy, Babylonian science, Babylonian astrology, and Babylonian religion. He would seek to reeducate them and replace the things of Zion and God with the value system of Babylon.

B. In our society, we see the exact same reeducating taking place through situational ethics, values clarification, evolutionary hypotheses, and the rewriting of history textbooks.

C. Educator John Dunphy expressed this anti-God attitude when he wrote: "The Bible is not merely another book, an outmoded and archaic book.... It has been and remains an incredibly dangerous book."

D. Again we read of the viewpoint in the "**Humanist Manifesto II**" where we read, “We affirm that moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is autonomous and situational needing no theological or ideological sanction. Ethics stems from human need and interest." One of the Scholastic books recommended to our children in school states that there is "no such thing as good or bad only that which works and that which doesn’t."

E. **Our culture** teaches "individuals should be permitted to express their sexual proclivities and pursue their life-styles as they desire." <https://americanhumanist.org/what-is-humanism/manifesto3/>

F. "... we can discover no divine purpose or providence for the human species. While there is much that we do not know, humans are responsible for what we are or will become. No deity will save us; we must save ourselves." "Man is at last becoming aware that he alone is responsible for the realization of the world of his dreams, that he has within himself the power for its achievement."

G. **Humanism** teaches the universe as self-existing and not created, man is a part of nature and that he has emerged as a result of a continuous process. It asserts that the nature of the universe depicted by modern science makes unacceptable any supernatural or cosmic guarantees of human values.

H. A number of years ago, **Gloria Steinem** said, "By the year 2000 we will -- I hope -- raise our children to believe in human potential, not God."

# 3 What they did - their Lifestyle - Daniel 1:5

A. Nebuchadnezzar appointed them to be given a portion of the royal delicacies of Babylon that he indulged in along with the wine, which he drank - wine that had been offered as an oblation to idols.

B. He sought to pamper them with the royal dainties of a pagan culture to entice and develop their appetite for these things and thus change their entire lifestyle.

C. “*Pleasure is the greatest incentive to vice.”* - **Greek proverb**

D. Happiness and the creative realization of human needs and desires, individually and in shared enjoyment, are continuous themes of today’s society, i.e. Hollywood.

E. Today even the church has been invaded by a "sanctified" materialism - the "name it, claim it prosperity gospel", Norman Vincent Peale’s Dynamic Imaging, and these days, Joel Osteen’s Your Best Life Now.

Listen to this commentary on Joel Osteen, by Brannon S. Howse of the Christian Worldview Network, “Osteen’s message is overwhelminng syrupy – Christian happy-talk on steroids. His “good news” sounds more like it came from the pages of *Oprah* magazine or a Dr. Phil book than from the Bible. If you are interested in health, wealth, prosperity and positive-thinking heresy, then Osteen’s your man. He is fast becoming the poster-boy for America’s politically correct, wimpy, liberalized clergy. Like so many of his colleagues, Osteen wants to be liked by all and offensive to none. As a result, he choses his words warily and shrinks from controversy like a hot stove.”

F. Today the church in America is being invaded by an increasingly secular humanist lifestyle that is creeping in like the sneaky snake in the back door.

F. The Apostle Paul warned young pastor Timothy of this nearly 1900 years ago: 2 Timothy 3:1-4 *"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come 2 For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, 4Traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;"*

# 4. What they stood for - their Loyalty - Daniel 1:7

A. The four young men had names which reflected their Hebraic heritage and ties to God.

1. Daniel = God is Judge

2. Hananiah = God is Gracious

3. Azariah = God is my Help

4. Mishael = Who is like God?

B. He changed their names related to the false gods of Babylon.

1. Belteshazzar - Bel will protect

2. Shadrach - inspired of Aku (the moon- deity)

3. Abednego - servant of Nebo (Venus)

4. Meshach - who is like Aku.

# II. Laying Foundations - Daniel 1:8

**1. The foundations must be laid in the home.**

Proverbs 22:6 *"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it."*

Ephesians 6:4 *"And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."*

Charles A. Wells - The school will teach children how to read, but the environment of the home must teach them what to read. The school can teach them how to think, but the home must teach them what to believe.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 *" 4Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. 5Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. 6These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.* ***7Impress them on your children.*** *Talk about them when you sit* ***at home*** *and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates."*

Christian moms and dads, listen to me, read my lips this morning. Lay the foundations of God’s truth in the hearts of your children while they are young, in your home, in your parental care, before they go off to school. The first five years are extremely crucial! And if at all possible, I recommend you send them to a Christian school. If you must send them to public school, be a watchman and check their materials, read their books, get to know their teachers, and help them to be able to distinguish the secular humanist doctrines that permeate our public educational system today, and sort it out for what it is, lies and deceptions of the prince of Babylon!

And bring them to Faith Lutheran so that Laura can teach them about God and Jesus!

# III. Taking a Stand.

Where the Bible speaks stand and stand firm. Daniel and his buddies :

-were not concerned about the teaching because they knew what they already believed.

-were not concerned about what they called them because they knew who they were and to whom they truly belonged.

- knew when to draw the line. When Nebuchadnezzar called on the young men to violate God’s Word they said "No way!

Psalms 119:11 *"Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."*

Psalms 119:9 "*Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word."*

Here is how these four Israeli youth stood in Babylon:

# 1. They stood out – ch 1

Daniel, Hanniah, Mishael, and Azariah were living in the king’s palace and had the opportunity to enjoy all the enticements of royalty. In particular, the food was wonderful. They were offered an expensive bottle of wine and a steak and shrimp dinner every night. The other Israeli boys lined up to eat. To them, it just wasn’t that big a deal. But to Daniel and his three friends it was a big deal, it was a matter of loyalty to God. We are told that Daniel:

• *“He purposed in his heart not to defile himself with the royal food and wine.”* (V. 8) This was a decision made beforehand out of a strong conviction. The food being offered was not kosher and had, most likely, been offered to idols. This was a no-brainer. There was no way he was going to defile himself before God.

• He proposed a compromise. (V. 9-10) He approached the head official and politely explained the situation. Because of their deeply held religious convictions they would not be able to eat the royal food. While the official felt for Daniel and his friends, he was not willing to put his neck on the line by changing their diet. So Daniel proposes a compromise to the guy that actually brings the meals to their rooms. Give us veggies for ten days and then see how we look, and “*treat your servants according to what you see*.” This is the original vegi-tale**. Daniel proved you can be contrary to the world without being contrary with the world!**

• They prospered physically and socially. (V. 15-20) While the rest of the good Jewish boys were eating hamburgers and oysters on the half-shell, our four Hebrew heroes were munching on broccoli , cauliflower, and a variety of grains. By day ten, the rest of the group looked in need of a personal trainer. But Daniel, Hanniah, Mishael, and Azariah proved your mother right – eating your vegetables does make you healthy. Not only did they prosper physically but God blessed them with wisdom ten times greater than any of the wise men in Babylon.

We all live in a world very similar to Babylon. Although God makes it clear in His Word that each of us is made on purpose, with a purpose, for a purpose, the world system in which we live attempts to change our identities. Our culture contends that we are nothing more than a product of random chance; the final equation in a cosmic freak accident. There is no meaning or purpose to life other than to eat, drink, and be merry…then die. There is no absolute right or wrong. Truth is relative and defined individually.

The church needs to sound the call to Christians today to **stand out!**

**2. They stood together.** – ch. 2

Have you ever had a dream that you couldn’t quite remember but you know it was bad? In chapter two of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar has a troubling dream and summoned the “magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and astrologers” to the palace. This was a regular psychic hotline convention. What takes place next is a sad comment on the real powers of these supposed wise men.

The king not only wants the interpretation of the dream but the contents of the dream itself. They ultimately agree that the job is too difficult for a mere man to do and they are stumped. Nebuchadnezzer pitched a temper tantrum and signs an execution order for all the wise men in the entire province of Babylon.

Arioch, the commander of the king’s guard, is put in charge of this ridiculous assignment and heads out to kill all of these wise men. He is met by Daniel, one of the guys on his hit list. Daniel doesn’t freak out.

• He calmly asks for more time. (V. 14-16) Scripture says that Daniel spoke to Arioch with wisdom and tact. He went a step farther and actually approaches the king and asked for more time. Daniel knew God was in charge and would give him the ability to know the king’s dream.

• He urgently requested prayer from his Hebrew comrades. (V. 17-18) It was literally a matter of life and death. The four of them had an all night prayer meeting to plead for mercy and for God to reveal the mystery of the dream to Daniel. God answered their prayer and Daniel received a vision in the night concerning the dream.

• He gratefully poured out his praise to God. (V. 19-23). Daniel grabbed his guitar and began to sing of God’s greatness and wisdom. Hanniah, Mishael, and Azariah collapse exhausted but joyful into their beds while Daniel hurries off to the palace to interpret the dream for the king and save all their lives.

We all live in a culture that is marked by its individualistic spirit. But we know that we were designed to best operate in community. When we stand together, it is an awesome and holy sight. Find and make and hang out with Christian friends!

# 3. They stood up. Ch. 3

In chapter three, Nebuchadnezzar’s ego has run amuck. He erected a ninety foot gold plated statue on the plain of Dura of himself. He invited all the dignitaries of Babylon to the opening ceremony. Interestingly, Daniel was not present and may have been out of the country on official business. Nebuchadnezzar made the crowd an offer they could not refuse. They had a choice between bowing down to the statue and being thrown into a blazing furnace. This was an easy choice for most.

Estimates place about two million people on the plain that day. When the music blasted, 1, 999, 997 people hit their faces to the dirt. The Hebrew actually says “as soon as they were hearing they were falling down.” But, in the back, those three Jewish rebels were at it again. They stood up. While other Jewish exiles were on their faces thinking of excuses why their actions were not blatant idolatry, Hanniah, Mishael, and Azariah stood tall. After being spotted, they are brought before the king and he explained the whole thing to them again. He gave them a second chance. Their response to the king is one of the boldest declarations of trust in God in the whole of Scripture.

Read Daniel 3:16-18.

• They would not bow. (V. 8-12) As little children, these teenagers were taught the Ten Commandments and the admonition to not make or worship idols was drilled into their heads. Now the choice is clear. There is no way, after all that God had done for them, that they would give their worship to anyone or anything else.

• They would not bend. (V. 16) When given a second chance, they did not fall victim to doubt or waver in their faith. They felt no need to defend their selves in this matter. The king could threaten all he wanted to; they were resolute in their stand.

• They understood “but, if not.” (V. 17-18) They depended on God’s omnipotence (He could save them) but trusted in His sovereignty (He may chose not to). Whether God saved them from the fire or not was irrelevant. They were not your normal, run-of-the-mill youth. They were aliens. They had different priorities and feared God more than the king. This combination, as the Christian rock group Pillar sings, made them “Fireproof.”

We all live in a culture today that worships rock stars, athletes, and actors and actresses. We are asked to bow down to the latest fad or trend and if we don’t then we just aren’t cool. Guess what? Biblical Christians don’t care that much about being cool. We believe that if we do not stand for something we will fall for anything. Biblical Christians stand up for their faith, respectfully, by engaging others in discussions about the Bible and Christianity, and moral issues of our day.

Well, let’s look at the rest of the story. So far, our Jewish teenagers have stood out, stood together, and stood up. Now, in one of the most intense miracles in the Bible, Jesus stands with them in the midst of the fire.

# 4. Jesus will stand with you! 3:24-27

Hanniah, Mishael, and Azariah’s defiance caused the king’s “attitude to change.” In fact, in a fit of rage Nebuchadnezzer ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter and had the three teens bound and thrown into the fire. The fire was so hot the guards were immediately incinerated. “No young whipper-snappers are going to openly defy me in front of two million people and live to tell about it”, thought Nebuchadnezzer. He peered into the furnace, through the flames, and saw something that made him “leap to his feet in amazement.”

Read verses 24-27.

Hanniah, Mishael, and Azariah were taking a stroll around the furnace! They were alive. Impossible! Nebuchadnezzer shook his head and looked again. He saw **four men** in the fire and one looked like the “***son of the gods***.” Even the king, in all his “glory”, recognized a miracle when he saw it. All the people gathered around the furnace must have been asking the same question, **“Who is the fourth guy in the fire?”**

An entire sermon could be preached on this one verse. Some have suggested the angel Gabriel as the possible companion of our main characters. I think it was obvious to all that this was more than an angel. Most commentators agree that this is a pre-incarnation of the Lord Jesus. These three had stood out, stood together, and stood up in the name of the God of the Universe. Now the God who became the Savior stands with them in the very fire of their greatest trial.

Jesus will stand with you whatever you are going through. (V. 25) We minister to people who are struggling with severe family problems that include divorce and abuse. We put our arms around people who are stressed out to the point of thinking about suicide. We talk to people whose friends are pregnant or experimenting with drugs. We stand with people as they go through the pain of relationship breakdowns and life’s difficulties. Underneath many of their smiles lie pain and uncertainty. It is our incredible privilege to share the hope of the Gospel story. We get to tell them that Jesus will stand with them whatever they are going through. He will never leave them nor forsake them. In a generation growing up in today’s Babylon these promises are like water to a wilting rose.

**Action Steps:**

• When is the last time you really took a stand for your faith in Christ?

• Has your passion for Jesus caused you stand out or do you blend in to the culture at large? Are you riding the fence? Are you an example of chameleon Christianity? Remember, peer pressure doesn’t stop when you reach adulthood.

• Do you have people around you to stand with you through tough times? God designed the church to be community of faith that stands together.

• Perhaps, this morning you are going through a really hard time. You put on your Sunday smile for everyone else but God knows your heart is breaking. Jesus is with you and will carry you through this time and lead you to “quiet waters where He will restore your soul.”

• It is possible that you have never surrendered your life to Jesus. Listen to Romans 10:9. “*If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved*.” Whether you are teenager or one at heart, Jesus loves you and deeply desires a relationship with you.

**Prayer for Total Surrender and Courage to Stand Strong in Babylon:**