

Can the man of God stand in the midst of Pagan authority?

1. *God's kingdom seemed at one point to be utterly crushed and defeated.*

- *Raises the question – 'Can a pagan empire destroy the people of God?'*

2. *The godly young Daniel was forced to live under a pagan authority.*

- *The young people were being encouraged to forget their Israelite background and become good Babylonians*

Answers from Daniel

- *Applies to modern Christians also*

1. *Daniel resolved not to become a pagan Babylonian*

Is it possible for a man of God to stand in the midst of pagan authority which is likely to want to crush the believer? This is the question that is raised by Daniel chapter 1.

1. **God's kingdom seemed at one point to be utterly crushed and defeated.** A pagan empire threatens to destroy the people of God. In the year 605 BC, 'the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim', Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon successfully invaded Jerusalem. Jehoiakim the Judean king was forced to surrender. The valuable golden utensils of the temple were taken and carried off to Babylon ^{□1}. It was a terrible point in the history of God's people. Never before had Jerusalem been so crushed and disgraced. Yet Jerusalem was the place where God's glory had been present in the holy of holies of the temple. It was a disgrace for God's people, a disgrace for God's city, a disgrace for God himself. It raised a question in the mind of any thinking person: can a pagan empire destroy the people of God? What will happen to God's kingdom if God's temple is robbed of its treasures and cannot function as God's temple any more? God's kingdom seems to be defeated.

2. **The godly young Daniel was forced to live under a pagan authority.** Daniel was taken as a young man to Babylon. He came from an upper-class family in Israel. He was handsome and intelligent ^{□1}. Nebuchadnezzar's idea was to persuade the most capable Israelites to become part of the Babylonian government, and to become loyal to Babylon. It is obvious that at some previous point Daniel had come to faith in the God of Israel, the God who brought Israel into being by the blood of a lamb. But what will Daniel do now? The young man and those like him were given a Babylonian education ^{□2}. They were to live in the Babylonian court, eat Babylonian food of the best quality, drink Babylonian wine, and live as young bright upper-class Babylonians in the pay of Nebuchadnezzar ^{□3}. The meat might well include foods that were illegal in the Mosaic law. The young people were being encouraged to forget their Israelite background and become good Babylonians. Daniel and his friends had names that reminded people of the faith of Israel. 'Daniel' means 'God is judge'. 'Hananiah' means 'Yahweh is gracious'. 'Mishael' means 'Who is what God is?' 'Azariah' means 'Yahweh has helped'. But the young men were given Babylonian names, which no longer made mention of Yahweh the God of Israel, the one-and-only Creator-God ^{□4}.

Daniel was forced to live in the Babylonian empire. Then, after the Babylonian empire was conquered, he lived in the Persian empire. The Book of Daniel is concerned with how a believer lives in such pagan surroundings and what his hopes may be for the future. How will Daniel survive? How does the modern Christian survive when he is under pressure to adopt pagan ways? The first story in the Book of Daniel gives us several answers.

1. **Daniel resolved not to become a pagan Babylonian.** *Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, says Daniel 1:8.* He could have exploited the luxurious life that was being offered him and he could have given himself to becoming totally identified with the Babylonians in the new career that was being forced on him.

□1 1:2

□1 1:3-4a

□2 1:4b

□3 1:5

□4 1:6-7

• Resolved not to eat meats that stood for the abandonment of Israel's faith

• Become alert to the pressures around us

2. Daniel combined decisiveness with courtesy.

• Given favour in the eyes of some other person

3. Daniel is expecting God to be working on his behalf

• We, too, shall discover that God's kingdom is quietly more powerful than earthly kingdoms

But Daniel firmly determined in his own heart that he would not get more involved than necessary in the Babylonian lifestyle, that he would not abandon his faith in the God of Israel, and particularly that he would not eat the Babylonian meats that in one way or another stood for abandonment of Israel's faith and total identification with the pagan way of life.

The first way of standing firm in a pagan atmosphere is to become wide awake to the pressures around us and firmly resolve not to be pushed into a way of life that displeases God.

2. Daniel combined decisiveness with courtesy. Although Daniel was firmly resolved not to adopt pagan ways, yet this did not mean that he became aggressive or insulting, or that he did anything that would invite persecution. He actually behaved with great courtesy, trusting God to bring him through the difficult situation he found himself in. He courteously asked permission to live in a different way¹. Christians may live a distinctive life in quite a courteous manner. They might well win their way where they live or work simply by their respect towards others.

God was working on Daniel's behalf. God can always give us favour in the eyes of some other person. Even if we are surrounded by the most oppressive false religion, such as might be found in a Babylonian court, yet God can give us people who will sympathize with us. The official who was responsible for Daniel was sympathetic (so Daniel's courtesy brought him some advantage), but the official was not so sympathetic that he would do whatever Daniel asked. He expressed his fear that supporting Daniel would get him into bad trouble¹.

3. Daniel is expecting God to be working on his behalf. He suggests a test to the Babylonian official. Let them be given only vegetables for ten days¹ and then let the Babylonian official see whether their health or appearance shows any sign of deterioration or anything that would trouble Nebuchadnezzar². The official agrees and the test goes ahead³. It is obvious that Daniel is expecting God to be at work on behalf of his people.

Can we survive in an oppressive pagan kingdom? Yes! Let us resolve not to become adjusted to pagan ways. Let us combine decisiveness with courtesy. Let us expect God to be working on our behalf. And we shall discover that God's kingdom is quietly more powerful than earthly kingdoms. God can sustain us, even in a court more powerful than the pagan kingdoms of this world.

1:8b

1:9-10

1:11-12

1:13

1:14



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