

GODLY LIVING IN A GODLESS WORLD

Expositional Study Of Daniel

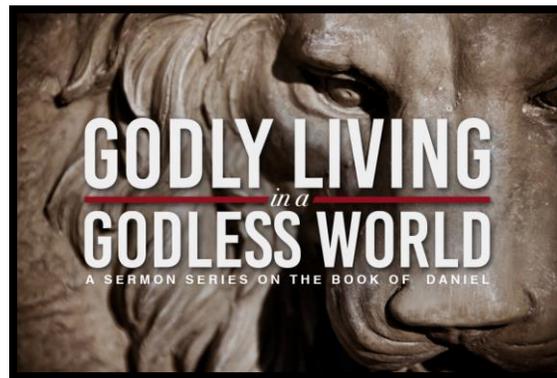
Daniel 1:3-21

Food Fight Faith

Written By

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The more sinful our world becomes, the ethical issues we face, as Christians, will be more complex and complicated. Take, for instance, one I encountered before I moved here from California.

Satya Narayan, a 70+ Hindu, came to new members' class at my house one evening. After class and after everyone else had departed, we stood on my front porch and he asked me this question: "Pastor, I have served several thousand gods in my lifetime within Hinduism, but they have left me feeling empty and frustrated because I cannot possibly make them all happy with my behavior. Could you tell me about Jesus Christ?" Within the next few minutes, Satya trusted Christ as His Savior and Lord. He, the first Hindu from his family to blaze a trail to the United States from Fiji years ago, became the first to blaze a trail to Jesus to find salvation.

Within two months, Satya contracted a terminal disease. His six brothers, who were highly influential in the local temple, blamed the disease on the fact he had angered the Hindu gods by departing from the faith. When he died about a month after this, they were incensed and angry with Christianity and me, the one who had introduced him to Jesus. They became even more hostile when they discovered their brother's dying wish was for me to provide for him a Christian burial.

Do you see the complexity of the issue? I'm sure. Should I honor Satya's memory and perform the funeral, while, at the same time, upsetting the hundreds of Hindu family members who would attend, or should I honor the wishes of his brothers and permit the service to occur in the local temple? As much prayer and contemplation, I chose option one. My meeting with

the six brothers in my office to plan the funeral became one of the tougher meetings I've ever had.

In our ever-darkening culture, we are faced continually with ethical issues demanding our answer. How do you decide in a way which honors God is the question. Within the field of ethics, there are six methods for determining our answer, ranging from situational ethics, which denies moral/spiritual absolutes and embraces love as the ultimate standard of measurement, to graded absolutism, which posits that when you have two opposing absolutes in a given situation which appear to contradict, you should choose the loftier, more noble of the two. As a graded absolutist, I chose option two because I felt it more important to honor the final wish of Satya, than to honor the contrary desire of the brothers. Having Satya's wife with me on the decision, along with that of his newly converted son helped as well; however, it didn't make the choice a cake walk; however, I'm convinced that in the end God received the glory.

What will you do when, not if, your culture poses a complicated ethical decision to you? What if that issue is a threat to the viability and nature of your faith? What if it could potentially undermine a clear moral teaching or command from the Word of God? What will you do at that moment? Will you bend to God's leading or will you bow to the pressure of the cultured?

Daniel faced a Gordian knot ethical issue not long after he arrived in Babylon with his three friends. He recounts how he responded to it in the first chapter of his apocalyptic book, and I'm glad he did for it gives us much needed insight into how we should navigate similar stormy cultural seas. For pedagogical purposes, we should start sailing with a question which naturally arises from the passage.

How Can I Hang Tough For God In A Testy World? (Daniel 1:3-21)

From my studied perspective, two pragmatic principals naturally arise from the biblical narrative of Daniel 1. First, growing, maturing saints who seek to honor God with how they live should ...

Wake Up To Indoctrination (Daniel 1:3-7)

We encounter this truth within the first seven verses of this historical story from Daniel's life. Let's read it and then make some salient textual, hermeneutical observations:

³ Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials, to bring in some of the sons of Israel, including some of the royal family and of the nobles, ⁴ youths in whom was no defect, who were good-looking, showing intelligence in every branch of wisdom, endowed with understanding and discerning knowledge, and who had ability for serving in the king's court; and he ordered him to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans.

King Nebuchadnezzar had one goal in mind with these intellectually gifted young Jewish men. He desired for them to look like Jews outwardly, but think and act like Babylonians when they finished graduating from the University of Babel. He gave this unique assignment to his "chief of

his officials.” The Hebrew term *rab saris* (רַב סָרִיסִיּוֹ) has been debated. Saris, which according to Brown, Driver, and Briggs Hebrew Lexicon can mean to emasculate suggests that this official was responsible for emasculating these males who would serve near King Nebuchadnezzar. That view is tenuous, at best, as John Collins, the Hebrew scholar, points out:

It is disputed whether the individual in question had necessarily been castrated or whether they term simply denotes “high official.” The title is found among the “princes of Babylon” in Jer 39:3. The most widely accepted etymology is the Akkadian *sa resi* (literally, “of the head,” probably referring to an attendant who stood at the head of, or near, a royal figure or dignitary). The meaning of “eunuch” would have developed because of the prominence of eunuch as high officials. In Ge 39:1, Potiphar is called a סָרִיס even though he was married. The use of actual eunuchs is best attested in the Persian period.¹

Based on this, I highly doubt these four Jewish young men experienced nothing but training in how to be government leaders.

Ostensibly, some of you might have difficulty thinking about this because you are still reeling over the King’s discriminatory ways. You shockingly asks questions like ... How could he choose one teen over another? I thought everyone was equal. How could he select this teen versus that teen based on who was more mentally gifted and better looking? How could he choose which teens would get an opportunity to get an education to beat all educations based on whether they had physical defects or not?² What about a young man with a birthmark on the side of his face but who still had a great mind? You mean he would have passed him by? How arrogant. How insensitive.

Well, if you are entertaining any of these questions, let me bring you back to earth circa 586 B.C. King Nebuchadnezzar, the ruler of the world’s only superpower at time, had absolute totalitarian power to do as he pleased. And you don’t think, regardless of what our politically correct world tells us, we don’t function in a similar fashion? As my federal agent father, Al, told me years ago regarding the government’s new aversion to profiling: “Son, as a law officer who has dealt with many criminals, you can’t help but profile. After a while, you know the look of the guilty person, you pick up tale-tell signs they are up to no good, you pay attention to their typical facial responses when you interview them.” You mean to tell me Hollywood doesn’t look at outer criteria when selecting people for roles in blockbuster movies? You mean you actually believe that we’re all equal intellectually speaking, capable of doing whatever we want? I am not convinced. Based on my aversion to math, I highly doubt I’d have been a wonderful candidate for an engineering program in aeronautics. Some people are just smarter than others, and I can

¹ John J. Collins, *Hermeneia-A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible: Daniel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 134.

² I would point out that the word defect in Hebrew “mum” (מוֹם) is used in Levitical Law to bar a priest from offering sacrifice (Leviticus 21:17ff). In order to offer sacrifice, the priest needed to have a look of wholeness and perfection, as it were. As such, these priests pointed typologically to Jesus, the ultimate High Priest (Hebrews 4:14). I find this most interesting, personally. King Nebuchadnezzar’s criteria, unbeknownst to him, matched God’s criteria for priests offering sacrifice in worship. He was, in a sense, choosing four Jewish priests who would eventually point him to the one, true, and living God who desires blood sacrifice for sinners to gain a relationship with Him.

live with that. But in its base form, don't get too hung up on the King's selection process for the University of Babel. It smacks of a similar mindset running through our world.

Back to the King's goal: To make highly gifted Jewish captives Babylonians in every sense of the word. Whether you want to call his methodology brainwashing or indoctrination, the goal was still the same: To replace their Jewish upbringing and faith with faith in his interpretation of how governments should function, coupled with a firm, abiding belief in the true gods of the Babylonian pantheon.

Their first classes would be in the Babylonian language, probably Akkadian cuneiform script. Akkadian, a Semitic language in Mesopotamia between 2,800 and 500 A.D., came on the world scene in Sumerian texts from 2,800. Eventually, the Sumerians adapted this complex method of writing to their culture. Around 2,000 B.C., Akkadian split between an Assyrian dialect amalgamation and that of the Babylonians. By the 9th century, the Babylonian version became the lingua franca of the Middle East. Aramaic rose to prominence in the area during the 7th and 6th centuries, causing Babylonian cuneiform to be the language of the intelligentsia and academics of the Babylonian Empire, probably something akin to Latin in our educational structure. In language studies you quickly separate the intellectual men from the boys, for some people minds just can't get the new language no matter how much they study, while others, like Daniel and his friends, have no issues whatsoever. So much for us all being equal. In any event, by mastering this coveted language the King could make sure these students could easily be exposed to the culture, religion, and thinking of the allegedly far superior Babylonians.

The King's next method of indoctrination included in depth exposure to the literature of the Chaldeans, which is just a code word for Babylonians (Isaiah 13:19; 47:1; 48:14). Their literature was quite extensive. Thousands are clay tablets written with a wooden stylus for forming the Chinese-looking letters are now available to us. They cover anything and everything Babylonian. From codes regarding law, to stories about their plethora of gods, the King made sure these Jewish young men's minds were saturated with the proper way to think about the world. They would most certainly have read the *Gilgamesh Epic*, the supposed true story of how the world experienced a massive flood, along with other tablets depicting the lives and actions of the various gods. No doubt, they would have read the *Enuma Elish* story, which supposedly recounted how the various gods came together to create the world. For three straight years all they would study would be founded and grounded upon polytheistic Babylonian thinking so they would be suited to advance all causes Babylonian. (I read both of these my senior year at Azusa Pacific University.)

The ancient Sumerians, who inhabited this Mesopotamian area prior to the Babylonians, were the first to identify three zodiac astral signs. The Babylonians added the final nine, and trained their people to study the star formations and planet movements to determine what the gods were supposedly thinking. Daniel and his buddies would have been trained in this type of mystical analysis. They would have also been exposed to *extispicy*, or the mystical art of analysis the entrails (usually the lungs and the livers) of sacrificial animals to, again, determine the will and thinking of the gods. Clay models of these entrails, replete with cuneiform markings gave the educated interpreters an endless array of ways in which to ascertain the voice of the gods regarding a given matter. I'm sure the indoctrination at this level was intense and mind-numbing, as well as amusing for these four young Jewish men knew the true God who had spoken through their prophets most clearly for the last 841 years (counting from the time of Moses in 1446 B.C. to the time of their captivity in 605 B.C.). As a side-note, these intense

educational processes in the ways of godless thinking didn't negatively impact these young men, nor did it cause their faith to fracture. In fact, just the opposite occurred. There is hope for your Christian children enrolled in Babylonian empowered schools.

Lastly, as we read in verses six through seven, the powerful, progressive, forward-thinking King had the names of these Jewish young man changed to reflect their new Babylonian culture:

⁶ Now among them from the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. ⁷ Then the commander of the officials assigned new names to them; and to Daniel he assigned the name Belteshazzar, to Hananiah Shadrach, to Mishael Meshach and to Azariah Abed-nego.

How interesting. He changed their names because in the politically correct environment of Babylon, these names were just too offensive to even pronounce.

- Daniel, Hebrew for “God is my Judge,” would cause waves with a culture who didn't value this monotheistic God. And the name was most annoying because it actually reminded the loose-living Babylonians that a day of divine judgment was, in fact, coming. So, the king had it altered to Belteshazzar, meaning “May Bel (or Marduk, one of their main gods) protect his life.”
- Hananiah had to go to. In Hebrew it means “Jehovah is gracious.” Grace? That's the last thing King Nebuchadnezzar was about. Remember, he's the king who slew the sons of the Jewish king, Zedekiah, when he toppled Jerusalem while the king helplessly watched, and then he had the king's eyes gouged out (2 Kings 25:1-8). So much for grace. This Babylonian potentate didn't know this word. Dictators and socialistic, atheistic, tolerant leaders can, and will, do the most ungracious, brutal things to retain their power. No wonder he expunged this name. Again, another bothersome Jewish name just had to be changed in their enlightened culture. Hananiah was, then, changed to Shadrach, or Babylonian for “Command of Aku.” Aku was their allegedly powerful moon god.
- Mishael, Hebrew for “Who is what God is?” would have posed an in-your-face problem for the Babylonian pantheon of gods. Nebuchadnezzar couldn't have a young Jewish man walking around with a provocative, intolerant name like that, so he modified it to the more palatable Meshach, meaning “Who is like Aku?” The similar sound between the Jewish and Babylonian names here suggests the King made fun of the Jew's God, while underscoring the greatness of their supposed god.
- Azariah, in Hebrews definitively states, “Yah[weh] is my help.” Having just defeated the Israelite army with no problem, Nebuchadnezzar probably laughed at this name in a mocking, sneering fashion. He wasted no time calling this young captive Abednego, meaning “Servant of Nabu,” or “the son of Marduk,” who was the king of the Babylonian gods.

The indoctrination into Babylonian life had begun, and I'm sure Nebuchadnezzar had high hopes of eventually using these re-programmed young and talented Jewish men in the advancement of everything Babylonian.

If you don't think this type of indoctrination doesn't go on today, then I don't know what world you live in. From the elementary grades to the university level, our children are steeped in the godless, humanistic, logically inconsistent, and sexually consumed thinking of our cultural elites. I remember when we my teachers prayed before class with us. I remember distinctly, also, when the government forbid them to do this. I've watched, in my lifetime, the purposeful sidelining of Christian thinking in every discipline in our country, replacing it with philosophical thinking, like relativism, in order to brainwash and indoctrinate the masses so they can and will function like the new Babylonians. The maniacal methodology has been so effective that by the time students show up to a university, they are already firm believers that truth is relative, and that no one person is absolutely correct in their analysis about things. Allan Bloom, a gifted professor at the University of Chicago, comments on this in his book, *The Closing of The American Mind*, which I studied in 1987:

There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of; almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative Relativism is necessary to open-mindedness; and this is the virtue, the only virtue, which all primary education for more than 50 years has dedicated itself to inculcating. Openness-- and the relativism that makes it the only plausible stance in the face of various claims to truth in various ways of life and kind human beings-- is the great insight of our times. The true believer is the real danger The point is not to correct the mistakes and really the right; rather it is not keeping your right at all.

Sounds like Babylonian indoctrination to me.

Nine years after Bloom wrote his insightful and alarming book, William Watkins, the former director of publications for the American Center for Law and Justice, wrote the jaw-dropping *The New Absolutes: How They Are Being Imposed on Us How They Are Eroding Our Moral Landscape*. In this must-read book, he clearly and helpfully details how relativistic-loving gurus have woven their destructive, erroneous, Judea-Christian hating doctrine into the fabric of our sleeping culture. Here's a sampling of the indoctrination content:

- *Old Absolute*: Religion is the backbone of the American culture, providing moral and spiritual light needed for public and private life. *New Absolute*: religion is bane of public life, so for the public good it should be banned from the public square.
- *Old Absolute*: Same-sex and bi-sexual {relationships} are immoral. *New Absolute*: All forms and combinations of sexual activity are moral as long as they occur between consenting parties.
- *Old Absolute*: Western civilization and its heritage should be studied and valued above others. *New Absolute*: Non-Western societies and other oppressed people and their heritage should be studied and valued above Western civilization.

- *Old Absolute*: Different perspectives should be heard and tolerated, but only the true and right ones should prevail. *New Absolute*: Only those viewpoints deemed politically correct should be tolerated and encouraged to prevail.³

You get the picture because you are smart. The practical point can't be missed: If you want to hang tough in testy times, you must understand how you, your children, and grandchildren are being indoctrinated by new Nebuchadnezzar types.

What should you do?

- Make sure you and your family study the Word of God. Daniel and his buddies were able to stand up for God because they were able to quickly isolate what the culture was attempting to do to their biblical teaching and divine worldview.
- Talk to your children and college students. Ask them what they are studying. Help them determine what is true versus what is false. Help them learn how to think critically and to tell the difference between, say, good science and bad, philosophically twisted science.
- Read and study good books individually and as a family which will help you understand what is being taught, why it's far afield from God and sound, logical thinking, and how you can, and should, deconstruct it so you can defend THE faith of all faiths while also pointing the indoctrinated to the living God.
- Choose your battles. Isn't it interesting that Daniel and his buddies didn't argue about the reclassification of their names? How wise. They realized from the start there were spiritual battles worthy fighting, and this one wasn't one of those. So, they'd wait and stand on an issue of greater significance. It didn't take long before a major spiritual issue confronted them. We read about it in verse 5: *"The king appointed for them a daily ration from the king's choice food and from the wine which he drank, and appointed that they should be educated three years, at the end of which they were to enter the king's personal service."* Ah, now here is an issue they couldn't collectively waffle on because the wine was probably used for toasting the Babylonian gods, and the meat was probably dedicated to the false gods. Additionally, there was a good chance the meat ran contrary to what God told Moses the Israelites should not eat (Leviticus 11). To drink and eat, therefore, would be to compromise their Jewish faith and to willfully sin against God and His clear commands. More on that in a moment. For now, let us simply re-iterate: choose your battles with encroaching darkness with much thought, prayer, and discussion. Not every issue is worth your voice, but some are.

The road up ahead is getting rougher by the day. Prepare for the journey by first realizing there is a whole lot of godless indoctrination and brainwashing regarding false views/thinking/philosophies going on. In addition to this, you have to ...

³ William D. Watkins, *The New Absolutes* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1996), 45-46.

Stand Up For Illumination (Daniel 1:8-21)

Put differently: Stand up for God's true revelation as detailed in the Bible. Put more succinctly: Don't compromise God's truth. The ensuing verses of our exciting and challenging historical narrative, show us, in a three-fold format, how to be courageous for God's teachings:

Don't settle for defilement (1:8-10). First, let's read the familiar story and then offer some observations:

⁸ But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself. ⁹ Now God granted Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the commander of the officials, ¹⁰ and the commander of the officials said to Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has appointed your food and your drink; for why should he see your faces looking more haggard than the youths who are your own age? Then you would make me forfeit my head to the king."

From the very beginning of his new education, Daniel (and his buddies) determined they wouldn't purposefully soil their spiritual garments by compromising on some key theological issue. Interestingly enough, the Hebrew for "defile" (נָאַל) has the connotation of something becoming polluted. Such is what sin does, contrary to what our culture says. Sin pollutes, fouls, and stains the soul. These four Jewish teens would have none of this because their loyalty, first and foremost, was to the living God, not the gods of the Babylonians. At this young age, they already knew there logically couldn't be more than one infinite being, God. To have two, three, or fifty gods, like the Babylonians did, you would have gods who would have characteristics differing from each other. To differ logically means the gods in question were not perfect because one would possess a characteristic the other(s) didn't, thereby eliminating their status as an infinite and perfect being, which is the definition of God. The conclusion, then, is there is only room for one, living, perfect, unchanging being, God.

Think about how these Jewish young men could have rationalized compromising their faith. I can just hear the reasons:

- These are such unusual circumstances, surely God won't mind if we flex a little here with His theology.
- We are so far away from home, and our homeland is gone anyway, so what will it matter if we relax God's laws some and go along to get along?
- Should we eat this great looking food and drink this really good wine we'll be in a better position to get placed in top political positions so we can help our captive people.
- We have to obey the king because if we don't we'll be executed, and then what good will we be to the advancement of God's purposes?
- Look, we have to eat and drink because if we don't the king will most assuredly execute this official assigned to us. God certainly wouldn't want innocent blood on our hands.

- God put us in this unbelievably complex situation. We didn't ask for this. He's left us with no choice but to eat and drink for our own preservation.

They didn't embrace any of these, or other, weak, selfish, unspiritual rationalizations. On the contrary, they stood their theological, spiritual ground and *they did it in a respectful, not a pugnacious, fashion*. You might need to read that last clause one more time. This time let it sink into your heart and mind. As our culture becomes more enamored with evil, there is the proclivity for Christians to feel like they are losing, resulting in some of them re-acting apologetically in a less than Christ-like fashion. Believe me, we have much to learn from these four Jewish young men, don't we? They implicitly trusted God to honor their obedience even in the face of death itself and they did it with marked humility and deep respect for those around them holding to false worldviews.

All of this spiritual courage naturally leads to some personal questions:

- Where in your life have you given in to the pressure of the godless culture? You might need to make a commitment right now you will not make that concession anymore.
- What weak, untenable justifications and rationalizations have you developed so you can live with your faith compromise? You might need to through them to wind and embrace the timeless teachings of God's Word.
- What significant theological, moral, spiritual issues have you caved on for the sake of peace, acceptance, and/or advancement? You might need to draw a new line in the proverbial sand.
- Have you chosen not to compromise your faith/beliefs before the pressure of a parent, teacher, professor, employer but you've done it in a rude, cocky, snooty manner, I'm-superior-to-you fashion? You might need to change your attitude. Humility is the order of the powerful apologetic witness of Jesus Christ. Such was His method.
- Are you prepared to pay the cost, be what it may, to stand up for God and demonstrate that He is the ultimate value in life?
- Where are you standing strong and true for God as your world seeks to force you into its mis-guided, mis-informed mold? Don't ever forget you are doing the right thing if your stance is on the Word of God.

Clearly, these Jewish young men understood that in this situation the proposed end would never be justified by the means, viz., their spiritual compromise. God will eventually place you in a tough, trying situation to see whether you'll be a fighter or a flyer. What will you do? Will you determine right now to say to God, "I will not defile myself as I, too, live in Babylon!"

A second step in standing up for God's truth, as revealed in the Bible, is found in this short statement:

Do search for the facts (Daniel 1:11-14). What does this mean? It means look for a way to showcase the truth of Christianity against the false world belief, be what it may.

¹¹ But Daniel said to the overseer whom the commander of the officials had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, ¹² "Please test your

servants for ten days, and let us be given some vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³ “Then let our appearance be observed in your presence and the appearance of the youths who are eating the king’s choice food; and deal with your servants according to what you see.” ¹⁴ So he listened to them in this matter and tested them for ten days.

Simple, huh? The Jewish teens wanted to eat their approved food for ten days, while everyone else gorged themselves on the Babylonian food, and at the end of this trial period they would come together and see who fared better. What creative apologetic thinking! What courage! They could have easily been executed for even offering a trial of this nature before the most formidable and powerful king on the planet.

Makes you ask, “What would I have done?”

Makes you also ask, “In the current situation where my faith is being pushed and pressured, what creative approach can I take in order showcase the gospel, the Word of God, and the reality of God’s existence? Do you have a humanistic, atheistic professor who will not permit you to write a paper mentioning anything about your belief in a personal divine being? Could you respectfully make a deal with him? Do you have a hostile, unbelieving mate who opposes the concept of God, while opting to put all their faith in science? Is there a way to do apologetics (viz., the reasoned defense of the faith) in order to prepare the ground for the gospel of Jesus Christ?

- Would he/she be willing to read and discuss a book by C.S. Lewis called *Mere Christianity*, which describes the reasons why he, an Oxford and Cambridge Professor, traded his intellectualism-humanism-atheism for faith in Christ?
- Would he/she be intellectually open-minded enough to read *Who Moved The Stone?* by Frank Morrison. Frank, an English journalist, set out in the 1920s to prove the resurrection story was nothing but a myth. His endeavor, however, resulted in him coming to faith in Christ, the resurrected one, because he found the resurrection proof historically verifiable ... and highly believable.
- Would he/she, at least, read *God’s Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?* by John Lennox, the devout thinking Christian and Professor of Mathematics at the University of Oxford?

Really, can you think of a creative way to open the gate of faith to your King Nebuchadnezzar by showing them how faith in God, while impossible to prove definitively, can be shown to be logically justified based on the hard evidence at hand?

Daniel and his friends were amazing believers. When most young men couldn’t wait to eat as much meat and drink as much as they liked, they abstained in order to honor God regardless of the potential personal cost. Think about it. They chose vegetarianism over meat consumption, and they did it to be loyal to Levitical law.⁴ Wow. What men of conviction. The

⁴ I can hear the vegans giving us all the reasons to be them: You’ll ward off disease, you’ll stay trimmer, you’ll live longer, you’ll have stronger bones, you’ll not be as susceptible to food-born sickness, you’ll have more energy, you’ll avoid toxic chemicals Blah, blah, blah. I’m still a meat-lover. Sorry. Cucumbers on the grill versus a New York steak just don’t cut it for me. But if you want more info on the benefits of the vegan lifestyle, then check out this web-site: <http://www.vegetariantimes.com/article/why-go-veg-learn-about-becoming-a-vegetarian>.

pragmatic question is clear: Will you be a person of deep, spiritual conviction of God's revelation in your Babylon experience? And will you stand in a respectful, thoughtful, and humble manner, knowing that at the end of the day you used to be a beggar eating all the wrong breads, when the Bread of Life was right there in front of you? Regarding this method of doing apologetics, Alister McGrath, a former atheist, helpfully states in his book *Mere Apologetics*:

The object of apologetics is not to antagonize or humiliate those outside the church, but to help open their eyes to the reality, reliability, and relevance of the Christian faith. There must be no mismatch or contradiction between the message that is proclaimed and the tone of the messenger's proclamation. We must be winsome, generous, and gracious. If the gospel is to cause difficulty, it must be on account of its intrinsic nature and content, not the manner in which it is proclaimed. It is one thing for the gospel to give offense; it is quite another for its defenders to cause offense by unwise choice of language or an aggressive and dismissive attitude toward outsiders.⁵

I couldn't agree more.

What happens when you choose to stand up for God? The closing section answers the question most powerfully:

Do anticipate the blessing of God (Daniel 1:15-21). Read on and you'll see what I mean:

¹⁵ At the end of ten days their appearance seemed better and they were fatter than all the youths who had been eating the king's choice food. ¹⁶ So the overseer continued to withhold their choice food and the wine they were to drink, and kept giving them vegetables. ¹⁷ As for these four youths, God gave them knowledge and intelligence in every branch of literature and wisdom; Daniel even understood all kinds of visions and dreams. ¹⁸ Then at the end of the days which the king had specified for presenting them, the commander of the officials presented them before Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹ The king talked with them, and out of them all not one was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's personal service. ²⁰ As for every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king consulted them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and conjurers who were in all his realm. ²¹ And Daniel continued until the first year of Cyrus the king.

This is simply amazing and instructive.

Our culture's advice is clear: Go along to get along, even if it involved compromising things you hold dear. Do this and you'll most certainly go up. This is not what God wants from His children. He wants us to lovingly, calmly, and kindly go against cultural pressures designed to water down His teachings, and when we do this He sovereignly blesses us in profound, jaw-dropping ways. For three years these four Jewish boys remained our equivalent of vegans (I'm sure vegans among us are pumping the air with their fists at this juncture), and God made sure they didn't lose muscle mass, and He, who made their minds, reached down from heaven and

⁵ Alister E. McGrath, *Mere Apologetics: How to Help Seekers and Skeptics Find Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 16.

increased their intellectual abilities so they would not only stand out from the other students, but they would be head and shoulders in their thinking than all of the kings most educated and seasoned officials.⁶ Do you get what I just said? Instead of divorcing themselves from the Babylonian culture, these young believers learned that culture better than those born into it, resulting in God positioning them in key political positions for maximum kingdom impact. Learn from their story. Believers must not retreat from our carnal culture, but we must know it well so we can properly engage it well for Christ. Bright, devoted, gifted followers of Christ should be plugged in purposefully at all levels of our culture, from modeling to soldiering. And we should do it with the confidence that God is and will be with us, and He will enable us to accomplish much for Him despite the roadblocks, persecution, and push-back.

So I ask you: Do you want to influence your world, our country for Jesus Christ? Stop compromising His truth and your faith. Start standing strong and true upon the truths of the Word of God, and God will, in turn, providentially use you to guide Babylon to come face to face with Him so they can have the prospects of hope in spiritual restoration, redemption, and salvation.

⁶ Leon Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1973), 46 offers this great insight about Nebuchadnezzar's wise men: The name 'magicians' (*hartummim*) may be related to the word "stylus" (*heret*), meaning, basically, those who use the stylus; in other words, sacred writers. The name "enchanters" (*ashshapim*) is a designation for the Ashupu priests of Babylonian texts.