

Daniel 1:1-8

*Godly Living in an Ungodly World*

“That’s worldly! Christians shouldn’t be involved with such things.” Have you ever heard a statement like that? You have if you’ve hung around Bible believing Christians for any length of time. The idea of something being “worldly” or “like the world” is common to our Christian vocabulary.

What is uncommon is a unified agreement on what qualifies as “worldly.” Every generation of Christians has defined that term differently.

The Old Order Amish consider automobiles, telephones, and electricity to be worldly.

The church my wife attended as a child was once a Mennonite church. I was reading in some of their historical literature and I learned that they originally considered wedding rings worldly.

One Baptist publication writes: “When a college runs its large screen TV in its student center on Sunday afternoons, worldliness has gained a prime foothold. When a full time seminary professor can interim pastor in a contemporary style church, worldliness has destroyed biblical discernment.”

In reality the term “worldly” is only used once in most of our English translations. Titus 2:12 *For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age...*

The word translated “worldly” is *kosmikos* {kos-mee-kos'} an adjective from the noun *kosmos* which has a variety of meanings. Strongs Concordance lists 8 different definitions for *kosmos*.

It’s most basic meaning has to do with something that’s orderly. Our english word “cosmetics” comes from *kosmos* because they adorn or put your face in order.

- 1) order, or government
- 2) ornament, decoration
- 3) the universe
- 4) the earth
- 5) the inhabitants of the earth,

- 6) the ungodly who are hostile to the cause of Christ
- 7) worldly affairs
- 8) any aggregate or general collection of particulars of any sort

All of those definitions are neutral except number 6 “the ungodly who are hostile to the cause of Christ”

When Paul writes to Titus to explain how God’s grace “teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires” he clearly is using the word “worldly” to mean worldly in the sense of having the character of this present corrupt age which is hostile to the cause of Christ.

The confusion among Christians so often comes when they define “worldly” as anything they see going on in the world. The problem is many things in our world change rapidly. Sin and righteousness never change but what Christians often define as “worldly” changes.

Case in point. In 1968 only hippies wore bell bottom pants. To wear bell bottoms was considered “worldly” by Christians. By 1971 flare leg pants were all the rage. Pastors and church members were sporting leisure suits with flare leg pants. All of a sudden the hippies had to wear straight leg pants to be different!

The truth is that “worldliness” has to do a whole lot more with the heart than the actions. But we can’t look on the heart so we tend to focus on the externals. Out of that external focus comes some real confusion on how we relate to the society around us. There are some unbiblical approaches that Christians tend to take toward living in the world.

The first is *isolation*. Some Christians say that because society is evil and against the kingdom of God they won’t get involved in it. They don’t see Christians having a place in politics, the arts, business. They get wrapped up with church and Christian activities but cut themselves off from society as much as possible.

The problem is that with that approach we can’t fulfill Christ's call to be "the salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13). Salt cannot do its work unless it penetrates the substance on which it acts. Even God, the eternal Word, had to become flesh and make his dwelling among us before he saved us. When praying for his disciples Jesus said, "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world.... As

you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world" (John 17:15, 18). I don't see isolating ourselves from the world as a Biblical approach.

The second approach to society is what we call *accommodation*. Some Christians say that the way of the world is different from the way of the Bible. If they are going to succeed in society, therefore, they can't help accommodating themselves to it, even if that means breaking some biblical principles. They claim that this is particularly necessary when Christians are a small minority. When they are among Christians, they act like Christians. But when they are in the world, they act like everyone else.

This morning I'd like us to look at a third option. Ajith Fernando calls this one *obedient involvement*. Living for God in an ungodly world. How can we be in the world as salt and light but not be of the world? How can we function in the world with out being "worldly?"

For the answer to that question I'd like you to turn with me to the first chapter of the book we're beginning to study, The Book of Daniel **pg 855**

The Book of Daniel is unlike any other book in the Old Testament. It has several unique features, one of which is that much of the book is written not in Hebrew but in a Gentile language. Daniel 2:4 through 7:28 is in Aramaic, the diplomatic language of the Babylonian empire.

Another of its outstanding features has to do with the nature of its prophecies. Daniel contains detailed prophecies of countries and events far ahead of its times.

The prophecies recorded in Daniel are so precise that skeptics insist it was impossible for them to have been written before the events they describe. They look upon Daniel at best as history, more likely a religious allegory, but certainly not the writings of a prophet.

The final remarkable feature of Daniel is the miracles it records. The fiery furnace. The lion's den. The madness of Nebuchadnezzar. The handwriting on the wall. For about seventy years, God performed one miracle after another to authenticate the ministry of the man whom Jesus called, "Daniel the Prophet." (Matthew 24:15)

For these reasons and many more, Daniel should be considered on the "must read" list for every Christian. Three times in the course of their dealings, God calls Daniel "greatly beloved." He is to the prophets what Abraham is to the patriarchs. Daniel was given the most comprehensive view of God's plan of the ages found in the Bible. That's why the Book of Daniel has been called "the key to prophecy" by the commentators. Much of the Book of Revelation would be shrouded in mystery if wasn't for the prophecies of Daniel.

But Daniel shows us something else in it's own unique way. It shows us how we can be involved in a fallen world without isolating ourselves from life or accommodating ourselves to sin.

As we begin today to look at this unique book we'll see three points.

*I. God is sovereign, even when evil seems to triumph. read vs 1 & 2*

Daniel, who is in Jerusalem during the invasion by Nebuchadnezzar, actually grew up during one of the greatest revivals in the history of Judah. The king was Josiah, the first good man to sit on the throne in almost 60 years. He reintroduced the Word of God to the people and stamped out idolatry.

The people of Israel came into the promised land under Joshua in 1405 BC. Josiah took the throne in 639 BC. So 766 years had passed in Israel's history. There were some bright spots, but there were a lot of dark times too. In fact Israel was so disobedient that God had already started the wheels turning for judgment.

Josiah was a good king but his eldest son who took over the throne wasn't. His name was Johiakim. Josiah's rule gave just enough time to prepare some of the Jews like Daniel and his three friends for what was to come.

Nabopolassar, the father of Nebuchadnezzar was the Assyrian General who took Babylon and later revolted and destroyed Nineveh, the capitol of the Assyrian empire. He formed an alliance with Media (north of Babylon) by a marriage of his son, Nebuchadnezzar, to a Median princess.

Judah was afraid of Babylon so they looked to Egypt for help. Unfortunately they looked to the losing side. Nebuchadnezzar defeated Egypt at Carchemish.

After the battle of Carchemish, Nebuchadnezzar advanced against Jehoiakim and took some Judeans captive, including Daniel.

This was the first of three invasions of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar in an 18-year period: 605 b.c., 597 b.c., 587 b.c. - all written in 2 Kings 24-25.

What's important for us to note is the beginning of verse 2. Nebuchadnezzar invaded but notice *the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand*. God is sovereign, even when evil seem to triumph.

This ought to be an encouragement to us. Even when evil seemed to be in control, God was actually in control and was working out His purposes. In this case, after centuries of warning, He was punishing Judah for their unfaithfulness.

Think about what that meant. God was responsible for the defeat of His people and the desecration of the holy temple vessels! God would allow His name to be mocked for a period of time by heathen nations in order to accomplish a His purpose for His people.

The theme that God is in control appears throughout the Book of Daniel. The Lord knows what's happening. Even the trouble His people endure under evil men has been permitted by Him and will fit his ultimate plan.

Think about it. As dark a day as it was when Nebuchadnezzar over ran Jerusalem it doesn't compare to day Jesus was crucified. Pagan Romans dominate Jerusalem. Jesus claims to be Israel's Messiah and they nail Him to a cross. Where was God? He was providing the sacrifice for the sins of the world through His Son.

It was all happening just as He had planned. And yet somehow in the mystery of God's working each nation, as well as individuals, did as they choose. They acted of their own volition and did God's will.

Maybe your in the midst of one of those difficult situations of life right now. Isn't it encouraging to know that God is in control. You say, "It doesn't look like He's in control at all." It might not have looked that way to Daniel either. Seeing his place of worship plundered, his homeland ravished, his people carried away

in slavery. But Daniel believed in the sovereignty of God.

That kept him from crippling discouragement. As we were going to see it also gave him courage to be obedient to God even when God's people were only a tiny minority.

*I. God is sovereign, even when evil seems to triumph.*

*II. Evil seeks to corrupt everything in its path.*

### **Read vs 3-5**

Putting together the time references and Daniel's age later in the book we know that he was about 16 years old at this time. Put this into perspective; think about how you would have handled being transported to a foreign country against your will, being made a eunuch, having your name changed, and being enrolled in a university to study foreign concepts in a foreign language.

How easy it would have been for Daniel to become bitter toward Babylon, toward his own people [after all, Israel's sin brought on God's judgment], and even toward God!

We are not told about the attitudes and actions of any of the other Hebrew hostages, but it is probably safe to assume they did not respond the way Daniel and his friends did. Daniel and his friends demonstrated character.

Now, Nebuchadnezzar was looking among the Jews he had brought back to incorporate them into his court. He wanted to use them to serve. So he had some high qualifications.

First, they had to be from the royal family. The Jewish historian, Josephus theorized that they were from the household of Zedekiah who was the third son of Josiah.

Second, they had to be good looking. (The pagan king wanted to surround himself with beautiful people.)

Third, they had to be intelligent.

These Hebrews were going to be enrolled in a 3 year program of intense learning. At the end of verse 4 it's described as the language & literature of the

Chaldeans. Chaldean is a term used interchangeably with Babylonian.

These 4 teens were to be taught the language, culture, astrology, mathematics, and mythology of the most powerful and important nation of the day.

Along with all of this The chief of the eunuchs gave them new names. **Read 6-7**

These 4 Jewish boys had godly names:

Daniel = God is my judge

Hananiah = Jehovah is gracious

Mishael = Who is like God?

Azariah = Jehovah is my helper

Daniel : Belteshazzar = Bel provides (or protects)

Hananiah : Shadrack = Command of Aku (Aku was the moon god)

Mishael : Meshack = Who is what Aku is?

Azariah : Abed-Nego = Servant of Nebo (Nebo was the son of the false god Baal)

See what the strategy was. Take these 4 guys and totally immerse them in Babylonian culture, religion, and learning and erase their past. Change their identity. Cut them off from all of their religious associations. Try to get them to forget their homes, their lifestyle, and everything else about their godly Jewish heritage.

The Babylonians were an advanced culture when it came to mathematics, language, & architecture. Nebuchadnezzar's hanging gardens were one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. But when it came to religion and mysticism they were as pagan as you could get.

Evil seeks to corrupt everything in its path. Here are these vulnerable young men, away from their parents, impressionable boys. They're not in a concentration camp or a prison. That might just generate anger and hostility in them. Instead, they're in the palace - intelligent boys, given books and teachers, promised vocations and high ranking jobs, careers and leadership, and an escape from this slave status - treated like aristocrats.

1PE 5:8 *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.* Babylon was a godless empire. What a temptation for these young guys to give in. To just be swallowed up. To buy into this Babylonian wisdom and teaching.

Isn't that what its like for all of us living in our society? The temptation is to adopt a "worldly" perspective. To buy into the thinking patterns of the world in which we live.

The media, books, education. All of these things put philosophies of life into our minds. Think about a child growing up in America. Why did the framers of the U.S. constitution base its principles on Scripture? Because they recognized The Bible to be God's Word and therefore authoritative and unchanging.

Law in our society today keeps on changing because it operates by the principle of the prevailing human wisdom. So a 3-year-old watches TV and grows indoctrinated by the media. He grows up and then become congressman, and then votes and change the country. A child reads books, goes to schools, is indoctrinated and those things become his values. What we think of as entertainment ultimately becomes peoples' values. Those things will become laws of your children and grandchildren in the future. Satan is very real. If you don't think he is then he's got you just where he wants you. He's real and he's working through this world system, indoctrinating people.

*I. God is sovereign, even when evil seems to triumph.*

*II. Evil seeks to corrupt everything in its path.*

*III. But despite the pervasive evil, God's people can live Godly lives in the midst of an evil generation.*

## **Read vs 8**

We don't know how many of those seventy-some youths succumbed to the seduction of Babylon, but one sixteen year-old said no. He drew the line when it came to the royal food and wine. Why? First of all, none of it was kosher. According to the God-given dietary laws, it was unclean. He also knew that in Babylon, the meat and drink were first offered to the gods of the land before they were brought to the table. Daniel was taking his life in his hands when he refused these gourmet meals.



When God gives us a hard thing to do, there are plenty of reasons we can think of not to do it. We can construct all sorts of rationale. Satan has the lists made up for us to follow.

Daniel could have thought, "Wait a minute, I'm just a kid. Why should I be expected to turn down the good life" Or he could have said, "Look at all of those other fellows. Why should just four of us be denied the king's delicacies and wine? After all, everybody else is living it up"

Daniel could have said, "I'm away from home, and Mom and Dad will never know." You know what the test of true character is? It's What you do when you know absolutely nobody will find out. Daniel also knew that if he disobeyed, he might not be around very long--Nebuchadnezzar had a reputation for throwing people into the furnace. It was one of his favorite indoor sports.

In fact, Jeremiah told about a time when Nebuchadnezzar decided he didn't like someone and had him slowly roasted in the fire while others watched. Another time Nebuchadnezzar had a guy's sons killed before his eyes

and then he had the man's eyes gouged out so that the last thing he saw was the death of his own sons. Not the kind of king you want to rub the wrong way!

Here's the best excuse of all. Daniel could have reasoned, "Now, Lord, I know this isn't exactly right, and I probably shouldn't do this, but I really want a place of leadership in the kingdom, and I know You could really use me if I were your representative to Nebuchadnezzar." Isn't that spiritual sounding? But Daniel had learned, it's never right to do wrong in order to do right.

Daniel took quite a stand here. But I want you to see something. He chose his battles carefully.

Daniel didn't refuse when his name was changed, nor when they wanted him to go to Babylon University, but when they tried to feed him the king's food he refused. Why? In the Old Testament there is no prohibition against taking another name. There is no command against learning what other people have to teach. Moses and Joseph were both assimilated into other cultures.

But, in the Bible there is a clear prohibition against eating meat that the Law of Moses declared unclean. Where God said no, Daniel said no.

We're going to find that Daniel serves for most of his life as an official in the courts of Babylon and Medio-Persia. Daniel wore Babylonian clothes, had a Babylonian name, spoke the Babylonian language, functioned daily in the Babylonian culture, learned the full gamut of Babylonian wisdom, and was active in politics.

He did all of that without being "worldly." At the same time he stood up for the clear commands of scripture, even if it meant his life, therefore he was godly. He lived a godly life in the midst of an evil generation.

It always amazes me when Christians argue over the things where God hasn't spoken, while they allow the things He has spoken to slip under the rug. There are certain things God says are wrong. Immorality is wrong. Adultery is wrong. Jealousy is wrong. Gossip is wrong. Pride is wrong. Not caring for the poor is wrong. Not loving God is wrong.

If we want the blessing of God upon our lives, we better have the courage and authority to stand as Daniel stood and say, "I will not defile myself, because God has said no." But we also better have the wisdom to operate in our world in such a way as to have influence.

Daniel and his friends are a real challenge to us. They were fully immersed in a pagan culture. They worked hard and succeeded in society. But they didn't compromise their religious principles. They challenge the position of those who say it is impossible to be totally committed to God and his principles in a fallen world.

Can you run a business and be godly? Can you be an artist and be godly? Can you be a musician that doesn't play primarily to Christian audiences and be godly? Can you be a part of high school or college life and be godly? Can you serve in politics and be godly?

A lot of Christians might say, "No." Daniel and his friends show us yes we can. Without a doubt.

Two weeks ago 600 high school students from all over the country got together in Washington, DC for *The National Youth Leadership Conference*. Jared Johnson was part of that group. They drafted a manifesto for action. This past Wednesday 20 of our teens in youth group also signed the declaration. I'd like to have Jared read from it as we close today.

I believe with all my heart that the young people who live this out are going to make a difference. They're taking their cue from Daniel. They're ready to live a godly life in an ungodly world.

We don't have time to have all of you sign on but as you hear these words and as you think of Daniel, I want you to ask yourself, "Is this where I'm at today in my Christian commitment? Am I willing to make a declaration of my willingness to leave a legacy of Daniel like