

**Scripture intro:** Open your Bible to Daniel chapter 1. Here Daniel opens his classic book of prophecy with an unassuming biography. The facts he includes in his account are sparse, writing as little as possible about himself. Perhaps part of Daniel's purpose is to deflect attention from himself and toward his God, showing God at work when every human factor seems to oppose His plan. As we look into Daniel 1, let's look for God's hand in some unlikely places.

**Intro:** Benazir Bhutto died in Pakistan this week. This is no surprise to anyone here today, and I do not wish to make any uninformed judgements about the Pakistani political situation. However, I do think these events illustrate something more universal. As Pakistan appears to spiral out of control, I think part of the problem is that none of the Pakistani leaders, from Bhutto to the presiding general, are capable of addressing the problem.

It really appears that all of them are seeking the increase of their own power at the expense of the nation.

Unfortunately, this is a problem everywhere, and has been for all time. Daniel faced a similar problem in this chapter. You face it every day. The problem that the Pakistanis and Daniel and we face is that ungodly superiors always pressure others to disobey God in order to conform to worldly expectations.

This isn't always explicitly stated, of course. None of the Pakistani leaders think they cause people to disobey God, indeed, numbers of them call upon the people's own religious beliefs in their campaigns. Nebuchadnezzar certainly never SAID he wanted Daniel and his friends to disobey God, but he certainly did have his own program for them didn't he?

And then when we take this more personally, I think we rarely consider how far-reaching this ungodly influence is on everything we do. Yes, we live in a free and peaceful country – and thank God for that – but we certainly don't live in a Christian country.

On some level you face some ungodly influence. Some of you go to schools where you are taught that God is a joke. Some of you work for people who do not know Christ. If nothing else, you still must obey the government, and though Christians may vote and run for office, I'm afraid our political system itself cannot be considered always obedient to God.

God has a solution in this passage. If you will turn to Him and respond to His Word, He will give you what you need to overcome the influence of ungodly authority. Daniel's experience shows us clearly that ...

**Proposition:** Because God sovereignly ordains authorities, you must make the choice to obey Him.

*This passage gives several reasons why you should choose to obey God instead of ungodly authorities.*

## **I. Choose to obey God because His will always prevails in human events. (1-7)**

### *A. God's will prevails when unbelievers seem to triumph. (1-2)*

#### 1. Jehoiakim was a wicked king. (1)

- a. Jehoiakim (first named Eliakim) was set on the throne by Pharaoh Necho of Egypt in his younger brother's place.
- b. Jehoiakim cut and burned pages from Jeremiah's prophecy in a futile attempt to avoid its judgements. (Jer. 36:23)
- c. Jehoiakim built an ostentatious palace and was told he would be buried like a donkey. (Jer. 22:13-19)
- d. Jehoiakim's last three years were spent in rebellion to Nebuchadnezzar.

#### 2. God gave Nebuchadnezzar the victory. (2)

- a. God's prophets foretold Judah's destruction because of Israel's wickedness and Jehoiakim's sin.
- b. The "Lord" (*Adonai* אֲדֹנָי "supreme master;" not *Jehovah*) gave Jehoiakim into Nebuchadnezzar's hand.

"The significance of using [*Adonai*] here is to say that, though outward signs did not seem to show it, God was the master of this situation, as Jehoiakim was given into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar." (Wood, *Commentary on Daniel*, p. 30.)

- c. Isaiah had prophesied the capture of the temple implements after Hezekiah foolishly showed them to the Babylonians. (2 Kings 20:13-19)

<sup>KJV</sup> **2 Kings 20:17** Behold, the days come, that all that *is* in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the LORD.

*B. God's will prevails when believers face hostile surroundings. (3-7)*

1. Nebuchadnezzar's program was designed for the complete secularization of Jewish talent.
  - a. He sent Ashpenaz to select talented young Jews. (3-4a)
    - 1) These men all had to be immensely talented.
    - 2) Few of these men were intensely spiritual.
  - b. He chose Babylonian immersion for the talented young Jews. (4b-7)
2. Nebuchadnezzar's later campaigns eventually result in the complete destruction of Jerusalem.
  - a. The siege recounted here occurred in 605 B.C.
    - 1) Nebuchadnezzar took only talented Jews and the temple implements.
    - 2) This begins the prophesied 70 year exile. (Walvoord, *Daniel, The Key to Prophetic Revelation*, p. 30)
  - b. Later Jerusalem sieges brought more dramatic results.
    - 1) In 597 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar returned and installed a new king because Judah had revolted. (Wood, *Survey of Israel's History*, pp. 317-18)
    - 2) In 586 B.C. this new king also revolted, causing the final destruction of Jerusalem. (Wood, *Survey*, pp. 318-20)

*This chapter's opening verses detail Judah's disheartening defeat. God orchestrated the destruction of His chosen people's nation by a wicked king for his own purposes, and the prophets explained why this was completely just. Not only should you choose to obey God because of His superiority over human events, but you should ...*

## **II. Choose to obey God because His way always requires a resolved heart. (8-16)**

*A. Obedience requires resolve when you must obey alone. (8-10)*

1. Daniel's decision was a burden of commitment. (8)
  - a. Literally, he "placed upon his heart" not to eat the food.

“Daniel, having made a decision not to eat the king’s food, placed this decision on his heart, thus putting himself under full obligation to act according to it. He did not make [this decision] to forget it, as is so often done.” (Wood, *Commentary*, p. 36)

- b. His decision required objecting to the king’s provision.
- c. His motivation is unclear.
  - 1) Was the meat unclean according to the Law of Moses?
    - a) The law did allow eating certain meats certain ways (Lev. 3:17; 11:1-47; 17:10-14).
    - b) The law did not prevent wine. (Baldwin, *Daniel*, p. 83.)
  - 2) Was the meat and wine offered to idols?
    - a) Nothing in the passage suggests this as the problem.
    - b) The Babylonians did make blood sacrifices to their gods. (Baldwin, 82)
    - c) The Babylonians offered all their food to their gods, making everything unclean and not just the meat. (Baldwin, 82-83)
  - 3) The passage never clearly explains **why** the food was unacceptable.
  - 4) The passage does clearly state that somehow eating the food **was** unacceptable.
- 2. Daniel’s decision was a risk. (9-10)
  - a. God gave him unusually good favor with his superior, Ashpenaz, the chief of the eunuchs. (9)
  - b. His good favor with Ashpenaz shows in the answer. (10)
    - 1) Ashpenaz did not have to listen.
    - 2) Ashpenaz could have punished them for asking.

*B. Obedience requires resolve when disobedience could be excused. (11-16)*

- 1. Daniel requests a temporary change from a subordinate (11-13)

a. He could have given up. (11)

“Now that [Daniel] had properly asked for relief from the order and had been refused, he had a ready-made excuse for desisting in his decision. Most would have been glad to use it. But Daniel clearly was not looking for an excuse—only a way to carry out his well-made choice.”  
(Wood, *Commentary*, p. 40)

b. He could have had less faith. (12-13)

- 1) Daniel believed there would be a noticeable difference after 10 days.
- 2) Daniel’s request would be hard to refuse, but easy to disprove.

2. Daniel is rewarded for his faith. (14-16)

- a. God honored Daniel by blessing him with better health. (14-15)
- b. Melzar honored Daniel by making the change permanent. (16)

*The focus of this passage has rightly been on Daniel’s decision, but if all God offered us was an example of someone who resolved to choose the lonely path of obedience, He would have given us a shallow motivation for obedience. Fortunately for us, God ends the chapter with the most stirring reason to choose to obey Him, showing us that you need to ...*

### III. Choose to obey God because His walk always brings God’s grace. (17-21)

*A. God gave Daniel and his friends unsurpassed wisdom. (17-20)*

1. Nebuchadnezzar found none like them among all the young men under the chief of the eunuch’s training (17-19)
2. Nebuchadnezzar found them ten times better than all in his kingdom. (20)

*B. God gave Daniel unusual longevity. (21)*

**Conclusion:** Daniel and his friends realized that they could not have obeyed God without his grace, that they certainly would not have done so without making their own choice, and they could see the evidence of God’s handiwork in history every day.

A few years ago, I took a Greyhound bus from South Carolina to Knoxville, Tennessee. One thing everyone realizes about riding a long distance bus like that is that you meet a lot of people, most of whom you would try to not meet otherwise. This ride was no different.

At one of the stops along the road, a man about my age boarded the bus and sat across the aisle from me. He was dressed a little differently than I, but after a little while he and I began to talk.

He told me that the reason he wore all black clothing and looked so different from me was because he was a “Goth.”

Naturally, he found out why I looked and thought differently than he did. He was very interested in Jesus, and asked me many questions about what I believed.

When I encouraged him to repent of his sins, come to Christ, and obey God the rest of his life, he had a sad, but instructive response:

*“If I were to ever darken the door of a church again, all my friends would come and find me and beat me until there was no tomorrow.”*

His friends held him in absolute sway, and even though I think he wanted to believe, he never trusted Christ for fear of their disapproval.

Obedying God today isn’t any easier for you. You have to make the very same choice.

That choice may be frighteningly costly, and you might be wishing you didn’t have to choose to obey God in such a drastic way. Maybe you’re also afraid of something that might happen to you, and you’ve forgotten that God is still in control of human events and is willing to reward obedience with His grace.

Maybe you’ve disobeyed God so many times that you don’t think you can ever obey Him properly again, thinking that somehow Daniel’s courage was only the result of a stronger will than yours or some sort of “super-sainthood” that removed him from having to struggle with sin.

Maybe you don’t believe in God at all. You think that the results of human sin somehow prove that God doesn’t have a better way and that you couldn’t believe in Him if you tried. But God **is** in control. He brought you here today to hear this, and he will give you grace if you’ll trust Him.

Maybe you do believe in God and have been trying to obey Him for years, but today you know that you have failed. You remember scores of times when you chose to disobey God even though you believe in Him because you are still a sinner. You need to call out to God today, and seek His mercy for your weakness!

Whatever your choice now, **you must make the choice to obey Him in spite of all ungodly influence!**