

## The Challenge of Secular Power

**Introduction:** In the report of the dark story of Israel's captivity, we can find some real bright spots. We can read about some outstanding examples of heroic faith, examples of ordinary people who did extraordinary things because they simply trusted in their God! Among them are four Hebrew heroes who exercised tremendous faith in the face of intimidating secular power. Their names were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Their story will not only inspire us; it will teach us also what to do when faced with the challenges of secular power.

### I. The Heroic Story of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego

#### A. Notes on chapter 1

1. In 605 BC, confirmed by ancient Babylonians inscriptions.
2. (Read v. 1-2) The Lord gave... From the first we see that God ultimately controls the governments of men. The Jews had to acknowledge that though Jehovah was their God, He gave them into the hands of these evil men because of their unfaithfulness to him.
3. v. 3-6 Nebuchadnezzar planned to acquire the loyalty of and make use of the most talented young men of the conquered peoples including our 4 Hebrew heroes.
4. v. 7 Notice the immediate pressure put upon them to forget their backgrounds. Every one of those Hebrew boys wore a name that gave honor to God; but no more. They could have reasoned that since God had given them into the hands of their enemies they should no longer serve Him.
5. v. 8 Note the resolution of Daniel not to violate the food laws of the OT; and notice how the leadership of one godly young person inspires others. He did not abandon his early teaching to get along or be accepted and with terrible risk as we shall see!
6. v. 9-10 I take it Daniel prayed about these things. God was with him. The commander himself was reluctant to make a change in the king's requirement lest he lose his head.
7. v. 11-13 Daniel approaches him with common sense and reason rather than rebellion.
8. v. 14-16 Following God's laws is always best.
9. v. 17-20 Notice how these young men applied themselves. What we see here is the wonderful convergence of spiritual and secular knowledge. All truth harmonizes. Those who are wise in the truths of God wisely know what among the wisdom of men to discard and what to keep!
10. v. 21 Daniel's faith here changed his whole life. He would serve for 70 years! What if he and his friends had taken the easy road of compromise!?

## **II. Lessons we may learn from them**

**A. God's people have always been tested by the challenges of secular power. Today we face the challenges of a culture that has dramatically shifted away from a theistic world view to a atheistic (humanistic) world view. Some of the chief centers of secular power in our culture are aligned with this shift.**

**1. Government--For several decades we have seen an increasing secularization of governmental power, manifested in legislation and court rulings that seek to removed all vestiges of religion in any public arena. And so we are not surprised to see that there now efforts to loosen even further laws rooted in Judeo-Christian morality.**

**2. Institutions of "Higher Learning"--Institutions of high learning have been filled with humanists for many years. They exert great influence on students who pass through them and they in turn control important institutions in society that affect the culture.**

**3. The press--Any survey of the press shows that the mainstream media is biased against Biblical positions. The choosing of stories to run, how they are presented are all affected by this bias, whether they want to admit it or not!**

**4. Entertainment media--Christian beliefs and morality are attacked incessantly; and moral people are made to appear ridiculous and dangerous. In addition the media itself intensifies its boldness to present the bizarre, the immoral as legitimate.**

**B. What can God's people do in face of such secular power?**

**1. Don't allow bitterness & resentment to cause you to quit doing right! We need not be full of pessimism and a "gloom and doom" mentality. Remember God is still in ultimate control!**

**2. Commit yourself to always doing right regardless of the consequences. The time to decide how you will deal with the throws of secular power, however it manifests itself, is before the confrontation. Make up your mind to do what is right!**

**3. Pray about the challenges you personally face. It may be the most powerful "weapon" we have against worldly power. Prayer changes us; it moves God's hand in the world.**

**4. Don't be afraid to teach the truth. Truth is the most powerful weapon we have. Let's present it in the best possible way.**

**5. Treat authorities with respect, not a rebellious attitude; & try to persuade them of what is right. Give them the opportunity to see the value of truth.**

**6. Learn from secular sources, but maintain independence of thought. Avoid getting caught up in a "movement" of non-Christians or herd mentality (political parties, media outlets,**

philosophical fads). In each case we must still evaluate all ideas by what the word of God says!

**7. Refuse to participate in what is wrong, always! If the choice is between man and God, always choose God. It may come to that in some circumstances. If every effort to teach and reason fails, we have a Biblical right to civil disobedience. We never have a right to do wrong!**

**8. Become convinced the true force of spiritual power There are many possible solutions to the problem of worldly power:**

Rebellion (Can we do this and maintain a respect for authorities as the Bible teaches? What hope is there of victory?)

Political maneuvering (Are there enough of us to accomplish much this way?)

Compromise (Won't we lose favor with God?), nothing (Won't we lose our influence?)

Staying faithful to our principles (Isn't this the most reasonable course?) And did this course not always work in history?

Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Rome. God is on our side, he will work with us and help us if we are faithful to him.

**Conclusion: There is a great need for heroes in our own generation. The battle against worldly power is just beginning for us. Who knows what course it may take in the future? If God so will it, it may bring discrimination and persecution to God's people. Some predict that; but one thing is for sure! I know who will be the ultimate victor; and I know how that victory will take place. It will be through the faithful lives of people like Daniel who have enough faith in what is right to live for it, to stand up for it, and even die for it, if necessary. Such people are the heroes of our own time.**