

## School Daze

In my previous two articles from chapter 1 of the Old Testament book of Daniel, we've looked at the biblical truth of the sovereign rule of God. We've seen that God is in absolute control of everything in life! Even though that statement may seem provocative, the Scriptures are replete with support for that important truth. Today, we'll take a very brief look at Daniel and his three friends and I'll conclude this article with some practical ways in which we can apply the teaching from this prophetic book directly to our lives.

As you'll see, I'm using "daze" in the title of this article as a play on words. The word "daze" is a word that means to "dazzle" or impress. This word references that which causes confusion, disorientation, and a loss of clear vision in the person or persons being "dazzled." This could be illustrated by someone having a light shone directly in their eyes. This causes them to be momentarily, or possibly for a longer period of time, blinded, resulting in being unable to discover, with any certainty, the truth that's needed to address the issue at hand. This is the plan for Daniel and his friends. Some have called this tactic of Nebuchadnezzar nothing short of "brainwashing." An analogy of this can be the way the things of this world are constantly put in front of us to dazzle us and our children with the idea that *we and our children* may be fooled into thinking that we need everything that we see advertised if we're ever going to have true happiness in life.

Daniel and his three friends are getting ready to be placed in the school of Babylon. This school is designed to "dazzle" them in the hopes that they'll forget their God and choose to find their dependence on the king of Babylon. Look with me now in verses 3-4: "Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, youths *without blemish*, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to *teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans.*" In my previous article, we were told of the prophecy from Isaiah (2 Kings 20:16-18) that the vessels from the temple would be taken to Babylon. You may remember that God also said that some of the royal family ("some of your own sons") would be taken as well (Daniel 1:3). Scholars have suggested that Daniel and, likely, his three friends, were descendants of King Hezekiah. At this point I want to pause and give a few points of practical application to ponder. We'll continue our look at Daniel and his three friends in my next article.

—No matter what we see going on in the world around us, God is Sovereign over all his creation and nothing happens, ultimately, apart from Him. We will certainly not understand everything we see or hear about but, because of the sovereignty of God, we don't have to live in unhealthy fear and anxiety.

—Daniel and his friends sought to honor God with their obedience to him even in the midst of a difficult situation as they're held captive in the kingdom of Babylon. Although it's true that God's people are saved by grace in the finished work of Jesus Christ and not by works, God takes our obedience or disobedience seriously. Christians are not saved by what we do, but because of our salvation, the way we live and the choices we make matter to God. And yet, it's also true that the *only* One who always obeyed was the perfect, prophet, priest, and king, the Lord Jesus Christ. Christians seek, by grace, to obey what Scripture calls us to do, but we rest in Jesus not our own imperfect obedience.

—Even though Hezekiah was a good king, he made a terrible error by thinking that a military and political alliance with a pagan nation would be the way to go rather than trusting in the promises of God (see my previous article). We want to be careful to see that the church does not try to ally ourselves with the wisdom and ways of this world. Even though government's are God's plan for a fallen world, our *ultimate* hope is in God *not* in the government or politics. If we get caught up in the anger and divisiveness of partisan politics, we run the risk of losing our ability to share the gospel with the non-believing culture.

—We want to remember that Satan's sinful world system will seek to draw us and our family away from God by dazzling us with the world's trinkets. Therefore, we should put on our battle armor daily (Ephesians 6:10-18), as well as help our children and grandchildren to put on their battle armor in order that, by God's grace, Satan and his world system will not be successful as he continually seeks to draw us and our loved ones away from the things of God. Rev. Dr. Steve Jones is the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church PCA in Paxton, Illinois.