



**BIBLE
STUDIES
FOR LIFE®**

Leader

Guide

SENIOR ADULTS
FALL 2023
KJV

Staying True in a World Far from God

Confident in the Face of Hard Questions

Contents

How to Use <i>Bible Studies for Life</i>	6
Leadership Training	12
<i>Bible Studies for Life's</i> Discipleship Plan	14

Staying True in a World Far from God

SUGGESTED FOR
THE WEEK OF

		Introduction	16
Sep. 3	Session 1:	Develop Strong Convictions	18
	Article:	Babylonian and Persian Kings	28
Sep. 10	Session 2:	Pray with Passion	32
Sep. 17	Session 3:	Speak Truth Boldly	42
Sep. 24	Session 4:	Live Courageously	52
Oct. 1	Session 5:	Confess Wholeheartedly	62
Oct. 8	Session 6:	Prepare for Battle	72
	Article:	Cyrus the Great and The Cyrus Cylinder	82
	Article:	The Sign Posts for Spiritual Growth	86

Confident in the Face of Hard Questions

		Introduction	88
Oct. 15	Session 1:	Does It Really Matter Which “Truth” I Believe?	90
Oct. 22	Session 2:	Are Miracles Relevant?	100
Oct. 29	Session 3:	Why Do We Suffer?	110
Nov. 5	Session 4:	Is Jesus the Only Way to God?	120
Nov. 12	Session 5:	Won’t All People Ultimately Go to Heaven?	130
Nov. 19	Session 6:	Is Hell Real?	140

Special Focus

	Introduction	150
Nov. 26	God Deserves Our Thanks	152
	Coming Next Quarter	162

eBook

Bible Studies for Life is also available as an eBook. You can order a copy at lifeway.com/bsflebook.

EXTRA!

Every week, you'll find additional discussion questions and creative teaching ideas to help you tailor each session to the needs of your group. You'll also find links to magazine articles and the Family Connection page for parents. www.BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra

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This Leader Guide is designed for leaders of senior adults ages 70 and up. We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter, and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. To review Lifeway's doctrinal guideline, please visit www.lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS—Passages marked KJV are from the King James Version of the Bible.

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We have a new look and design!

While many things may have changed in the way *Bible Studies for Life* looks, one thing has not changed: our commitment to discipleship. Each year, our studies focus on eight different areas of discipleship. You can read how we touch on these eight markers of discipleship on page 14, but this issue focuses on two areas.

Live Unashamed. An ongoing challenge believers face is the pull of the world around us. Culture may want to sway us in ways that are contrary to God's plan for us, but what does it look like to stand confidently in God? In the study *Staying True in a World Far from God*, we look at Daniel's life and example to discover how we too can live unashamed in a world far from God.

Share Christ. As we live unashamedly for Christ, we will have opportunities to tell others about Him. People may confront us with questions—*hard* questions. We may even struggle ourselves with some of these questions. In the study *Confident in the Face of Hard Questions*, we will discover answers grounded in Scripture that help us confidently point others to Christ.

May God bless your Bible study group as you dig into His Word!

Lynn H. Pryor

Team Leader, Bible Studies for Life

Follow @lynnpryor

Invite the Holy Spirit's Guidance

Because God is the guide for your study, invite Him to show you how to be the best facilitator for your group. Read the Bible passage several times with the Holy Spirit showing you its meaning and application.

Personal Study Guide

Then read the Personal Study Guide. Its content provides the foundation and direction for the Bible discussion and study by your group.

Leader Guide

Follow the simple directives in the group plan. This plan will guide you in engaging your group in discussion around the Bible passage. Read the commentary to help you understand the passage. Share insights from the commentary as needed during the group discussion.

New Feature: Bonus Content. QR codes will provide you with additional content to enhance your groups Bible study experience.

Leader Pack

The optional Leader Pack is designed to enhance the group experience, especially for visual learners. Pull in the Leader Pack items as referenced in the group plan. Other valuable tools found in the Leader Pack:

- Promotional videos to introduce each study for this quarter
- Sample Twitter® and email messages to post prior to your Bible study time to raise awareness and promote the session topic
- An electronic version of the group plans that you can customize and print

- The Leader Pack also includes access to digital files including:
 - JPEG files of the two main study images that you can use with any presentation software (Promote the study by placing these images into an announcement slideshow or display the images during the sessions to reinforce the study topic.)
 - PDF files of each pack item (Create multiple posters, during your session display the image on a screen using any presentation software, or post these images on social media to promote the study.)

Additional Ideas

Additional discussion questions and teaching suggestions for leaders are available online at www.BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra.

Prepare Your Group Members

Encourage your group members to read the Personal Study Guide prior to the group meeting. (Some group members will prefer to read it after the meeting as a way to follow up and reflect.)

Encourage them to join the conversation with others on our Facebook page ([Facebook.com/BibleStudiesforLife](https://www.facebook.com/BibleStudiesforLife)); our blog (BibleStudiesforLife.com); or on Twitter (@BibleMeetsLife).

For Those Who Want to Go Deeper



The ***Advanced Bible Study*** (KJV) is written for group members who desire more extensive commentary. It includes exposition of each session's Scripture passage, an examination of key words, an introduction to the setting of the passage and biblical life and times, questions to guide the study, and interactive responses to help readers apply God's truths to their lives today.

Prayer Requests

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Prayer Requests

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Everything I Learned about Outreach, I Learned from an HVAC Company

By Dwayne McCrary

In the fall, the HVAC* service companies start reminding us about getting ready for the winter months. If we have a contract with a local service company, most of us get a card reminding us to make an appointment for our semi-annual HVAC check. If they don't hear from us, we get a second card and maybe a text. If we continue to ignore the reminders, we eventually get a call to schedule the semi-annual check. They warned us, so we are almost apologetic when they call for not already scheduling the appointment. As the day of the appointment approaches, we get a reminder that they'll be coming between certain hours. On the day of the check, we most likely get a text letting us know they are on their way. Once at our home, they knock on the door, tell us why they are here (as if we didn't know), and enter with plastic booties covering their feet. They do their inspections, tell us if we need to take any other actions, give us an opportunity to ask questions, and are on their way. We may even receive a follow up text or email thanking us for the business.

We can learn some things from HVAC companies when it comes to reaching out to others.



1. WE NEED TO REMIND OTHERS WE ARE HERE.

Over the summer, people tend to be on the go more than at other times. We see more individuals taking vacations, participating in outdoor activities, and planning family outings. Our assumptions usually are that they know where we are when they're back home and are ready to settle down for a season. HVAC companies don't assume we know when to call them or that we know they're still in business. Instead, they remind us that we need them, and we should do the same. Keeping up with the people assigned to our Bible study group and our guests is part of being a good shepherd.

2. WE NEED TO GO ONSITE.

The HVAC companies don't expect us to dismantle our systems and take them in for review. Nor do they depend on a video app to walk us through how to check our system. They come to our house. We may think contacting someone in their home is old school, but research indicates the expectation of Sunday School leaders visiting people was introduced in the early 1920s. That time was filled with all kinds of challenges, including the aftermath of the Spanish Flu, with parallels to today (you can find out more about these parallels in the book listed in the article bio). Just like the 1920s, the post-COVID world requires us to go to people far from God if we want to reach them.

3. WE NEED TO MAKE APPOINTMENTS.

We are thankful that HVAC technicians don't randomly show up at our front porches. They make appointments so they can use their time wisely, and so we can remove stuff in front of the return air vent. We both win! The same is true when it comes to contacting someone face-to-face. We want to be good stewards of our time and allow them to make any preparations they may want to make.

The HVAC company usually sends a text to let us know they're about to be there, even though they already have an appointment. Doing so serves as a last-minute reminder to get ready for their arrival. When we are headed to a person's residence (who has been a guest or away for a few weeks), we can send a text to let them know we are on the way, even if we already have an appointment.

4. WE NEED TO REMEMBER WE ARE ON THEIR TURF.

The HVAC tech wears booties because he or she is on our turf. Most technicians wouldn't wear those same booties in their home. When we stop by someone's home, we need to remember that we're on their turf. The way we treat any pets they may have, the questions we ask, and the things that we point out about their home are important. Knowing the difference between asking why they display a picture versus inviting them to tell us the story behind that same photo matters.

5. WE NEED TO DO WHAT WE SAID WE WOULD DO.

Most of us know what to expect when the HVAC technician visits because they've told us on the cards, as well as when making the appointment. Imagine the surprise most of us would express if the technician began testing each chair in our living room. We would be looking for another HVAC company! When we make an appointment to see someone face-to-face, we can explain why we're coming by and then be true to that explanation. One reason we may have for making an onsite visit is delivering our Bible study resources. This gives us a natural reason at least four times a year to visit everyone assigned to our Bible study group.

The HVAC tech wants to be thorough, but he or she knows we have other things to do. We need to follow that same practice when making a visit to a group member or guest.

6. WE NEED TO FOLLOW UP AFTERWARDS.

Once the HVAC tech leaves, most of us get a summary of the inspection and some tips that may help our system last longer. This individual may also thank us for trusting their company with the hope that we will continue using their service. After we visit someone face-to-face, we too can send a personal follow-up message, giving them a tip about the upcoming Bible study, how they might use the resource we dropped off, or information they requested. While this may seem like a small thing, a follow-up message communicates that we care.

Dwayne McCrary is the manager of adult ongoing Bible studies at Lifeway and teaches an ongoing Bible study as well. His most recent book is *Farsighted: Fostering a Culture of Outreach in our Churches and Bible Study Groups* (available at Lifeway.com/TrainingResources).

*HVAC: Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning

THE PATHWAY OF DISCIPLESHIP

Growing in Christ is a journey—a lifelong journey—but what does that look like? Lifeway’s research reveals eight markers consistently present in the lives of believers who are growing spiritually. Each year, Bible Studies for Life engages all eight of these areas. Following this intentional plan for discipleship ensures progress on the pathway to becoming more like Christ.

Visit www.BibleStudiesforLife.com for a fuller picture of this discipleship plan through 2024.

	FALL 2023	WINTER 2023-24	SPRING 2024	SUMMER 2024
LIVE UNASHAMED	Staying True in a World Far from God			
SHARE CHRIST	Confident in the Face of Hard Questions			
SEEK GOD		A Name Like No Other		
EXERCISE FAITH		Owning a Faith That Matters		
OBEY GOD AND DENY SELF			It’s All About Jesus	
SERVE GOD AND OTHERS			Being an Authentic Church	
ENGAGE WITH SCRIPTURE				Promises We Can Count On
BUILD RELATIONSHIPS				More Than a Sidekick: Serving Alongside Others

STAYING TRUE IN A WORLD FAR FROM GOD

How This Study Supports the Discipleship Plan:

Live Unashamed. We live in a culture that is becoming increasingly antagonistic toward those who follow Christ. Through his actions and prayers, Daniel gives us a powerful example of what it looks like to live unashamed in a culture that sees no need to live righteously and obediently for His glory.

- Sept. 3 Session 1 **Develop Strong Convictions** (Daniel 1:3-13,17-19)
- Sept. 10 Session 2 **Pray with Passion** (Daniel 2:13-23,27-28a)
- Sept. 17 Session 3 **Speak Truth Boldly** (Daniel 5:13-17,22-28)
- Sept. 24 Session 4 **Live Courageously** (Daniel 6:6-13,16-17,21-23)
- Oct. 1 Session 5 **Confess Wholeheartedly** (Daniel 9:3-10,17-19)
- Oct. 8 Session 6 **Prepare for Battle** (Daniel 10:1-3,10-13,16-19)

CONFIDENT IN THE FACE OF HARD QUESTIONS

How This Study Supports the Discipleship Plan:

Share Christ. When we know what we believe—and why—we stand with assurance in the truth of Christ. Consequently, we speak with confidence as we have opportunities to talk to others about Christ. Questions—even objections—about our faith can arise, but our witness for Christ is not hindered because we know how to respond.

- Oct. 15 Session 1 **Does it Really Matter Which “Truth” I Believe?** (John 3:19-21; 8:31-36)
- Oct. 22 Session 2 **Are Miracles Relevant?** (John 10:22-26; 14:8-14)
- Oct. 29 Session 3 **Why Do We Suffer?** (Job 30:26-31; 42:1-6)
- Nov. 5 Session 4 **Is Jesus the Only Way to God?** (1 John 5:1-13)
- Nov. 12 Session 5 **Won’t All People Ultimately Go to Heaven?** (Matthew 7:13-23)
- Nov. 19 Session 6 **Is Hell Real?** (Thessalonians 1:3-12)



Introduction

Staying True in a World Far from God

For those who grew up in church, our first thought concerning Daniel is likely of the king throwing him into the lion's den. This centuries-old story highlights the world's antagonism toward the things of God and His followers. The division between the world's standards and God's is not a thin line in the sand; today, it is a vast chasm. The differences are seemingly becoming greater at an ever-increasingly rapid rate.

Daniel in the lion's den is but one snapshot from the life of a prophet who remained faithful when kings and companions challenged him to forsake God. The book of Daniel portrays him as unashamed, unwavering, and unwilling to compromise in his devotion to God. One behavior that stands out to the reader is Daniel's faithfulness in prayer. Another is his willingness to show courage. Daniel thus serves as a model for believers who want to stand strong today despite the world's disapproval and opposition—or even its resentfulness and animosity. Daniel remained unashamedly faithful; we can too.

AUTHOR

G.B. Howell served as a pastor in Georgia and as an adjunct professor for New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary before serving at Lifeway as the Content Editor of Biblical Illustrator magazine until he retired.

COMMENTARY WRITER

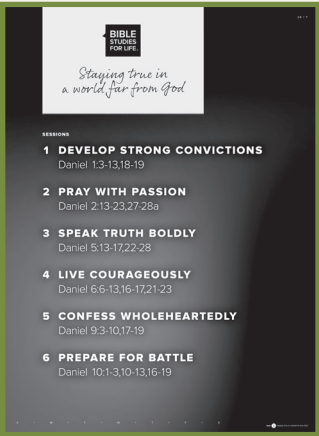
Ross McLaren wrote the commentary for this study. Ross has been a visiting scholar at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, and has lectured in numerous universities and seminaries in the United States, Canada, Africa, and China.

Get into the Study



GUIDE: Invite the group to turn to **page 3** of the **Personal Study Guide (PSG)** and review the titles of the six sessions of this study titled **Staying True in a World Far from God**.

LEADER PACK: Display **Item 1: Staying True in a World Far from God** poster to overview the study. Reference session titles throughout your study.



STUDY INTRODUCTION:



DISCUSS: Draw attention to the question on **PSG, page 15** and ask **Question 1: When have you experienced culture shock?**

GUIDE: Refer the group to **"The Bible Meets Life" (PSG, p. 15)** to the 1960s sitcoms about people living in a world far different from what they had previously known.

Session 1

Develop Strong Convictions

THE POINT

Our convictions, not our circumstances, define who we are.

LIFE CONNECTION

We have all assimilated to some degree to the culture we live in. Our understanding, customs, and traditions all grow out of our culture. That’s not necessarily bad, but it becomes an issue when those customs and practices conflict with the biblical standards to which God calls us. In the book of Daniel, we find a man who had convictions and lived out those convictions in a culture that called for a different standard.

THE PASSAGE

Daniel 1:3-13,17-19

THE SETTING

The events in the first chapter of Daniel took place in “the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah.” Two rival empires dominated the world—Egypt and Babylon. The Egyptian army attacked and defeated Judah, killing its good king, Josiah, in 609 BC at the Battle of Megiddo.

In 605 BC, at the Battle of Carchemish, the Babylonians defeated Egypt, conquering all of Syria-Palestine. Jehoiakim rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar which brought the Babylonian army against Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar conquered Judah and imposed a forced exile on some of the Jewish population. Daniel and others from the nobility and royalty were among those in this first wave of deportees to Babylon in 605 BC.

Daniel 1:3-7

3 And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king’s seed, and of the princes;

4 Children in whom was no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king’s palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans.

5 And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king’s meat, and of the wine which he drank: so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king.

6 Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah:

7 Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abednego.

Connection to The Point: Daniel was placed in circumstances beyond his control.

The book of Daniel. The book of Daniel was written during the Babylonian exile. It covers a period of about seventy years—from Nebuchadnezzar’s first conquest of Jerusalem in 605 BC to around the third year of the Persian king Cyrus in 536 BC. The book of Daniel divides neatly into two equal parts. Chapters 1–6 are historical and inform us of events that happened to Daniel and a few other young Hebrew exiles in Babylon. Chapters 7–12 are prophetic and record four visions given to the elderly Daniel concerning the kingdoms of this world and God’s coming kingdom.

An outstanding feature of the book that English readers might miss is that it is written in two languages—Hebrew and Aramaic. Chapters 1:1–2:4a are in Hebrew, as are chapters 8–12. Chapters 2:4b–7 are in Aramaic. Significantly, chapters 2–7 relate to what Jesus called “the times of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24) and outline the course of secular world history. Thus they were written in Aramaic, the language of diplomacy and commerce of that time. Chapters 8–12 concentrate more on the future of God’s covenant people, and so were written in Hebrew.

SAY: Sometimes we look at our world today and say, “This is not the world I have known! Something is wrong here.”

GUIDE: Introduce **The Point** on **PSG, p. 15: Our convictions, not our circumstances, define who we are.**

OPTIONAL INTRODUCTION: Refer to **"Life Connection"** on page 18 for an alternate introduction to the study.

PRAY: Begin the Bible study with prayer. Ask God to remind us that He has not forsaken us, even though the world seems to have forgotten Him.

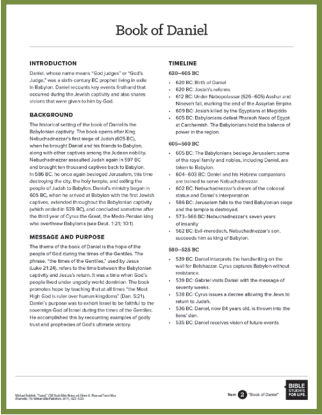
Study the Bible

Daniel 1:3-7

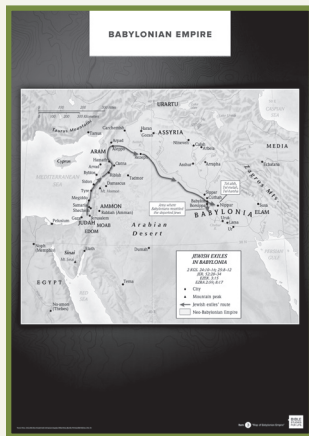


SUMMARIZE: Refer to **"The Setting"** on page 18 to establish the context of the biblical passage.

LEADER PACK: Distribute **Item 2: Book of Daniel** handout. Use this to provide historical context for the events in the life of Daniel.



LEADER PACK: Display **Item 3: Map of Babylonian Empire.** Point out the locations of Jerusalem, Babylon, and the route taken by the exiles.



SUMMARIZE: Refer to the **Bible Commentary** to provide background information about the book of Daniel:

The book of Daniel. Written during the Babylonian exile. It covers a period of about seventy years—from Nebuchadnezzar’s first conquest of Jerusalem in 605 BC to around the third year of the Persian king Cyrus in 536 BC. The book of Daniel divides into two equal parts:
Dan. 1–6: Historical;
Dan. 7–12: Prophetic.

Purposes of the book of Daniel. Chapters 1–6 recorded the history of a group of the Jewish exiles who were taken from Jerusalem to Babylon in

Purposes of the book of Daniel. A number of purposes can be discerned for the book Daniel wrote. First, as chapters 1–6 demonstrate, Daniel recorded some of the history of a group of the Jewish exiles who were taken from Jerusalem to Babylon in 605 BC, of which Daniel himself was a member. Second, chapters 7–12 reassure God’s people that while the kingdoms of this world will come and go, God is moving the course of human history along to His desired goal. The world situation is not out of His control, and it will end in the coming of God’s kingdom on earth. A third purpose of Daniel’s book was to provide insight, guidance, and principles to God’s people as to the extent of cultural accommodation they properly could make in a dominantly secular society that often was hostile to their faith.

The setting of Daniel 1. Verse 1 states the setting as “the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah.” In Jehoiakim’s time, two rival empires dominated the world—Egypt and Babylon—both at opposite ends of the Fertile Crescent, with Israel in the middle. As the Egyptian army moved north toward Assyria, it attacked and defeated Judah, killing its good king, Josiah, in 609 BC at the Battle of Megiddo when Josiah tried to intervene. Josiah immediately was replaced by his son Jehoahaz, but pharaoh Neco, within three months, removed him, transported him to Egypt, and placed his brother Jehoiakim (also known as Eliakim) on the throne of Judah in 609 BC (2 Kings 23:28–24:7; 2 Chron. 35:20–36:8). In 605 BC, at the Battle of Carchemish, the Babylonians defeated Egypt, conquered the whole of Syria-Palestine, and made Jehoiakim a vassal to the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar. However, Jehoiakim soon rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. That brought the Babylonian army against Jerusalem. Thus in 605 BC, when Nebuchadnezzar first conquered Judah, he imposed a forced exile on some of the Jewish population. Daniel and others from the nobility and royalty were among those in this first wave of deportees to Babylon in 605 BC. (Under Nebuchadnezzar, two other waves of forced deportation occurred in 597 BC, which involved Ezekiel, and in 586 BC at the final fall and total destruction of Jerusalem.)

Jehoiakim king of Judah (v. 1). King Jehoiakim was an evil ruler of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The second son of good king Josiah to sit on the throne, Jehoiakim, whose original name was Eliakim, was placed on the throne as a vassal by pharaoh Neco of Egypt in 609 BC. Jehoiakim encouraged idolatry in Judah, ordered indignities to be performed on Uriah’s corpse (a faithful

contemporary prophet of Jeremiah’s; see Jer. 26:20-23), and cut up and burned the first edition of Jeremiah’s scroll (Jer. 36). Yet, his name means “Yahweh raises up.” Perhaps that was his father’s wish for his son. After three years as king, the Babylonians’ defeat of Egypt in 605 BC brought about Nebuchadnezzar’s attack on Jerusalem and Jehoiakim. Daniel and other noble persons were forced into exile in Babylon.

The third year of the reign (v. 1). While debated by some Bible students, Jehoiakim’s third year as king was 605 BC, having been placed on the throne of Judah by pharaoh Neco of Egypt.

Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon (v. 1). Nebuchadnezzar was the son of King Nebopolassar. He defeated pharaoh Neco of Egypt in 605 BC at the Battle of Carchemish, thereby gaining domination of Syria-Palestine and the Euphrates valley for the Babylonian Empire. Nebuchadnezzar became king upon his father’s death and proceeded to put down further revolts in Judah in 597 BC and 586 BC, eventually destroying the Jewish kingdom and its capital city of Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar instituted a policy of forced deportation, and thus took many Jewish captives to Babylon.

Babylon (v. 1). From the root meaning “to confound,” Babylon goes back in Bible times to the tower built there and God’s act of confusing the languages (Gen. 11:9). The ancient city was first founded by Nimrod (10:8-10), then many centuries later was ruled by the famous Hammurabi from 1810–1750 BC. The height of its splendor and fame, however, came under Nebuchadnezzar, who built great temples and canals, fortified the city’s double walls, and constructed the magnificent hanging gardens. The great city was perhaps the first to reach a population of 200,000 and is estimated to have been up to a half a million people in Daniel’s day.

Jerusalem (v. 1). Jerusalem was the capital of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Its name means “city of peace.” David conquered the ancient city, then called Jebus, from the Jebusites (2 Sam. 5:6-7; 1 Chron. 11:4-5). David also bought a threshing floor there from a Jebusite, upon which Solomon later built the Jerusalem temple. The Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the city of Jerusalem and its temple in 586 BC. The Persian king Cyrus the Great allowed the city, its walls, and its temple to be rebuilt when he permitted the Jewish captives to return to their land, ending their exile.

Besieged it (v. 1). This phrase indicates that Jerusalem was difficult to capture (compare 2 Kings 25:1-2).

605 BC, of which Daniel himself was a member. Chapters 7–12 reassure God’s people that while the kingdoms of this world will come and go, God is moving the course of human history along to His desired goal.

The setting of Daniel 1. (A more detailed explanation about the historical context of the book of Daniel.)

Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon (v. 1). He defeated pharaoh Neco of Egypt in 605 BC at the Battle of Carchemish. Nebuchadnezzar instituted a policy of forced deportation, and thus took many Jewish captives to Babylon.

Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs (v. 3). The chief of the officials under Nebuchadnezzar. He was responsible for selecting and caring for the conquered foreign nobles who were to be trained in the ways of the Babylonians. Explain that serving the king in this role was considered an honor.

GUIDE: Refer the group to **Digging Deeper** on **PSG**, pp. 24–27 for more information about the kings of Babylon and Persia.

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read Daniel 1:3-7.

READ: Share the **Connection to The Point:** Daniel was placed in circumstances beyond his control.

RECAP: Refer the group to **PSG, pp. 16–17** to look for the traits Babylon’s King Nebuchadnezzar was looking for in his captives:

The Best and the Brightest.

The Hebrew captives were to be males from royal or noble families. These would have been both educated and exposed to culture. These men were to be healthy and strong.

The Training and Teaching.

Nebuchadnezzar wanted to replace long-established traditions with new thinking and practices.

SAY: The reason for the high standards was that those chosen were to attend the king (v. 5). In ancient societies, service in the king’s court was an honored and important role—reserved for the best qualified and most trustworthy.

SUMMARIZE: Refer to the **Bible Commentary** to provide information about how the Babylonians changed the names of the Hebrew youths. Explain that their former names honored the one true God, but their new names reflected pagan theology.

- **Daniel**, meaning “God is my judge,” was changed to **Belteshazzar**, which means “May Bel protect his life!” The new name refers to Bel, a primary god of Babylon.

Part of the vessels of the house of God (v. 2). Nebuchadnezzar took only some of the sacred vessels from the temple in Jerusalem. Others were taken later when King Jehoiachin was deported (2 Kings 24:13), and still others were taken when the city and temple were destroyed when King Zedekiah was overthrown (Jer. 27:12,19-22).

His god (v. 2). Marduk, the king of the gods of the Babylonians, was Nebuchadnezzar’s god and the patron god of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar built a great temple to him in Babylon. Marduk was also known as Merodach and Bel.

Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs (v. 3). This man was the chief of the officials under Nebuchadnezzar. He was responsible for selecting and caring for the conquered foreign nobles who were to be trained in the ways of the Babylonians. That he was a eunuch need not be taken literally. The same Hebrew word is used of Potiphar, and he was married (“office,” Gen. 37:36). Thus the word could be rendered “leading man” or “officer.” At any rate, he treated Daniel with kindness and favor.

The tongue of the Chaldeans (v. 4). The script of the Chaldean language and literature was cuneiform, a system of characters composed of wedges. This reference may refer not merely to the general learning of the population, but more specifically to that of a special class of learned men.

That . . . they might stand before the king (v. 5). This statement gives the express purpose for the three years of training—they were to serve the king. Men of letters played an important role in the courts of ancient societies. In Babylon, such training began about age 15 and continued to about age 18.

Daniel . . . Belteshazzar (vv. 6-7). Babylon commonly imposed new names on foreigners who entered government or public service (see 2 Kings 23:34; 24:17). **Daniel** means “God is my judge.” His name was changed to **Belteshazzar**, meaning “Protect his life!”—or, if a reference to the Babylonian god Bel, then either “May Bel protect his life!” or “Bel’s prince.” Daniel was re-named specifically after the name of Nebuchadnezzar’s god (see Dan. 4:8).

Hananiah . . . Shadrach (vv. 6-7). **Hananiah** means “Yahweh is gracious” or “Beloved of Yahweh,” but was changed to **Shadrach**, possibly a perversion of the name of Marduk, of the moon god Aku, or of the sun god Rak.

Mishael . . . Meshach (vv. 6-7). **Mishael** means “Who is what God is” or “Who is as God,” but was changed to **Meshach**. We are not certain of the meaning, but this name is possibly also a reference to the moon god Aku, thus meaning “Who is as Aku.”

Azariah . . . Abednego (vv. 6-7). **Azariah** means “Yahweh has helped” or “Yahweh is my help,” but it was changed to **Abednego**, meaning “Servant (or worshiper) of Nebo [Nabu],” the Babylonian god of commerce and money, who was the son of Bel.

All four of the Hebrew young men’s original names had theological meaning that would have reminded them of their heritage and of the true God. The Babylonians replaced each of these names with names of pagan significance. The two sets of names appear together only here in the book of Daniel. The Babylonian names are in 2:49 and in chapter 3; the Hebrew names are additionally found in 1:11,19 and 2:17.

Daniel 1:8-13

8 But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.

9 Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs.

10 And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which are of your sort? then shall ye make me endanger my head to the king.

11 Then said Daniel to Melzar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah,

12 Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink.

13 Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king’s meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants.

- **Hananiah**, meaning “God is gracious,” was changed to **Shadrach**, which honored either the Babylonians’ primary god, Marduk or maybe the sun god Rak.

- **Misheal**, which means “Who or what is like God,” was changed to **Meshach**, maybe a reference to the moon god, Aku.

- **Azariah**, which means “Yahweh has helped” was changed to **Abednego**, which honored Nebo, the Babylonian god of commerce and money.

DISCUSS: Question 2 (PSG, p. 18): What are some ways we might feel like foreigners in this world?

Alternate: In what areas do you find your Christian worldview challenged these days?

TRANSITION: Next we will see cultural differences between the Babylonians and the Hebrew youths related to food.

Study the Bible

Daniel 1:8-13



10 MINUTES

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read Daniel 1:8-13.

READ: Share the **Connection to The Point:** Daniel determined he would not let his circumstances redefine who he was or his relationship with God.

GUIDE: Refer the group to the content on **PSG, p. 19** **Decision and Defilement.**

1. Daniel would have understood certain foods were not kosher and certain animals were “clean” and others, “not clean” (Gen. 7:2-3,8-9). Hebrew Law prohibited Jews from eating certain animals, including camels, pigs, eagles, shrimp, lobster, vultures, ravens, owls, bats, mice, lizards, and locusts (Lev. 11).
2. Ancient pagan religions often compelled adherents to leave food before an idol. After it had been presented to the god, the priest would consume it. When God gave the Law to Moses, He prohibited the consumption of food offered to idols (Ex. 34:15). This was an issue in the early church (1 Cor. 8:1-13).

DISCUSS: Question 3 (PSG, p. 19): How do you distinguish between matters of preference and issues of conviction?

RECAP: Refer the group to **PSG, p. 20** to discuss Daniel’s suggestion for the diet he and his friends would follow:

The king’s chief servant was concerned that if the four

Connection to The Point: Daniel determined he would not let his circumstances redefine who he was or his relationship with God.

Purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s meat, nor with the wine (v. 8). Whereas Daniel seemingly did not object to being given a pagan name or assigned pagan learning, he made a decision based on principle when it came to the food and drink he was offered. There were two concerns behind this rejection. First, the food the Babylonians consumed did not meet the requirements of the Mosaic law and thus was considered unclean (Lev. 3:17; 11:1-47; 17:10-14). Second, was the fact that the food and drink from the Babylonians were first offered to their pagan gods before being consumed. Thus the meals were consecrated to their gods, and those who took part in them, in effect, worshiped those idols. For Daniel to participate in such meals would have been self-defiling. Further, in the East, to share a meal was to enter into a covenant friendship, to commit oneself to the allegiance of the person—in this case, to that of the king. This Daniel could not do.

In fact, well over a century earlier, Hosea had prophesied about this very situation for the exiles of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Hos. 9:3-4). Many Jews during the period of Greek dominance between the Old and New Testaments made a similar commitment to Daniel’s. We are told, “Many in Israel stood firm and were resolved in their hearts not to eat unclean food. They chose to die rather than to be defiled by food or to profane the holy covenant; and they did die” (1 Maccabees 1:62-63). Fortunately, this was not the outcome for Daniel.

Favour and tender love (v. 9). While the chief eunuch showed Daniel favour and tender love, it was God and His intervention that caused the eunuch to treat Daniel in this way. The word *favour* is the important Hebrew word *hesed* that has many shades of meaning, including “goodwill.” *Tender love* is used in the plural to add intensity to the term. Thus it refers to a deep-seated sympathy. Because God caused the chief eunuch to respond in this way, it opened the door for Daniel to propose an alternative suggestion.

Endanger my head to the king (v. 10). Not only could the course of action Daniel suggested endanger the lives of the captives, but also that of the chief eunuch because he was solely responsible for these captives’ care and would be held accountable for them with his life. Ashpenaz could lose his life for changing the king’s

orders and directions. He might also face the consequences of siding with those who were rejecting participation in this show of loyalty to the king by not eating his food.

Melzar, . . . set over (v. 11). When Daniel did not succeed with Ashpenaz the chief eunuch, a guard, a person lesser than and under the authority of the chief eunuch, was the one to whom Daniel pitched his idea. This man agreed to test Daniel’s proposal for ten days. He no doubt enjoyed the king’s rich food and wine himself while he substituted vegetables and water for the young men’s portion of meat and wine. According to verse 16, it seems the guard apparently not only substituted their food for the ten-day test period, but also for the course of the next three years!

Pulse to eat (v. 12). *Pulse* literally is “things sowed.” Neither the vegetables nor the water would have been offered to the pagan gods, nor would eating them have violated the Mosaic food laws. The vegetables likely would have included a variety of grains and greens, not just peas, beans, and legumes.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: Distribute different secular magazines. Ask everyone to find and tear out examples that demonstrate the world’s expectation of conformity. Allow individual members to share their examples. Use this exercise to demonstrate the scope of the world’s expectation for conformity.

Daniel 1:17-19

17 As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

18 Now at the end of the days that the king had said he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar.

19 And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishaël, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king.

Connection to The Point: Daniel’s conviction to stay true to God did not waver, and he used the gifts and skills God gave him to serve.

Hebrew youths appeared less healthy, his own life would be in danger.

Daniel turned to his personal guard. This highlighted Daniel’s determination not to eat unclean items.

Daniel asked if he and his friends could eat just vegetables which referred to things planted—including peas, beans, legumes, greens, and grains.

SAY: Because of their devotion to God, the four Hebrew captives were unwilling to compromise and adopt the Babylonians’ diet.

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read Daniel 1:14-16.

DISCUSS: Question 4 (PSG, p. 20): How do we navigate the tension between standing in our convictions and not isolating ourselves from the world?

Alternate: How can we determine when to compromise and when to stand firm?

TRANSITION: Next, we will see how God blessed them and caused them to stand out in a truly distinctive way.

Study the Bible Daniel 1:17-19



10 MINUTES

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read Daniel 1:17-19.

READ: Share the **Connection to The Point:** Daniel's conviction to stay true to God did not waver, and he used the gifts and skills God gave him to serve.

SUMMARIZE: Refer to the **Bible Commentary** to highlight the terms knowledge, understanding, and wisdom.

Knowledge refers to the God-given ability to determine what is true and false. The New Testament word for this is "discernment."

Skill referred to having a grasp of the Babylonian writings and every kind of literature.

Wisdom refers to the ability to apply correctly what they knew and had learned.

DISCUSS: Question 5 (PSG, p. 22): What helps you stand firm in your convictions?

Alternate: How can we help each other stand against the culture when it conflicts with our faith?

ENGAGE: Invite the group to complete the Engage activity (PSG, p. 22). Encourage volunteers to share responses.

Knowledge and skill . . . and wisdom (v. 17). Once again the text stresses that it was God who gave these four young men knowledge and skill or understanding. We are not told how hard they studied or how difficult the material was over their three-year course of study—incredibly difficult in both cases most likely—but all four of these young men were given insights and comprehension that their comrades could not achieve by their own means. *Knowledge* here refers to the God-given ability to discern what is true from what is false. *Skill* relates to the mastery of the entire corpus of the Babylonian writings—in **all learning** (v. 17). *Wisdom* is the ability to apply wisely and correctly the knowledge they acquired. Such gifts were given to all four young men. In this sense they were like Moses, who was skilled in all the wisdom of Egypt (Acts 7:22).

Visions and dreams (v. 17). To Daniel, something more was given. God gave Daniel understanding of all kinds of visions and dreams. Daniel had the ability to see, understand, and interpret what dreams and visions meant. This will become important in the chapters that follow. Dreams occur while one is sleeping. Visions normally occur when one is awake. The reference here includes not only the dreams and visions that came to Daniel, but also those that came to others. Daniel now lived in a culture and society that placed great emphasis on dreams and visions and on their interpretation. So this was an important gift of God to Daniel that would help him significantly as the years went by.

Found none like (v. 19). With that short comment, these four young men **stood** (began to serve) **before the king**. But after saying that, Daniel returned to make a further comment on the king's final examination of these four young men: "And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm" (v. 20). "Ten times" is a standard idiom for absolute superiority. These four were absolutely superior to "all"—not just some—of "the magicians and astrologers." And not just superior to those who studied with them for three years or who lived in Babylon. No, they were superior to all those "in all his realm"—which was a most extensive empire. The term *magicians* was used of soothsayer priests in Egypt; and the term *astrologers* refers to a conjurer. These were considered the wise men of Babylon.

LIVE IT OUT

- **Analyze your own life situation.** Is God working in an unexpected way? If so, pray and ask for His wisdom to see the bigger picture of what He is doing in your life.
- **Think about your own life.** Is there an area in which you have compromised and adopted the world's unbiblical values? Pray and ask God for strength to know what to do in this situation.
- **Tell your story.** Share with your family or friends details of a time God led you into an unexpected or even uncomfortable place, opportunity, or situation, but you later saw His hand at work. Explain how this experience affected your life and your family. Pray with them, thanking God for letting them be part of your faith journey.

ENGAGE

A Line in the Sand

Mark areas in which you have experienced the temptation to compromise:

Gossip

Sexual behavior

Financial decisions

Business ethics

Believers often have to "draw a line in the sand" to indicate the lines they will not cross in compromise. How has God helped you avoid compromise?

Live It Out



GUIDE: Emphasize **The Point:** Our convictions, not our circumstances, define who we are.

REVIEW: Live it Out (PSG, p. 23). Encourage the group to follow through this week with at least one of the applications.

Wrap It Up

GUIDE: Remind the group of the need for us as senior adults to live according to our convictions so that we leave a legacy of faith for those who follow after us.

PRAY: Father, give us the courage and the boldness to live according to our convictions so that others know where we stand and what we believe.



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EXTRA!

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