

Youths in Babylon: God's Purpose in Education

But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself (Daniel 1:8)

What is God's purpose for education? What does He plan to do with young people once they have been trained to understand and practice biblical Christianity? We can catch a glimpse of His strategy by studying how God used four youths in Babylon 2,500 years ago.

Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego ... these are names synonymous with dens packed with lions and furnaces ablaze with fire. God could use these young Hebrews because their faith and character had been built on a solid foundation. What was this foundation?

“For I have chosen him (Abraham), in order that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice ...” (Genesis 18:19).

“Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up” (Deuteronomy 6:4-7).

“Listen, O my people, to my instruction; Incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not conceal them from their children, but tell to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and His strength and His wondrous works that He has done. For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should teach them to their children; that the generation to come might know, even the children yet to be born, that they may arise and tell them to their children, that they should put their confidence in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments, and not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation that did not prepare its heart, and whose spirit was not faithful to God” (Psalm 78:1-8).

Because of their biblical training, these young men understood:

- The nature and character of God.
- The laws of God.
- The works of God.

Because of this understanding, they could:

- Keep the way and commandments of the Lord.
- Do righteousness and justice.
- Love the Lord with their entire being.
- Put their confidence in God.

Ideas have consequences. “The people who know their God will display strength and take action” (Daniel 11:32). Knowledge of God began with these men at the giving of their names. Daniel means *God is my judge*. Hananiah (Shadrach) means *Jehovah is gracious* or *Jehovah has favored me*. Mishael

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(Meshach) means *overwhelmed by God* or *who is like God?* Azariah (Abednego) means *Jehovah is my helper*. After birth, their parents, with the help of the others in the covenant community, trained them in God's character, ways, and works.

God works in human history to accomplish His purposes. Daniel knew that when he wrote that “the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his (Nebuchadnezzar) hand” (Daniel 1:2). Nebuchadnezzar's armies sieged the city of Jerusalem, seized the golden vessels of the temple, and captured the finest youths of Israel.

Nebuchadnezzar wanted to use these highly qualified men to serve him and his purposes. So, he enrolled them in a three year course at the “University of Babylon.” He also changed their names from:

- Daniel to Beltshazzar - protected or favored by Bel, the sun god of the Babylonians.
- Hananiah to Shadrach - under the command of Aku, the moon god.
- Mishael to Meshach - who is like Shesach, goddess of sex.
- Azariah to Abednego - servant of Nego, god of fire.

Imagine the impact the city of Babylon had on these young men. It was the most magnificent city on earth at the time. Its dominant structure, the “hanging gardens,” was an awesome artificial mountain of receding terraces of flowers and trees, supported by arches and columns. The city was a center of world trade and luxury. It had not only a military power, but a financial and commercial power as well. It was also a center of astrology, occult, and black magic.

Nebuchadnezzar's strategy was to use the physical, psychological, and intellectual powers of the Babylonian world to make these men serve him, not the God of Israel. Two world views were in conflict, but men of faith and character will resist the conforming influences of the powers of their age.

Daniel “made up his mind that he would not defile himself” (Daniel 1:8). Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego expressed the true nature of biblical faith:

“If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up” (Daniel 3:17-18).

These men knew that God had made foolish the wisdom of the world (I Corinthians 1:20; Isaiah 29:14). They knew how the world began; it was created by their God. They knew that their God not only created the world, but ruled the world for His glory and honor. They knew who they were; made in God's image and likeness to worship and serve their Creator. They knew what was wrong with the world: sin. They knew God's salvation through faith in the Levitical sacrifices. And most important, they knew how Babylon began -- it had disobedience at its roots (Genesis 11:1-9). They knew that Babylon had nothing but confusion to offer because that is what the word Babylon meant - confusion.

Given what these men knew, they easily detected the lies of Babylon. Knowing the truth, they would not conform themselves to the lie (Romans 12:1-2).

The life and faith of these men have a direct impact on issues dealing with biblical Christian education. What made the difference in their lives? How could they withstand the pressuring influences of Babylon? They knew the truth because they had been trained to live the truth. This knowledge was not just intellectual assent to basic doctrines. This knowledge flowed from a foundational commitment to the

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living God. To them, “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Proverbs 9:10).

Trained to live the truth ... let God burn these words into your heart and mind. Only those trained to live the truth can detect, resist, and expose the lies of Babylon.

What are the modern day lies of Babylon?

- There is no God.
- There are no absolute standards.
- Happiness and pleasure are the goal of life.
- We are products of time and chance.
- Sin is normal and not to be resisted.
- Chance and luck govern our lives.

Like Babylon of old, Satan packages the lies of Babylon today in magnificence. Books, advertising, radio, television, magazines, and secular education portray the lifestyle of Babylon in irresistible splendor.

The lies of Babylon are unable to answer the basic questions of value, origin, and destiny.

Remember, wrong ideas have wrong consequences.

- *Who am I?* Wrong idea: I am nothing. Wrong consequence: No respect shown for human life; violence, abortion and “mercy killing” rampant.
- *Where did I come from and where am I going?* Wrong idea: I do not know. Wrong consequence: Culture steeped in pessimism, despair, and chaos.

The Scriptures answer these basic questions of life.

- *Who am I?* I am made in God's image and likeness, the crown of His creation.
- *Where did I come from?* I came from the loving and wise hand of the infinite, personal God.
- *Where am I going?* I am going to an eternity of ages that will forever unfold more of the glorious facets of the wonderful perfections of my Creator and Lord.

Right ideas have God honoring consequences. As William Haller said, “Men who have assurance that they are to inherit heaven have a way of presently taking possession of the earth.”¹

Why education? Why go to school? Just to get good grades, graduate, and get a good job? No! The objective of biblical Christian education is not just academic excellence and job skills. It is academic excellence and job skills developed in the context of godly living. We go to school to investigate God's word, God's works, and God's ways. Out of this discovery of God, we then take our responsible positions as reigning kings and priests on this earth *now* (Revelation 5:10).

We reign on this earth by living the truth. In so doing, we will detect, resist, and expose the lie. This is God's purpose for education.

Endnotes:

¹William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, [1938] 1957), p. 162.