

# Faith@Work 2014: Conquer or Conform

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[0:00] Now, I did struggle knowing how to, or thinking about what I do this morning. Then I concluded the best way would be to do what I do best, that is, do some teaching from the Bible.

So, for many years I've been convinced that Daniel is a remarkably contemporary book. That is, I'm also convinced that Daniel and his friends working in the court of Babylon reflects a remarkably similar situation to the contemporary workforce.

You might not think so, but I think it does. It's actually reasonably easy. There are some difficulties with it, but Daniel found it a reasonably easy place to work in the sense that he could have been working in much worse places.

So, I think chapters 1 to 6 are very helpful for Christians thinking about work and Christian faith. Now, I could spend a whole day working my way through these chapters, but I just thought I'd get you started with chapter 1.

Okay, so turn in your Bibles to chapter 1. And I do want to encourage you, though, to read the remaining at least five chapters of Daniel to see just what the situation is like for Daniel and his contemporaries.

[1:12] I have also written, I think, an easily readable commentary. There's a copy of it up the back there, and it addresses some of these issues more broadly as well. But let's pray.

Gracious God, we thank you for the life of Daniel and his friends in Babylon. Thank you for the model that they give of what it is like to live in a world that is set against you, but is yet your world. We pray that we learn from them, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, friends, I want you to imagine the situation. The villagers are standing at the city gates, and they're waiting, and their eyes are watching.

And then the messengers begin arriving. They come from the north, from the fields of war, from a place called Carchemish, where a battle has just been waged. And these people run gasping to the gates, and exhausted they fall.

You can imagine there's dust in their mouths. There's terror in their eyes. And words sort of hurriedly come from their mouths, and they go like this. Great Egypt is destroyed. The chariots of Babylon were too much, and Egypt is no more.

[2:18] And the men rest for a little while, and they resume their run toward the courts of Egypt. On arrival, they will be strangled as the bearers of calamity. That's what one did in those days.

But the villagers, they watch, and then run on to their fate, and they wait to see what's going to happen. And more fugitives follow, and their words strike fear in the ears of the hearers.

For they say this, the Babylonians wiped out our generals. They tore out their eyes on the battlefield. They led them away like cattle with yokes on their necks.

Our charioteers had their tongues cut out. Their ears were sliced away from the sides of their heads. They too were led away into slavery. Again, that's the normal thing that happened in warfare in those days. Then they wait again.

And finally, their eyes strain northward, wondering what will come next, and they see him, a lone straggler. And he wanders, bewildered through the city gates. His one remaining arm hangs wearily by his side.

[3:16] And he is the man who's been set free deliberately by the conquerors to report the battle properly. And his story is grim as he relates it. It goes like this. You saw us when we marched north.

We had incredible power. Everyone thought no one could match us. But the young Nebuchadnezzar was waiting for us. And his army was ten to our one.

And his trap was invincible. This man is incredible. He is no ordinary man. You've never seen anything like his cunning and his ability.

You've never seen power like his. And we really had no choice. Our generals were like babies compared to him. So you better watch out because he's headed your way now. And soon he'll be heading down your creek beds.

Your little village won't stand a chance. It's little men and little kingdoms. Don't stand a chance anymore. There's no one to match Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Now that's a fictitious story but based on fact.

[ 4 : 18 ] This is the Nebuchadnezzar who's mentioned so many times in the Old Testament, particularly the prophets. He is the one who marched on Jerusalem three times in the next 15 or so years in Israel's history.

He is the one that God used to punish his disobedient children, the children of Israel. And he was the one who carted off the prisoners to Babylon on each visit.

Every time he came, he carted off Israelites to Babylon. And he's the one who in 586 marched on Jerusalem, determined to end its rebellion and succeeded. He besieged the city.

He ransacked it. He demolished its walls. He destroyed its temples. He caused the Ark of the Covenant to disappear forever from history. And then he burnt the city and he raised it to the ground. That's the Nebuchadnezzar, the Jerusalem destroyer.

He was very young and extremely capable. He's the great king who carted the Israelites off. And as many Jews trudged off to Babylon, his victorious chariots going before them, they couldn't help thinking that their God was finished.

[ 5 : 28 ] It's very hard for us to estimate what this did, this particular event. You see, Babylon had battled the Jews and won. Marduk, the God of the Babylonians, had challenged Yahweh, the God of the Jews, and won.

And for many who trudged through the sands toward Babylon, there was this ominous feeling that Yahweh, their God, lay dead on the battlefield.

A defeated God. As Israel had been, was now a has-been in the world of super generals and superpowers, so many of them would have thought that Yahweh was now a has-been in a world of greater gods, of super gods.

And as if to rub salt into the wound, the sacred vessels of Yahweh's temple were now on display in the temple of the victorious God, Marduk. Ever showing that Yahweh was now impotent.

Forever a sign that his people were no more the special people of a special God. So that's the background to the first few chapters of the book of Daniel. And I want you in your Bibles to open it up with me because we're just going to work through Daniel chapter 1.

[ 6 : 33 ] So you should find a Bible in the chairs in front or behind you. Let me say these first few verses of Daniel are markedly despondent. They pose huge questions.

They are verses that pose the sorts of questions that hung over every Jew every day in Babylon. And that is this. Where is Yahweh? Where is our God in this world of super gods?

Can our God survive in these heady days? And is he appropriate for a new situation? And let me say that in the march of new atheism, that I think is the question that many Christians will be asking as well.

Is our God we worship some ancient God whose day has gone? Whose time has passed? Where are we now?

It's those questions that hang, I think, ominously over this chapter in the Bible. However, these verses are not totally grim. They are verses that provide us with some subtle hints as to where our writer is heading and how he's going to answer these very questions.

[ 7 : 34 ] So look at verse 2. It supplies our first subtle hint. The first subtle hint is in the first half of verse 2. And we read this. And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into his hand.

Now let me tell you what the function of that comment is. It's to tell us from the start that God is not absent. You see a reference there to God. Yahweh, the Lord, the God of Israel, has been active.

And in fact, he is the one who is responsible for the situation Israel finds themselves in. He is the one who gave Jehoiakim into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. The second hint is in verse 2 as well.

Have a look at it. We're told that God delivered some of the articles of the temple of God into Nebuchadnezzar's hands. So again, God is behind this. The articles that Nebuchadnezzar carried off to the temple of the God in Babylon were perhaps the chalices and so on from the temple.

And these words state the dilemma. You see, God has been defeated, but it looks as though God has not been defeated, but his people have.

[ 8 : 39 ] He is active. He is active in his world. He is active in delivering his people. But his people are very much look defeated. His chosen people are in Babylon.

The symbols of his glory were there in pagan temples for everyone to see. So the question is, what is God going to do about things? How will he deal with this situation? What's he going to do and how will he take on the gods of Nebuchadnezzar?

And does he stand a chance in this new world of super gods and super powers? The third hint is in the latter half of verse 2. Have a look at it. The NIV translation says that Nebuchadnezzar carted off the vessels to the temple of God in Babylonia.

But do you notice that, I think it's in the NIV version that you have, there's a little footnote attached that says that the word Babylonia is actually in the original, the land of Shinar.

Now, the term for the land of Shinar is a strange and very ancient way of speaking. It's only used a few times in the pages of scripture. But the very first of them is in Genesis 11. You see, in Genesis 11, we're told that the land of Shinar is where the Tower of Babel was built.

[ 9 : 49 ] And the Tower of Babel symbolized humans at their best setting themselves against God. That's what the Tower of Babel is about. And this, I think, is what the writer wants us to remember.

He's letting us know that the contest has been set by Nebuchadnezzar. He's a human king. He's one of the greatest of human kings the world had seen till this point. And he has set himself against the king of kings, the God of Israel.

And the writer is therefore getting us to ask the question, what will God do here? Will he repeat Babel? Will he demolish Babylon? Can he win again? Can he do a Babel again, as it were?

Now, so can you see what I'm saying? These very few verses of this chapter of the Bible are setting the agenda for this chapter, and they're announcing a contest. The conflict is on.

The greatest of human kings and kingdoms pitted against the seemingly defeated God and his kingdom and his people. The gods of the nations pitted against the God of this puny and defeated nation.

[ 10 : 51 ] This is the contest. This is the conflict. And into that setting, Daniel and his friends march. Can you see the parallels in the contemporary world to Christians and work?

Our workplaces are places where humans are building their own kingdoms. Their interests are largely focused on their own concerns and on serving their own needs.

And you can see that in some of the stories Kara's already told us. Yet we, God's people, are forged by greater concerns, aren't we? We are servants of a greater master.

And so let's, perhaps we can get some hints from Daniel and his friends and from what happens as to what we might do in such a situation. And what happens is that Nebuchadnezzar decides to use the people of God in his battle against God.

It's a very shrewd move. He decides to use them in a program of assimilation. Have a look at what he does. Verses three to four. He puts stage one into action. He orders Ashpenaz, chief of the court officials, to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility.

[ 12 : 01 ] And, you know, they're the best candidates. They're good looking. Physically perfect. High and intelligent. Intelligence of noble birth and teachable.

Young men, we're told, without physical defect. Handsome. Showing aptitude for every kind of learning. Well-informed. Quick to understand. Qualified in the king's palace. You know, the best graduates from their particular background.

It's a shrewd move by him. Stage two involves throwing these young men into the world of the Chaldeans for three years. Ashpenaz was to teach them in the language and literature of the Babylonians.

So they're given the best university education of their day. And let me tell you, Babylonian education was the best of its day. The world of the Babylonians was one of renowned. Renown, a world of priests, expert magicians, astrology, philosophy, the best literature of the ancient world. The literature covered would include things like omens, incantations, prayers, hymns, myths, legends, scientific formulas for skills such as glassmaking, mathematics and astrology.

[ 13 : 09 ] Daniel and his friends were to study that literature and become masters of it. And we've dug some of it up and it is remarkable stuff. But there's more of an education, more than an education in store for these young men.

They're to enter into even greater privileges reserved for just a few. They're given special honour in being assigned a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. The most expensive menu, in

other words, in the known world is to be their menu.

The best food, the best education. Stage three is put into effect. This program is to take place over three years, after which they'll enter the king's service.

Now stage four is equally cunning, you see. In dealing with people whose names were an important part of their identity, Nebuchadnezzar does some renaming. Now we think it's just, you know, giving them some new names, but there's something very profound about it.

Look at what the verse says, verses six and seven. The chief official gave new names to Daniel, new names. To Daniel, the name Belteshazzar. To Hananiah, Shadrach. To Mishael, Meshach.

[14:14] And to Azariah, Abednego. Now I want you to have a look at those names. Do you notice that the end of each name, Hebrew name, either ends with the word EL or IAH? So they've actually got the name of God and Yahweh incorporated into their names.

And what Nebuchadnezzar does is very shrewd. The names that he gives them have incorporated into them the names of Babylonian gods.

And I could give you what they mean, but for example, Daniel means God is my judge, becomes Belteshazzar, which probably means, O Lady Ishtar, protect the king.

So can you see what happens? In their names, you shift their allegiance from one person to another, from one god to another god. Now let's summarize where we are. First two verses of the chapter, they found the vessels of God in Israel in the house of the gods of the nations.

They had us asking, where's the God of Israel? Can he survive? The second four verses find the people of God under a program of assimilation. And we have ourselves asking at this point, where are the people of God and can they survive?

[15:24] Will assimilation succeed? In three years' time, these young men will stand before the king. And we find ourselves wondering, I wonder how it's going to go. Will they graduate well, as it were?

Will they be totally Babylonians by this point? Now at this point, I need to remind you that Daniel and his friends were familiar with Nebuchadnezzar because they had seen him in action themselves.

And so they were undoubtedly scared of him. They couldn't help being afraid of what would happen if they didn't meet his expectations. But there were other factors at work in them as well.

You see, they were Jews. And they were Jews from the nobility. And that means they probably had been brought up with the stories of the great ones of Israel.

They knew of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, and so on. And they therefore knew that there was nothing wrong with being Jews in a pagan court and learning pagan things. Joseph had done it and done pretty well.

[16:20] All you had to do was keep clear of certain dangers and avoid certain traps. You must not let yourself be trapped as Joseph had been by Potiphar's wife.

And you must not get sucked in by the fringe benefits of being foreigners as Solomon had and lose your distinctiveness as God's person. And you must not act out of your own interest merely to preserve your own life as the kings of Israel had done time and time again.

With those things in mind, we're told that at some point Daniel resolved that he was going to hang on to his belief in God. It's a remarkable little thing in this scenario. In other words, he decided he'd say no.

Now, at the appropriate point, therefore, he faced the chief eunuch and he let the chief eunuch know he would not be accepting the king's rich food and wine.

He asked for permission not to defile himself in this way. You see, he had accepted deportation, a re-education, a name change, but he had not been on this issue. Now, it's a really radical thing to do.

[17:26] In doing so, he chose to turn down the generousness or the graciousness of his benefactor. He opposed the great Nebuchadnezzar, the king of kings, the conqueror of the known world, the destroyer of Israel.

It's also a very strange thing to do. You see, I wonder, with all of those things, which one you would have said no to. I doubt it's the eating of some food.

You'd accept the good menu, but you might say no, perhaps, that the name change. Anyway, first thing, let's think about what could be wrong with the food and the drink.

A very important thing to ask. The first thing could be wrong is that it's been offered to idols and that's why Daniel turns it down. I don't think that's what it is. I think that that's probably just a case of us reading the New Testament into the Old Testament.

In any case, that explanation doesn't explain what's wrong with the wine. Nor does it deal with the fact that we know that Babylonians offered every kind of food, including vegetables, to their gods.

[ 18 : 27 ] So that doesn't help us, really. The second solution is to conclude that Daniel says no because the meat is from unclean animals. But that doesn't solve the wine problem either, does it?

The only people we know who don't drink wine in the Old Testament are Nazarites and Rechabites, and we have no indication that Daniel was either of those.

Why then? So what is the problem? Why does Daniel say no at this point? Well, I think the solution can be found elsewhere in the book of Daniel. See, later on in chapter 11, verse 26, which you might like to look up at another time, we're told about some who shared the king's table food had entered into covenant with him.

And when they ate his food, they committed themselves to friendship, and committing themselves to friendship, they accepted they had an obligation to be loyal to him. And we have a similar sense even in our own world, particularly if you lived in the time of Paul Keating's dominance over Australian politics.

If one businessman, you see, asks another out to lunch, or a business person, asks another out to lunch, offers to pay, there's often a little sense of obligation, isn't there?

[ 19 : 42 ] And when that person comes around a week or so later, or they ring, and they ask for a favour, there's a sense in which you can't turn them down.

It's much softer than is what is meant here. Paul Keating, of course, immortalised it with the words, there's no such thing as a free lunch. What I'm saying is that Daniel refused the meals and the wine, because he knew that to accept would have symbolised his dependence upon the king, and his commitment to him.

The food and the drink, you see, defiles Daniel in the sense that it challenges his freedom as God's person. In other words, Daniel is saying he wants to be free.

Now, Kara gave us some examples of where you might say no in a work context, and that's what he's doing here. He wants to say a clear no to assimilation and to being a lackey to this king.

He's not at his beck and call. By eating vegetables, he's showing that he and his friends are a distinct and special group, a force to be reckoned with. They were going to be God's people first, no matter what the cost.

[ 20 : 52 ] By the way, there's a very interesting parallel. You see, the king of Israel at this very moment, or probably in the very reign of Nebuchadnezzar, we're told at the end of the book of Kings, 2 Kings, is eating from the king of Babylon's table.

Daniel says no. But the king of Israel says yes, and shows himself to be a lackey of this king.

Daniel says, I'm not. And he and his friends say they're not. So Daniel's pronounced an ultimatum, and understandably, the chief of eunuchs, who also has to front up to Nebuchadnezzar, is worried about it.

Look at what he says. I'm afraid of my lord, the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you. That's verse 10. Now, he's not the only one who's afraid.

My guess is Daniel must have been petrified. You see, he's taking a step into the unknown, isn't he? And the writers of Scripture would have commended him for acting rightly, but none of them would have promised him that he'd be safe when he did it.

[ 21 : 55 ] Many other people who have said no to various people have died in Israel's history. Well, but he acted without guarantees, stepped into the darkness from which he might never have emerged.

As readers of the story, we don't have to face the darkness, though, because look at what we're told. Somehow we know that the God of Israel will not leave Daniel. You see, the words of verse 1 taught us that it was the will of God that the Israelites were here, and the presence of such words like appear in verse 9.

I'm not surprising to us. Look at it. God does it again. He acts by causing the official to show favor and sympathy. There are three references to God in this chapter. That's number two.

Presumably, it's this favor and sympathy that allows Daniel to approach a lesser court official and obtain his cooperation. Daniel stepped out, prepared to take the risk that God will undergird his efforts, and it happens.

And so Daniel and his friends actually surpass their fellow students in health and appearance, outstrip them in wisdom and knowledge. In fact, they exceed the Babylonian court officials in all matters.

[ 23 : 06 ] So they win over assimilation, you see. But I want you to look at verse 17. Verses 1 and 2 talked about God's activity. So did verse 9.

Verse 17 provides us with the third reference to God's activity in this chapter. God acts to give these four young men knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

In other words, their triumph over assimilation is not through their own efforts. It's through God. Through God's mercy, God's action, these young men have won out.

And it's very important to understand the real point of this chapter. You see, God's reputation has been on the line. And these young men represent God, and it's he who gives them success.

See, you don't go into the workforce alone. You stand with your God. And it's he that gives them physical health and intellectual rigor. He may not have, but he did in this case.

[ 24 : 02 ] He acts for them for the third time in the chapter to preserve his people. The hero may be Daniel, but the power to do it is God's. So that's the end of the chapter. And in the very first few verses, we heard some subtle hints and questions.

And so it is in the last few verses. Have a look at them. We are informed of the vanquishing of the Chaldeans. At the end of the time set by the king to bring them in, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar, and the king talked with them, and he found none to equal Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

And so they entered the king's service. And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.

Now, this is more than just a matter of superior intelligence. That's not just what's being said here. See, God is the source of their wisdom, isn't he? It's he who supplied it. And the point is that the gods of the Chaldeans are no match for the God of Israel, isn't it?

The tables have been turned from where they were in the first few verses. You see, the symbol of victory in the first few verses was Israel in exile and the gold utensils in the temple of Marduk.

[ 25 : 23 ] Now, what's the symbol? The symbol of victory here at the end is some men of superior wisdom standing before this pagan king.

So, as readers of the Bible, you see, we hear the three references to God. And we realize that the questions that were there in those earlier verses have been answered. God has survived.

And so have his people. But what about the other subtle hints we saw? What happened to the conflict between the human kingdoms and the kingdom of God? Look at verse 21. It addresses that issue.

It tells us about some events in the history of the world. 539. In 539, Cyrus, the Persian, conquered the Babylonian kingdom.

In that year, the great and awesome Babylon went the way of all human kingdoms. It passed away to be replaced by another. Daniel, however, survived.

[ 26 : 22 ] Did you notice that? He's still around. Daniel, the representative of God and his kingdom in a pagan world, had not only outmaneuvered the representatives of the pagan gods, he's outlasted and outfoxed the kingdom of Babylon.

And he lived to see its fall. So Daniel and his God survived the seemingly unconquerable. So please understand what this chapter is about. It's a chapter where we see God repeating what he did at Babel.

But what about the other subtle hints we saw? What has happened to the... Sorry, but how does he do it? He does it through these... This young man. This young man and his friends.

Standing firm. There's no shattering of languages of people this time. There's no dispersion of the nations throughout the world. In Daniel 1, all we have is the lonely figure of Daniel conquering the kingdoms of men by the kingdom of God.

All we see is Daniel, God's appointed means of showing up the weakness of the kingdoms of men. Daniel, who trusts in God, will be the... That God will be active despite appearances to the contrary. [ 27 : 29 ] Now, what I want to do is just in the last few minutes of what we do, is to reflect for a moment on one of the central thrusts of this chapter. You see, I think Daniel has a lot to say to us today.

For as Christians today, we find ourselves in a world which is set against God, where militancy against God is growing, and our workplaces are places with agendas that are far from God-centred. Now, my perception is that we as contemporary Christians can and do take one of three attitudes to this world. The first attitude I would call Christians versus the world.

Now, this view says, the world is totally opposed to God. The people who take this view say, therefore, the way ahead is to separate ourselves from the world.

They withdraw. They radically reject the culture of those who are not Christians. They reject their views. They refuse to listen to pagan radio stations or music or whatever.

[ 28 : 35 ] They reject non-Christian education. They place their children in schools that are supposedly protected from non-Christian influences, but are not really. Especially not in the world of technology.

You know, these people often have only Christian friends. Anything which is not specifically Christian is seductive and corrupting. That's the view historically that's been known as monasticism, or it's a view of the ghetto.

It says that God can only operate in religious settings. It tends to say that God is only marginally operative, if at all, in any other area. However, that's not what you see here in Daniel, is it?

And let me tell you, it's not what you see in the Bible as a whole. You see, Jews like Daniel held firmly to the belief that this world was God's world. It's his creation. There's nothing wrong, therefore, with being in a pagan setting.

Nothing at all. There's nothing wrong with pagan education, even if it involves learning about astrology and magic. And there's nothing wrong with serving a pagan king.

[ 29 : 40 ] You see, this world is God's world. And Daniel is passionately committed to it as God's world. It's a place given by God for us to live in, to serve God in, and to enjoy. It's God's world, Genesis 1.

The second attitude is very different. Second attitude is very accommodating in its view of the world. It means accepting secular culture unquestioningly.

Accepting its presuppositions and its conclusions. Underneath it lies an assumption that humankind is basically good. And that the things it comes up with are to be treated as coming from God himself.

That's the way of humanist liberalism. And the marks of those who hold this view are clear. They engage in social action, political activity as a way of changing the world. They go along with what the world says, thinking that human discourse is where God reveals himself to humanity.

And while there's a degree to which that is true, that's not where he fundamentally reveals himself. So, but there's a rationale here that if humans decide that the Bible is outdated, it's outdated.

[ 30 : 50 ] If it's no longer okay to talk about God as male, then we'll talk about God in non-sexist language. If enlightened people consider that homosexual practice is legitimate, then God must too.

And so on and so forth. You know all the views. Okay? This is not the way of God's people either. It's not the way of Daniel, is it? For Daniel knows the benefits of this world, but he knows its dangers.

And he also suspects the world, and he knows how far to go. Like others in the Bible, he knows that the presuppositions and conclusions of this world need to be recognized and avoided when they oppose God and his ways.

There is a third way, and you can find it in the Bible time and time again. You find it in places like Isaiah, Daniel, and John's Gospel. And you can find it in the thoughts of great Christians throughout history, like John Calvin and Charles Wesley.

The third view sees Christians as called people in the world. Called to be agents of change. Agents of God in the conversion of the world to God.

[ 31 : 56 ] Agents of God in the transformation of the world as well. So it's not just conversion, it's transformation as well. The way ahead, you see, is not to withdraw from the world.

Rather, it's to participate in the world. Confront the world. It's to throw yourself into that role in the hope that God will be at work through what you do to transform and recreate.

So that's Daniel's word to us in our age, because that's exactly what he does, you see. He says to us, live vigorously. Carry your trust in God into the very heartland of your oppressors.

Beat them at their own games of wisdom and understanding. Glorify God by being faithful to him. And above all, remember whose world this is. Remember that it does not belong to the Nebuchadnezzars of this world.

It belongs to God. It's God's world. And it's his creation. And it presents you with many challenges. And you are going to have to say yes to many of them.

[ 33 : 05 ] But there are going to be some no's that you are going to have to shout loud and clear. You are going to have to say no to all the things that will destroy even that little bit of your identity as God's person.

Just one illustration. The first time I gave this talk was in the early 1980s. And I knew a man at that time who had been an architect and had been growing influence within the company he was in. But the company was playing with the books. And he was asked to participate. He had six children, a wife and six children, this man. And he said, no, I can't do it.

I will not do it. Ten years later, he was still out of work. But you see, he had worked out where the place to say no was.

And we will have to do that as well. There will be times in our life when we'll have to say no. And we'll do it in the workplace. And our employers will ask us. Either openly or surreptitiously.

[ 34 : 11 ] But they'll do it. And you're going to have to maintain your allegiance. It's very hard working out which point is the one to say no and which thing is the thing to say no to, isn't it? But can you hear what's being said?

What's being said is live vigorously. Carry your trust in God into the very heartland of your oppressors. Beat them at their own games of wisdom and understanding.

Be uncompromised. Unencumbered. Ramrod straight in the face of those who would buy you for themselves because they will.

They will pay for you if they think you're of value. If you're a good Christian worker, you will be. In other words, dare to be a Daniel. Dare to take on the Babylonians on their own grounds and dare to take them on even though their presuppositions are different from yours.

And if you do, be aware of Daniel 1. It is possible. You see, that's the great thing about Daniel and Joseph and many others. It's possible, isn't it? It's possible to operate as a person controlled by the kingdom of God in a world dominated by petty human kingdoms.

[ 35 : 18 ] It doesn't mean conquer and it doesn't mean assimilation. It means making choices and depending upon God and putting your trust in him and asking him to be active.

Okay. Let's pray. Father, we thank you. Thank you.