

Have you—or someone close to you—had any concerns about the survival of your faith during your graduate program? You are certainly not the first! Tonight we will observe four believers from nearly 3000 years ago in their first year at what we might call the University of Babylon.

Background: At the time of the siege of Jerusalem described here, Nebuchadnezzar was not yet king, only the crown prince and leader of Babylonia's armies. But while on this campaign, his father died and he became ruler of the largest empire in the world (on September 9, 605 BC).

1. Describe the sack of Jerusalem (vv. 1-2).
2. What else do we learn about Nebuchadnezzar's *social* strategy of conquest from vv. 3-7? What would be the rationale for this plan? How would these steps make it easier to govern conquered city states?
3. Does anyone know anything about how advanced Babylonian culture was at this time?
 - *Babylon was a city of incredible magnificence. The Hanging Gardens were among the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The great processional way that led into the city passed through the gargantuan Ishtar Gate, adorned with full-color reliefs of fantastic creatures, through the triple wall that surrounded the city. The wall was so thick that it was said a chariot with a team of four horses could be turned around on top of it. The city was filled with marvelous temples, a lavish palace, and an unsurpassed ziggurat. Much of the city has been excavated in recent years, and even its ruins are breathtaking. They were highly advanced in literature, engineering, mathematics, and craftsmanship.*
 - How would you assess the educational opportunity being "offered" these exiles?
4. Setting aside for the moment the food issue the Jewish youths had to deal with, what difficulties or challenges might these exile students have faced (cf. vv. 4b, 5b & 7)?
5. Are there any challenges you face that are similar?
6. What was the unique dilemma they had to deal with as Jews (vv. 5, 8a)? What did Daniel and his companions object to? What is the difference in the question of food compared to the other cultural practices imposed on them?
7. What did they apparently *not* object to?
 - *Babylonia at this time was a thoroughly pagan society. The temple in Babylon honored more than a thousand different deities! It might have been argued that four young followers of the one true God couldn't possibly spend three years in such an educational setting without being corrupted. That they had no choice isn't really valid: later all four were willing to lay down their lives to remain faithful to God. Yet now they freely submitted to the teaching they were given.*
 - Why? What further insight does v. 17 give?
8. How did the four Jewish youths do on their "oral exams"? How were they rewarded (v. 19)?
9. How do you sort out what is of interest to God in your academic program? What guidance do you find in this account?
10. If we are to rightly discern what to embrace and what to reject in our graduate experience, we need wisdom from God and wisdom from his people.

Pray for wisdom and understanding, and for courage to remain faithful in the face of pressures to compromise your obedience to Christ.

Seek out believing peers and faculty who can walk with you in navigating this challenging path. Get down to specifics and ask the hard questions together.