

# Day 3 No Compromise in Babylon

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**“But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself” (Daniel 1:8).**

We often get the impression that putting God first refers only to the religious life and not to our lives in the workday world. The religion of the Bible, on the other hand, is a practical one; it penetrates all spheres of existence and has to do with the whole human being. Sometimes even the people of the Bible did not put God first and made compromises. Their list is quite long and includes names such as Eve, Adam, Abraham, Moses, Solomon, Elijah, and Peter, to mention only a few. The list of the uncompromising ones is not so long, and includes first of all Jesus, the perfect model, followed by Joseph; Daniel; Daniel’s friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; as well as a few others.

## Identity and Integrity

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and his soldiers surrounded Jerusalem, conquered it, and took the vessels from the temple. Nebuchadnezzar also took hostages, including Daniel and his friends (Daniel 1:3-5). The primary purpose for which they were taken to Babylon was to serve Babylon from within. They were to be trained at the “University of Babylon,” get to know the culture of Babylon, be impressed by its beauty and greatness, and serve its interests. Slavery always has two risks: the first one is isolation. It’s much easier to keep your faith, values, and culture when you lock yourself down in an enclave. God’s message through the prophet Jeremiah was to not isolate yourself, be present in the life of Babylon, and show that you have a God and hope (Jeremiah 29). The other risk is that of assimilation. It’s what was tried with these young Jews. Arriving in Babylon, their names were changed because their original names pointed to the identity of

their religion and their God. The philosophy of Babylon continues the desire of the builders at Babel tower to make themselves a name.

Even for many today, their educational or financial condition is a way to make themselves a name. Abraham, called by God, left Babylon with the confidence that God would keep His word and make His name great (Genesis 12:2), a blessing to all nations. Babylon collapses, a new kingdom follows, and the new king, Darius, cries out to Daniel when approaching the pit, calling him by his Jewish name, which will remain forever. “Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?” (Daniel 6:20). The pit with lions which Daniel was put into, as well as the hot oven heated seven times more where the three friends were thrown, show that they had not lost their identity. The names could be changed, but the heart could not.

These young men were also exposed to Babylonian education, which evidently contained more than learning new languages necessary for serving the kingdom at the highest level. They had a thorough knowledge of God’s Word. That’s why they could filter and distinguish the truth from the lie.

The process of assimilation did not stop at the names and the intellectual development but also reached other aspects of more personal life, including food. Babylon wanted to change their lifestyle, which had great potential in destroying the identity.

Eating the food served at the king’s table contradicted the diet God had clearly established by law (Leviticus 11). The purpose of the commandments regarding food, as well as the entire Jewish law, was sanctification,

preservation of the identity as God's people.

## Consistent with the Lifestyle

Daniel and his friends had no choice in some things: their deportation to Babylon, the changing of their names, their intellectual preparation, and their choice of food.

Away from home, slaves in a foreign country, these young men were under huge pressure. In spite of all this, they decided not to defile themselves (Daniel 1:8) with the king's delicacies and the wine from his table. The language is religious in connotation and has to do not only with the nutritional laws outlined in Leviticus 11 but also with the fact that it was served in a ritual setting, in which the king was considered a god. When asking for vegetables and water, Daniel was referring to the food established in the beginning by God for humans (Genesis 1:29), and he implicitly affirms that God, not the king, is the Creator.

There are three things the Bible calls an abomination before God: idolatry, unclean food, and promiscuity. The young men decided not to accept compromise regarding any of these.

The theology of food is already present in the first pages of the Bible because the first commandment we find in Genesis is regarding food and the forbidden tree (Genesis 2:16, 17). The first test that Adam and Eve had to pass included a food component, and this is repeated in Jesus' life, when the devil tempted Him in the desert to turn stones into bread.

Together with his friends, Daniel is aware that they need to witness to their colleagues and all the Babylonians. So they chose to take it further than the typical Hebrew diet. They chose vegetarian food. Those who want to avoid any compromise are not content with the law's limit. They choose the highest and best standard.

Sometimes, people around us are not so interested in our beliefs, but they cannot overlook our lifestyle. Most discussions regarding the Bible and religion are motivated by seeing us living a different lifestyle.

We learn from Daniel that religion is not limited

to the theoretical and abstract; it goes deeper, to the practical level of daily life. Religion has to do with the way we take care of our bodies, as well.

Daniel asks Aspenaz, the chief of the eunuchs, to allow him and his friend to subsist on a vegetarian diet for ten days, thus assuming a risk of faith that these young people are brilliantly passing.

The final test takes place three years after graduation when the king "examined them" and "found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers, who were in all his realm" (Daniel 1:20).

Three times in the first chapter of the book of Daniel, God's intervention takes place. First, God delivers Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 1:2). Next, he brought Daniel "into the favour and goodwill" of Ashpenaz. The third time, He "gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams" (Daniel 1:17).

The major theme that frequently comes up in the book of Daniel is victory and liberation. The book begins with a period of local distress and ends with the great tribulation, but also the great liberation. The victory in the first chapter, when God gives wisdom to these young people, is nothing but a prelude to what follows later. This victory was possible because they *decided* to remain consistent in their faithfulness to God, even in things that might seem small to some. And God honoured their faithfulness by giving them wisdom. The wise, according to the book of Daniel, have shone in the darkness of Babylon, and the promise is that they will shine forever and ever (Daniel 12:3).

## A Lifestyle for the End Time

In His last sermon on the end time, Jesus recommended the study of the book of Daniel (Matthew 24:15). Its study led to the birth of the Adventist movement and the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We must not forget, however, that if God had not intervened to change the lifestyle of our pioneers, this movement might

have died, so weak was their health. Without the health message, it would not be what it is today, a worldwide church with a prophetic message. In 1848, Ellen White received her first vision of the harmful effects of tobacco, coffee, and tea. It took almost ten years for the church to be cleansed from the vice of tobacco and smoking. The next vision, in 1854, is about body hygiene, order, and cleanliness in homes. Next comes one of the most influential visions, on June 6, 1863, at Otsego, Michigan, when Ellen is presented with the principles of a healthful lifestyle and the fact that health care is part of the gospel.

In order to live, a human being first needs these vital functions: heartbeat, breathing, digestion, and assimilation of food. We can call these vital functions the life-support system. We can care for this system in order to maintain and even improve its performance. But we function at an even higher level, the intellectual or mental, and through proper care, we can have clear and correct thinking. God created us wonderfully. Not only do we have the physical dimension, but we have the emotional and intellectual one. He also added an even higher level, that of moral and spiritual judgment. If we ask ourselves which of the above levels is the most resistant to violation, the answer, of course, is the physical one. Its performance is remarkable. There are many who not only neglect to take care of their physique but abuse it through the use of very harmful substances. The intellectual level is less resistant to violation, but the most sensitive is the moral and spiritual one. There is a close connection among all these levels. They influence each other. Ellen White said, "Between the mind and the body there is a mysterious and wonderful relation."<sup>1</sup>

To further emphasise the need of caring for the physical body, Ellen White adds, "The health of the body is to be regarded as essential for growth in grace and the acquirement of an even temper."<sup>2</sup>

The biblical prophecy, expressed in poetic

language, describes the menu of the one who was to become Emmanuel, "Curds and honey He Shall eat, that He may know to refuse the evil and choose the good" (Isaiah 7:15). We remember the metaphor that described Canaan, the land where "milk and honey" flowed, but this metaphor expresses the language of that time, that in this country is found everything that is needed. And in Jesus' case, a healthy and complete diet would influence correct thinking and moral discernment. We have the senses with which we can know the external reality. In order to know the spiritual reality, we need the Word of God, but also the presence of the Holy Spirit, its Author. This communication takes place at the intellectual level. Unhealthy eating and drinking habits make God's voice more and more difficult to hear (Isaiah 30:21).

Another quotation from Ellen White's writings emphasises this truth: "All who profess to be followers of Jesus should feel that a duty rests upon them to preserve their bodies in the best condition of health, that their minds may be clear to comprehend heavenly things."<sup>3</sup>

God has given us an instruction manual about the functioning of the body, and we must not only know it, but also put it into practice. We need the healthiest food eaten at appropriate times and in the right amounts, physical exercise, enough water, clean air, sunlight, adequate sleep, and especially trust in God. The goal of a healthy life is not primarily a longer life, but to live for God's glory and to do the work entrusted to him or her as well as possible, like Daniel did.

Let's not forget, a lifestyle in harmony with the principles of the Bible is the best testimony, and for such a life we need the grace of God. That means putting God first in our lives. Today's world needs people who can say no to compromise, just like Daniel and his friends did.

1 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 485

2 *Ibid.*, vol. 9, p. 159

3 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 522

## Questions:

1. What are those compromises in your life that take your lifestyle out of harmony with God's requirements?
2. What lessons of steadiness can we learn from Daniel's life?
3. What are the decisions you want to make regarding a lifestyle for the glory of God and the fulfilment of your entrusted mission?

## I Promise

To **ESTABLISH** one new **HEALTHY HABIT**, to better serve the Lord with my mind.

# Children's Story: When You Eat, But You Don't (Ch)eat

**“Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).**

It was a hot summer. The days were so hot by noon that people tried to stay inside as much as possible until the temperature went down a little. Emily was spending her summer vacation at her grandparents' home in the countryside. “I'm so bored!” she complained, discontented. “I wish I could go play outside with Hannah.” Hannah was her best friend, who lived just two streets away.

“I'm sure you two can play a bit later, when the day cools down a little,” Grandma suggested. “In the meantime, you can read a book, play with the dolls, draw something, or help me to make some cookies.”

“But I want to play outside,” Emily insisted. “Please, please, Grandma, let me go to Hannah's and spend some time with her!” “Promise me you will take good care!” insisted Grandma. “Health is a gift from God that we should take care of!”

“I promise!” Emily shouted as she rushed toward the door, sending her grandmother a flying kiss.

Emily forgot her promise. At Hannah's house they played hide-and-seek inside for a little while, then they wanted more space and went out in the backyard, where they started running and playing with the ball. The sun was burning

as the noon temperature reached its peak, but the girls didn't pay attention or feel its scorching rays until Hannah stopped and said: “I'm so thirsty! How about something to drink from the market at the corner of the street?”

“I don't know,” responded Emily, undecided. “Grandma might not like me drinking unhealthy sodas. Plus, I have no money with me.”

“Oh, come on!” Hannah said, waving her hand in the air. “I have enough in my money box for both of us, and I'm sure you can find something healthy and natural to drink. It's so hot, and I'm as thirsty as a camel in the desert,” she joked.

The two girls went down the street, sweat still running down their backs, and bought two orange juices directly from the fridge.

“I bet the sugar in this juice will give you enough energy to catch me faster,” laughed Hannah.

“That's the point,” Emily said, looking at the last drop left in her bottle. “I'm sure these ice-cold sweet drinks might be harmful, and it might not be a wise decision buying them!”

It took just a couple of hours to discover that she was right. The same evening, both girls started feeling the side effects of their decision: Hannah's sour throat tortured her during dinner

time and all the rest of the night, while Emily's high fever ruined her plans to see her friend the next day. In fact, she stayed in bed with laryngitis, chills, and a high fever, under strict medication, for almost a week.

"I should have listened to you!" Emily told her grandmother. "I can't play with Hannah, plus I have to endure all this torture!"

"And the pain you've caused to your own body," her grandmother said. "You see, our body and our health are gifts that God entrusted us with, and we have to take care of them in order to live happily and for His glory. We can't represent God or honour Him while we destroy what He has given to us. Every time we hurt our bodies by eating unwisely, drinking unhealthfully, consuming things that damage the temple of the Holy Spirit—which is our body—or have habits that negatively affect our physical, mental, or

spiritual health, we sin against God.

"Sometimes when we eat, we cheat on our bodies, which were created for His glory. So, the wise way to eat, drink, sleep, and live is to do all these correctly, so we can enjoy this life and be prepared for heaven. Heaven is a healthy place and only those who have a healthy lifestyle will be able to get there and enjoy the menus that God prepared for us."

"I promise to never cheat when I eat or drink," said Emily, hugging her grandmother and already imagining what heaven will be like.

Questions:

1. What do you think a healthy lifestyle means?
2. Can you give examples of bad habits that can harm your body?
3. Why is it important to take care of our health and bodies?