

Lesson Text

Daniel 1:8-21

⁸ But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. ⁹ Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, ¹⁰ but the official told Daniel, “I am 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.”

¹¹ Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, ¹² “Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³ Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see.” ¹⁴ So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.

¹⁵ At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. ¹⁶ So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.

¹⁷ To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

¹⁸ At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹ The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king’s service. ²⁰ In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.

²¹ And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.

Today’s Lesson Aims

- **Learning Fact:** To recount the details of the first test that Daniel and his friends faced as captives in Babylon and how they responded to it.
- **Biblical Principle:** To be a person of faith in a hostile culture.
- **Daily Application:** To demonstrate respect for others, tact and grace in our circumstances.

Power Hour Lesson
Summary for
January 7, 2018

“A Sincere Faith”

Lesson Text:
Daniel 1:8-21

Background Scripture:
Daniel 1

Devotional Reading:
Psalm 56



Introduction

Worst-Case Scenarios

In 1999, Joshua Piven and David Borgenicht authored *The Worst-Case Scenario Survival Handbook*, a guide to surviving the worst of all imaginable catastrophes. The book has sold over 10 million copies and inspired a series of related books, games, and even a television show.

While strategic planners regularly discuss how to react in extreme circumstances, they usually do not consider situations as extreme as those Piven and Borgenicht describe. Their book provides instructions for situations such as landing a plane when the pilot is incapacitated, defusing a bomb, escaping from quicksand, and surviving a shark attack.

Bad things do happen to good people. True, we may not have had to survive a shark attack or defuse a bomb, but we have all experienced crisis: the loss of a job, conflict with a family member, etc. There is much to learn from how an Old Testament prophet dealt with a crisis in his life.

Lesson Background

Time: 605 B.C.

Place: Babylon (Chaldea)

The focus of this quarter's lessons is the twofold nature of faith as encompassing both belief and action. The unit of four lessons that begins with the current study is drawn from the Old Testament book of Daniel.

Daniel and his three friends lived in perilous times for Judah and its capital of Jerusalem. The "third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah," mentioned in Daniel 1:1, was 605 B.C. This was also the year when King Nebuchadnezzar came to power in Babylon. He ruled for 43 years.

The siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar noted in Daniel 1:1 was the first of a series of excursions by Babylon into Judah, climaxed by the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of Solomon's temple in 586 B.C. (Note that the land of Babylon or Babylonia is also referred to as Chaldea, and the residents are called Chaldeans.)

Of course, it is vital to read what follows the account in Daniel 1:1: "And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into [Nebuchadnezzar's] hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God" (1:2). This makes clear what all of Scripture proclaims: kings such as Nebuchadnezzar, as great as they may be or consider themselves to be, are ultimately under the reign of the truly "great King," the Lord (Psalm 48:2).

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Part of the Babylonians' strategy in conquering territories such as Judah was to select individuals from those territories who showed significant potential for being schooled in the culture of the Babylonians. In the words of Daniel 1:4, they were looking for

young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians.

This practice was intended to replace the captives' cultural identity with that of the Babylonians'. Among those taken from Jerusalem for this purpose were Daniel and his friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (Daniel 1:6). Daniel 1:3 notes that these young men were drawn from the royal family and nobility of Judah.

One component of the reeducation and ownership of captives was that of changing their given names. In a culture where names were of great significance, such an action was intended to show the captives that their very identity had been changed. Thus Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah became Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, respectively (Daniel 1:7). The new names included references to fictitious Babylonian gods (compare 4:8); they no longer reflect the name of the God of Judah.

It is interesting that while Daniel's three friends are referred to by their new names exclusively after Daniel 2:17, Daniel himself, whose Hebrew name means "God is judge," is identified by both his old and new names together six times (see Daniel 1:7; 2:26; 4:8, 19; 5:12; 10:1). Some propose this to be a way of recognizing that Daniel's God remained in control in a pagan setting; but this theory does not explain why the same is not noted of Daniel's three friends, who serve the same God. The lesson text begins with the first of a series of tests that Daniel and his friends faced regarding their loyalty to the true God—their God.

Note concerning food restrictions: The subject of food restrictions is mentioned as early as Genesis 2 and Genesis 9:3. With the advent of the Law of Moses, God placed limitations on the foods that an Israelite could eat. Many of the animals used for sacrifices were eaten, and guidelines in this regard were given. The Israelites had to evaluate whatever they ate or did each day against the guidelines that God gave them (Leviticus 11).

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What Do You Think?

- When was a time you honored a boundary to stay true to God's will? What did you learn from that experience that could help others?
- How should a Christian go about appealing an employer's policy that goes against his or her Christian convictions?
- What did you learn from an experience when you saw an attempt to honor God backfire?
- How would you use Daniel 1:17a, 20, if at all, to counsel a student who is worried about being corrupted by secular higher education?
- What have you seen Christians do to improve work relationships? Which of those actions are models for to emulate?

Points to Ponder

- We should remain steadfast in our trust and obedience to God (Daniel 1:8-10).
- We do not have to be disrespectful or hostile to others in our pursuits to honor God (vs. 11-14).
- In every circumstance, be faithful to God and leave the results to Him (vs. 15, 16).
- God gives us knowledge, skills and abilities to use for His glory (vs. 17, 18).
- God's faithfulness and blessings will be evident wherever He has placed you to serve (vs. 19-21).

Conclusion

Strategy for Exiles

A change of setting became very real and intense for Daniel and friends. Their status changed from being part of a majority in Judah to being a clear minority in Babylon. These four young men could have viewed their new status from a primarily negative perspective in never again being able to serve God as they once did. But they chose instead to see their circumstances more in terms of an open door to honor God before pagans.

That more positive perspective produced within Daniel and his companions a strategy that we as exiles who serve Jesus in alien territory (compare 1 Peter 2:11) can apply. Daniel, while expressing his dislike for the foods offered by the king, used the proper channels to present his objections. Daniel was not disrespectful toward those in authority, and neither should we be (Romans 13:1-5; 1 Peter 2:12-19). Our intention to "obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29) does not mean that we must set out to create hostility.

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God's Testing

When it comes to solving the problems of life, we must ask God for the courage to face the problem humbly and honestly, the wisdom to understand it, the strength to do what He tells us to do, and the faith to trust Him to do the rest. Our motive must be the glory of God and not finding a way of escape. The important question isn't, "How can I get out of this?" but, "What can I get out of this?" The Lord used this private test to prepare Daniel and his friends for the public tests they would face in years to come. The best thing about this experience wasn't that they were delivered from compromise, as wonderful as that was, but that they were developed in character. No wonder God called Daniel "highly esteemed" (Dan. 9:23; 10:11, 19), for he was very much like His Esteemed Son.

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, guide us in following the example of Daniel as we exhibit tact and grace under pressure. May we emulate our ultimate example, Jesus, who was filled with grace and truth. Grant us your Spirit's power in our spheres of influence. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thought to Remember

Godly conviction combined with diplomacy can overcome many crises!

Anticipating the Next Lesson

Next week's lesson is **"A Bold Faith,"** and summarizes the deliverance of Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach) and Azariah (Abednego) from death in the fiery furnace and the reaction to that deliverance. Study Daniel 3.

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