

THRIVING IN BABYLON • DANIEL: BOLDLY FAITHFUL • DANIEL 1:1-21 • 5/21/2023

# MAIN POINT

We are working through a sermon series called: Thriving in Babylon that covers Daniel chapters 1-6. It's not easy to live a godly life in an increasingly godless society. An Old Testament hero named Daniel, shows us that it can be done. He not only survived but thrived and impacted an entire empire while he was at it.

Today's sermon will focus on dare to be different. Daniel 1:1-21.

However, this lesson takes a similar passage in a new direction. The theme of this lesson is:

When immersed in a culture that contradicted God’s commands, Daniel exhibited bold faithfulness.

# INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**How did you struggle with peer pressure when you were younger? In what ways do even adults struggle with peer pressure?**

**Describe a bold demonstration of faithfulness to God you have taken or witnessed in your lifetime.**

Parents often worry about the inﬂuence of peer pressure on their children. Adolescents do not often have great wisdom, and the desire to ﬁt in and be liked can cause them to make foolish life decisions. Young people are not the only ones inﬂuenced by such power; adults are also swayed by the demand to conform to the culture around them as well. We see that same struggle throughout the pages of Scripture. In that struggle, Daniel displayed character that compelled him to take a bold stand in order to remain faithful to God in his culture.

# UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

## ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ DANIEL 1:1-4.

**Why do you think the king wanted Israelites in his court?**

**Why do you suppose the king gave these speciﬁc requirements to Ashpenaz?**

**Put yourself in the place of these young men. What do you think Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were thinking when they were chosen for this process?**

**Why was it important for them to learn the culture they lived in?**

Nebuchadnezzar conquered Israel, and one of the reasons he wanted the best and brightest in his court was to show oﬀ his conquest. When the people of Nebuchadnezzar’s court saw the fairest and smartest that Israel had to oﬀer, it demonstrated how wise and powerful Nebuchadnezzar was to subjugate such a people. In addition, if Nebuchadnezzar had the smartest and best working for him, it would also prevent them from working against him.

Nebuchadnezzar wanted Daniel and the other Israelites completely immersed in Babylonian culture. He wanted them to worship his gods, read his books, wear his clothing, and eat his food. The quicker he could assimilate them, the less likely it would be for them to rebel against him.

**Is it possible for a person to be boldly faithful if he or she avoids culture altogether? Explain. What are some ways Christians today can be part of culture that won’t compromise our faith and provide us opportunities to share that faith?**

## ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ DANIEL 1:5-9.

**What does it mean that they were assigned daily provisions from the royal food?**

**How much pressure do you think the boys felt to conform to the culture of Babylon?**

Daniel and the others were given the ﬁnest food that the court had to oﬀer. This made certain that they had plenty to eat, but it also reminded them that they were dependent upon the king of Babylon for their sustenance. The boys were renamed because they were named after the God of Israel. Daniel’s name means, “God is my judge.” Their new names reﬂected the Babylonian pantheon. This was another technique to assimilate Daniel and his friends.

The temptation for Daniel to give in would have been incredible. The king had the power of life and death, so any kind of rebellion could have terrible consequences. Plus, he was being treated well. He was being educated, well fed, and groomed for the highest court in the world. Losing that opportunity would have been a great cost. Further, Nebuchadnezzar had taken Jerusalem and looted the temple. His empire was ﬁlled with conquered peoples. It would have been very tempting to give up, worship the gods of Babylon, and assimilate with the people there.

**Of all the things they were being taught, why do you think Daniel and his friends speciﬁcally rejected the food from the king’s table?**

**What two things did Daniel do in verse 8 to resist compromise and remain faithful to God? Which is more diﬃcult for you—determining not to compromise or speaking with grace about your convictions with someone you might oﬀend? Explain.**

Daniel probably did not want to eat the royal food because it was unclean. He kept the food laws of the Torah in order to be obedient to God. Interestingly enough, he did not reject the education that he received, only the food and the worship of false gods. He probably dressed in Babylonian attire and learned the ways of the Babylonian court. Not all of the culture was wrong. Daniel rejected that which was against God and accepted the things that were not.

In Romans 12:2, Paul wrote, “Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God” (CSB). Daniel and his friends demonstrated such wisdom in their day by rejecting the unclean foods and idolatry of Babylon by staying faithful to God.

## ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ DANIEL 1:10-21.

**What did Daniel risk in making his bold request?**

**How did God respond to Daniel when he stood by his biblical convictions?**

**Does Daniel’s story mean that every Christian who is boldly faithful will gain the respect of contemporary culture? What does it mean?**

Daniel and his friends were blessed by God who gave them knowledge and strength because they stood by biblical convictions. In that situation, the king saw and admired the diﬀerence between those four men and every other young man in the program. Daniel’s bold faithfulness to God caught the attention of the king. This kind of earthly reward is not always the case. We have other examples like Paul, Stephen, and even Jesus that let us know our bold faithfulness won’t always be appreciated by the culture in which we live.

But we can be assured that when we remain faithful to God, He will bless us (Deut. 7:9). God blesses us with His presence and strength to endure and, ultimately, with rewards in heaven that far surpass any accolade we could ever hope to receive on earth.

# APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**Is there a situation where you’re needing boldness to stay faithful to God? How can this group help you in that?**

**Where might we as a church be tempted to ﬁt in with culture at the expense of faithfulness to God’s call to us? What would bold faithfulness in culture look like for our church?**

# PRAYER

Thank God for His strength and the conviction of His Spirit to direct us in a pagan culture. Ask Him to help you be bold when you need to in order to stand by biblical convictions.

Invite Him to help our church be a faithful witness to the truth of God in these changing times.

# COMMENTARY

## DANIEL 1:1-21

1:1. Although Daniel recorded these events as taking place in the third year of...Jehoiakim, Jeremiah wrote that it was in the fourth year (Jer. 25:1,9; 46:1). Daniel probably used the

Babylonian system which did not count a king’s year of accession, while Jeremiah used the Israelite system of counting, which did include the accession year. The events took place during the accession year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, probably when he was still co-regent with his father and just after the battle of Carchemish (605 B.C.).

1:2. Although Nebuchadnezzar viewed his defeat of Judah as a victory for his gods, Daniel’s perspective was that it was the Lord who handed Jehoiakim over to the Babylonians. The historian Berosus mentioned these events when he wrote that Nebuchadnezzar conquered Hattiland (referring to Syro-Palestine). At that time, Nebuchadnezzar took vessels from the house of God, in fulﬁllment of Isaiah’s prediction when Hezekiah showed them to the Babylonian king a century beforehand (Isa. 39:2,6).

1:3. Chief of his court oﬃcials means literally “chief of the eunuchs,” but since “eunuch” had come to mean “royal oﬃcial,” most likely Ashpenaz was not a eunuch, nor did Daniel and his friends become thus.

1:4. The Hebrew word for young men here literally means “children” or “boys” and probably refers to teenagers, a good estimate being around age 15. Chaldean language and literature refers to an ancient university-style education in Sumerian, Akkadian, and Aramaic.

1:7. Daniel and his friends, whose original names honored the God of Israel, were given other names that intended to honor the false gods of Babylon. Daniel (“God is My Judge”) became Belteshazzar (“Bel Protect Him”); Hananiah (“God Has Been Gracious”) became Shadrach (“The Command of Akku”); Mishael (“Who Is What God Is?”) became Meshach (“Who Is What Aku Is?”); Azariah (“The Lord Has Helped”) became Abednego (“Servant of Nebo”).

1:8. The word determined means literally “set upon his heart,” referring to inner resolve. Daniel decided that he would not deﬁle himself with a diet that included non-Kosher meat such as horseﬂesh and pork, or drink wine that had been oﬀered to Babylonian gods.

1:15. The fact that Daniel and his friends looked better and healthier is not a biblical endorsement of vegetarianism (Gen. 9:3). Rather, God in His providence made them healthy and strong.

1:20. Throughout the Book of Daniel, there are six diﬀerent expressions for the king’s counselors. The ﬁrst two, used here, are diviner-priests and mediums. The word “diviner priests” comes from a root that means “engraver.” It refers to those who engraved

Babylonian religious activities and astrological movements of the stars on clay tablets. The word “mediums” means “conjurers.” It refers to those who used spells and incantations to communicate with the spirit world.

1:21. Daniel saw the end of the exile, living until the ﬁrst year of King Cyrus (539 B.C.) and even beyond that time (see 10:1, where “third year” dates to 536).