

DANIEL'S CONVICTIONS (DANIEL 1:5-14)

A few years ago, a psychologist named Ruth Berenda carried out an interesting experiment with teenagers designed to show how a person handles peer pressure. They brought groups of ten students into a room for a test. Each group of ten was instructed to raise their hand when the teacher pointed to the longest line on three separate charts. But nine of the teens in each group were instructed ahead of time to only raise their hand when the teacher pointed at the *second* longest line.

So, when the instructor started each experiment, the one teen that had no clue would glance around the room in confusion, knowing that his/her classmates were wrong. But then, they would slowly raise their hand with the rest of the group.

In group after group, the self-conscious teenager would knowingly give the wrong answer simply because he/she lacked the courage to challenge the group and stand for the truth. This occurred in about 75% of the cases.¹ Very few would stand under the cultural pressure.

That's probably a good indicator of how most teenagers live their lives. Would you agree? But Daniel and the boys were not like that.

Last week we opened this series by looking at *Daniel's Captivity* and how he was suddenly removed from everything he was familiar with – everything that brought him comfort, strength and stability was taken from him.

And tonight, we're going to look at *Daniel's Convictions* – his firmly held beliefs (worldview) based on the unchanging Word of God. So, let's pick up in verse 5...

Daniel 1:5-14 "The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king. ⁶ Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. ⁷ And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names:

¹ C. Swindoll, *Living Above the Level of Mediocrity*, p. 225.

Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.⁸ But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself."

As we learned last week, Daniel and his friends have been chosen for a 3-year training course – *Babylon U* – which will decide if they're considered worthy to serve in king Nebuchadnezzar's court. And this training course gives us lots of insight into Daniel's faith...

1. His convictions faced an immediate challenge.

For three years, their Babylonian teachers would attempt to "brainwash" these young men – teaching them what to think and how to live like Babylonians.² You see, Nebuchadnezzar wasn't interested in putting good followers of God to work in his administration. No, he wanted to change the way these young men thought—their worldview, their value system.³ For example...

- **The king exposed them to new teachings.** (vs. 5b) *"They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king."*

Babylon U most likely included a study of agriculture, architecture, astrology, astronomy, law, mathematics, and learning the very difficult Akkadian language.⁴

But it was much more than that. They would be taught mythologies and new origin stories of how the world was made. Nebuchadnezzar wanted to change the way they viewed the world and their values within it. No more speaking and reading in Hebrew. You will speak in Aramaic and write in Akkadian. And within a generation, you won't even be able to read Isaiah and the other Scriptures.⁵

- **The king gave them new names.** (vs. 7) *"The chief of the eunuchs gave them [new] names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego."*

² Wiersbe, W. W. (2000). *Be resolute* (p. 14). Victor.

³ Smith, J. E. (1992). *The Major Prophets* (Da 1:3–7). Joplin, MO: College Press.

⁴ Pentecost, J. D. (1985). Daniel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck, Ed.) (Da 1:4–5). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁵ Ben Stuart

In our culture, names don't mean much. Most people choose a name simply because it has a unique sound or spelling. But, in biblical times, your name was *who you are*. It said something essential about you. And these boys names were all connected to their allegiance to the true God...

| Old Name: | New Name: |
|--|--|
| Daniel – “God is my judge” | Belteshazzar – “Bel protect the king” |
| Hananiah – “the Lord is gracious” | Shadrach – “command of Aku” |
| Mishael – “who is like the Lord?” | Meshach – “who is what Aku is?” |
| Azariah – “the Lord is my helper” | Abednego – “servant of Nebo” ⁶ |

The king knew his brainwashing tactics would never work unless he removed God's Name from their everyday life. And the devil is still using this same tactic today. Think about how God's name has been systematically removed from our everyday life...

- Schools are forbidden to teach that God created the world.
- We can have a “moment of silence” but not actually voice a prayer to God. And even if we do pray publicly, we're told not to mention the name of Christ.

So, Satan is using the same tactics with us today that he used with Daniel in Babylon. He knows that a key factor in deceiving a younger generation is to remove the name of Christ from their everyday lives.

- **The king exposed them to a new diet.** (vs. 5a) *“The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that [he] ate, and of the wine that he drank.”*

First of all, Nebuchadnezzar wanted to get them used to the good life so they would never want to go back to their old way of living. But also, Daniel knew the king's diet did not meet the requirements that God had given to His people in the OT dietary laws (Exodus 34:15; Leviticus 11). Plus, in OT culture, when you sat at a table with someone and ate their food, it showed your alliance with them and their god – their worldview.

So, Daniel's refusal to eat the king's food came from his convictions based

⁶ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2006). *The MacArthur study Bible: New American Standard Bible*. (Da 1:7). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

on God's Word. And he wasn't willing to compromise his covenant with God.

Then there was the king's wine. And Daniel knew that he should avoid it. You see, the Bible never says that drinking alcohol is a sin – it says *getting drunk* is a sin. However, Daniel knew that those in leadership should abstain from ANY substance that would hinder their ability to lead and make wise decisions...

Proverbs 31:4 "It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to take strong drink."

Those in leadership are to avoid any type of substance that could hinder their decision making, ability to lead well, or their testimony. Daniel knew this and he wasn't willing to compromise.



So, how were Daniel and the boys able to stand so strongly under the pressure to compromise (unlike the teens in the opening illustration)?

Because their convictions were established *BEFORE* they were put in this situation. You see, Daniel didn't wait until he was facing a test/trial/temptation to figure out what he believed. He's only a teenager but his firmly held beliefs (his worldview) was already established *before* he arrived in Babylon.

In other words, you can't wait to figure out where your "line" is while your simultaneously being pushed over that line. Daniel's convictions were *RESOLVED* *before* the trial/test/temptation came, which resulted in...

2. His convictions allowed him to avoid compromise.

"One compromise here, another there, and soon the Christian and the man in the world look the same." – A.W. Tozer

Daniel was resolved NOT to let this happen. Even though he and his friends had to study things that sometimes contradicted the truth, they knew God's Word well enough to discern truth from lies!

Nebuchadnezzar was telling them WHAT to think, but Daniel and the boys understood HOW to think for themselves – how to discern truth from lies!

One preacher described Babylon U as *"Daniel In the Scholars Den."* And he said, "This is more dangerous than the lion's den." If a Christian doesn't have a solid biblical worldview, they won't be able to discern truth from lies when they're in school or college.

But, let me give you one more VERY important factor...

3. He combined conviction with courtesy.

This is EXTREMELY important. **Verse 8** tells us that Daniel *"asked"* the chief of the eunuchs to *allow* him not to defile himself." Daniel has great courage and conviction, but he's not a jerk about it. He can disagree without being disagreeable. He says, "Yes sir, No sir. Yes mam, No mam. Please and Thank you."

NOTICE WHAT HE DOESN'T DO: They don't threaten anybody, stage a protest, or try to burn down a building. They didn't march in the streets or hold up signs of protest. They simply excelled in their studies, acted like gentlemen, and asked the person in authority to consider another option. What option? Pick back up in verse 9...

Daniel 1:9; 11-14 "And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs..."¹¹ Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah,¹² "Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink.¹³ Then let our appearance and the appearance of the youths who eat the king's food be observed by you, and deal with your servants according to what you see."¹⁴ So he listened to them in this matter, and tested them for ten days."

Because Daniel combines conviction with courtesy – a combination of grace *and* truth (like Jesus) – Ashpenaz and his assistant were kind to Daniel, and Daniel recognizes this as God's "favor"...

Proverbs 16:7 "When a man's ways please the Lord, [God] makes even his enemies to be at peace with him."

Throughout Scripture you'll find courageous people who defied the authorities in order to obey God (Joseph, Esther, etc.). But, those who did it right would always combine *courage* with *courtesy* – truth with grace. Daniel says, "Watch our lives and put God's ways to the test for 10 days. And see if God's way isn't better."

Of course, this came with a risk. If they didn't look better than the other youth after 10 days, they would all lose their head for defying the king's order. But Christians have no right to ask unsaved people to take risks that they won't take themselves.⁷ So, Daniel invited people to watch his life and make their own evaluation because he knew that God's ways are better!



Can people watch your life and see that God's ways are better (from your attitude, work ethic, respect for authority, moodiness, etc.)?

In fact, did you know that on average – people who go to church at least once a week are happier, healthier, and live longer than people who don't? Harvard professor Tyler VanderWeel is a world expert on this subject and his research shows that, on average...

- Children who are brought up going to church tend to be happier and have a greater sense of purpose in their lives than those who were raised non-religious.
- Kids who are raised in church tend to avoid the abuse of alcohol and drugs.
- People who go to church every week are less likely to get depressed. This doesn't mean that Christians never suffer from depression. Many do, and sadly, some even take their own life. But people who never go to church are up to *five times* more likely to take their own life than people who go to church every week.

Of course, following Jesus and being active in a church, doesn't mean your life won't be hard. In fact, for many people around the world today, following Jesus *literally* means they will lose their life. And Daniel's life will certainly be threatened many times over!



So, what happens with Daniel after the ten day experiment? Will they look better than the other youth? Will God's way prove to be better?

We'll find out next week!

Small Groups

⁷ Wiersbe, W. W. (2000). *Be resolute* (pp. 16–17). Victor.