

Cottonwood Creek Church

DANIEL

SESSION ONE: FAITH IN HARD TIMES

DANIEL 1:1-21

9.8.24

MAIN POINT

Daniel and his friends demonstrated faith and faithfulness, even when their culture rejected the one true God.

INTRODUCTION

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

If you could change one thing about American culture, what would it be and why?

In your opinion, what social issue do you feel is being pushed in the American culture to accept that is unbiblical?

Can you think of a time or a season in your life when you struggled to be faithful? How was your faith tested? How were you pressured to acquiesce to culture or the people around you?

How did you respond? How do you typically respond in times like this?

The Book of Daniel gives us a look into what it is like to be faithful in a decaying world. We see many different kings in this story of Daniel, but one familiar name is Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar was an arrogant man. He believed that he was greater than God. Nebuchadnezzar was the king of Babylon at this time. History tells us that he attacked the southern kingdom of Judah three times, beginning in 605 BC. Some theologians believe that it was in the beginning of these invasions that Daniel and his friends were taken to Babylon to be trained, around 606 BC. Most likely Daniel was anywhere from 13-16 years old. Like Daniel and his friends, the world will try to hold us captive by claiming us, renaming us, and taming us.

UNDERSTANDING

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

READ DANIEL 1:1-7.

Why would Nebuchadnezzar want to assimilate the young people into Babylonian culture? What was he seeking to eliminate?

Why change their names? How was the process described in these verses connected to their identity?

In what ways can we draw parallels between Daniel's situation and the pressures we face today in our culture?

Daniel, along with others viewed as promising young people, were taken to Babylon as Israel was defeated and then exiled from their land. The Lord had long warned His people that if they failed to remain faithful to His covenant, this very thing would take place (Lev. 26:33; 39; 2 Kgs. 20; Isa. 39). For generations, God's people walked in disobedience, and now they were feeling the effects of God being true to His word.

READ DANIEL 1:8-16.

What tension do you think Daniel and his friends felt in their new position?

Why would Daniel and the others refuse the king's food? How do we see God's sovereignty and faithfulness at work in this passage?

What lessons can we learn from Daniel about standing firm in our convictions, even when it may lead to conflict?

How can we effectively communicate our beliefs in a way that is respectful and persuasive?

We don't know all the reasons why Daniel and his friends refused the meat and wine. Perhaps it had been offered to idols or they feared it to be unclean by Jewish standards. Regardless, Daniel was convicted that it would defile him either spiritually or physically to partake of this food. So, he asked to eat only vegetables and water. If after ten days, he and his friends were in worse condition than those eating the meat and wine, they would do as the chief to the eunuchs said. After this period, not only were Daniel and his friends not in worse condition than the others, they were actually in better condition.

READ DANIEL 1:17-21.

How did God demonstrate His provision and favor toward Daniel and his friends in these verses?

What role does prayer and community support play in standing firm in our faith?

How does this encourage you to be faithful to God in the midst of pressure to do otherwise?

Not only did God protect the young men physically, but He grew them in wisdom and in skill so they might be promoted by the king. He even gave Daniel an understanding of dreams and visions (1:17). This is one of many reminders in the life of Daniel that God's hand was upon His people, even in the midst of their oppression. Even while King Nebuchadnezzar sought to tame the young Hebrews, God strengthened them in body and spirit.

APPLICATION

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

How does our culture seek to inform our identity? How can we make sure our identity is secure in Christ, even when our faith is tested?

What are some areas in your life where you feel pressure to conform to societal norms that contradict your faith?

With the next generation coming up, what can you do/have you done to help them address cultural pressure? (i.e. media consumption, lifestyle, etc...)

How have you struggled to be faithful when tested in the past? How does Daniel's obedience inspire you to be faithful, even in ways that might seem insignificant (like the food he ate)?

How can living faithfully before God in small ways provide big opportunities to share the gospel with others?

PRAYER

Take some time in prayer to repent of ways that you have given into the culture around you because it was the easier choice. Ask Him to strengthen your faith and faithfulness, even when this means rejection or opposition from the world.

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 (Jr 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 King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, probably when he was still co-regent with his father and just after the battle of Carchemish (605 BC).

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 (Is 39:2,6).

1:3. His chief eunuch could also be translated his chief official, since the meaning of Hebrew saris varies (see the word's use in Gn 39:1; 2Kg 20:18; Est 2:3; Is 56:3).

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 fifteen. Chaldean language and literature refers to an ancient university-style education in Sumerian, Akkadian, and Aramaic.

1:5. Persian literature shows that three years was the customary time allotted for such training.

1:6-7. Daniel and his friends, whose original names honored the God of Israel, were given other names 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 a set upon his heart, a 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.

1:9-14. Only God's Spirit could have convinced the official to disobey the king even for ten days.

1:15-16. The fact that Daniel and his friends looked better and healthier is not a biblical endorsement of vegetarianism (Gn 9:3). Rather, God in his providence made them healthy and strong.

1:17-19. The ability of Daniel and his friends to excel intellectually was clearly given by God.

1:20. Throughout the Book of Daniel, there are six different expressions for the king's counselors. The first two, used here, are magicians and mediums. The word for magicians comes from a root that means an 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 BC) and even beyond that time (see 10:1, where a third year dates to 536).¹