

Week Thirty-two: A Captive Kingdom - Daniel 1



Overview

God's presence and the release of His power in the midst of His people distinguish Israel from all other nations. Moses understood this truth, asking, "For how then will it be known that your people and I have found grace in Your sight, except You go with us? So we shall be separate, Your people and I, from all the people who are upon the face of the earth" (Ex.

33:16). The LORD Himself had affirmed this truth to His people: "And He said: 'Behold, I make a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation; and all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the LORD. For it is an awesome thing that I will do with you" (34:10). He follows this statement with an admonishment, "For you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God" (34:14).

Israel's idolatry costs them greatly; they find themselves removed from the land of promise and in captivity. Daniel and a few contemporaries, however, walk in the fear the LORD even in the land of their captivity. God strategically positions them in servantleadership roles in Babylon. All four men experience God's presence and power.

This lesson highlights four foundational truths about the lives and success of Daniel and his contemporaries during the early years of their captivity.

Lesson Objective:

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will examine Daniel's secret to living righteously in the midst of unrighteousness and discover truths that apply to life today.

Key Truths

God employs both captivity and serving roles to develop, test, and use those who belong to Him.

Convictions developed early in life prepare God's people to make crucial decisions later in life.

Lesson Outline

When the LORD grants King Hezekiah another fifteen years of life following a neardeath sickness, the son of the king of Babylon hears about Hezekiah's recovery and sends a delegation with letters and presents. Hezekiah rewards the delegation with a tour of his treasure house, and Isaiah rebukes him for his foolishness: "Hear the word of the LORD: 'Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing

shall be left,' says the LORD. 'And they shall take away some of your sons who will descend from you, whom you will beget; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon'" (2 Kings 20:16-18). Sadly, the book of Daniel begins by describing the Babylonian setting in which King Hezekiah's descendants find themselves held captive.

Daniel, by his example, demonstrates how God uses people living in pagan cultures to make a difference. Daniel's early decisions impact all of his future life choices.

1. Daniel Embraces the Importance of a Secular Education - Daniel 1:3-5

Daniel, along with three other captive young men, is selected for a three-year language and literature program to prepare him for service in the king's household. This intensive training equips Daniel to understand and interact with his peers in Babylon and to function effectively.

The Apostle Paul understood the importance of a secular education in his interaction with the Greek philosophers. He engaged them in their language and quoted from their noted scholars.

Daniel doesn't resist learning about his host culture. Understanding the language and literature of others enables cross cultural workers to become acceptable outsiders.

2. Daniel Knows Who and Whose He Is - Daniel 1:6-7

Bitterness does not seem to taint the lives of Daniel and the three other young men, even though they have been given Babylonian names and made eunuchs.

Daniel's name means, "God is my Judge." His name is changed to, *Belteshazzar* ("Lady, protect the king").

Hananiah's name means, "Yahweh has been gracious," and is changed to *Shadrach* ("I am fearful").

Mishael's name means, "Who is what God is?" and is changed to *Meshach* ("I am humbled").

Azariah's name means, "Yahweh has helped," and is changed to *Abednego* ("Servant of Nebo").

The name changes of all these men reflect their change of status from free Judeans to servants and eunuchs of a foreign king and nation. Though Daniel and his cohorts are given Babylonian names, those names cannot erase their identity as Judeans and Godfearers—a simple name change cannot cancel their roots, their identity, and their relationship with Yahweh.

3. Daniel Develops Personal Convictions - Daniel 1:8-10

Daniel possesses and acts on personal convictions regarding defilement—about what he will and will not do: "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" (1:8).

Personal convictions that Daniel had developed earlier in his life have emboldened him to request an exemption from eating the food and wine set before him. Personal convictions based on the holiness of God, the awareness of His ever-abiding presence, and the Word of God distinguish Daniel and his Judean contemporaries from all the other eunuchs in the king's household. Perhaps Daniel recalls Moses' words to the Levites, "Do not drink wine or intoxicating drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations, that you may distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean" (Lev. 10:9); the law of the Nazirite, "He shall separate himself from wine and similar drink" (Num. 6:3); or Hosea's words, "Harlotry, wine, and new wine enslave the heart" (Hos. 4:11). He certainly remembers Moses' words regarding unclean meats (Lev. 11; Deut. 14), and in order to ensure that he does not eat the wrong meats, he requests only vegetables. Regardless, Daniel possesses convictions about personal and spiritual defilement, so he requests an exemption from that which threatens defilement.

4. Daniel Operates from a Biblical Worldview - Daniel 1:11-21

Daniel recognizes that God has placed him under the authority of the chief of the eunuchs, and he isn't defiant or rebellious, but he does offer his direct supervisor an alternative. The supervisor agrees to Daniel's appeal and grants him and his buddies ten days to demonstrate how an exemption from the diet of the other eunuchs will not cause them harm.

Daniel demonstrates how people with convictions don't need to be obtuse or difficult; they can appeal graciously and offer acceptable alternatives that keep their convictions intact. When the ten days end, Daniel and his friends are in better shape than their contemporaries, and the chief of the eunuchs grants Daniel his request and changes their diet.

Three years later, the king interviews Daniel and his three friends and finds them "ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in his realm" (1:20). For the next seventy years Daniel experiences numerous promotions, further testing of his convictions (along with deliverance), interprets the dreams of several rulers, and has visions from heaven as he serves Nebuchadnezzar and the kings who succeed him.

Application - What does this lesson teach about God? Man? Sin? Redemption?
God often positions those He plans to use greatly in servile positions to test and develop them.

An awareness of God's sovereignty and presence enables God's people to resist conformity to the world while learning about the world in which they live.

Without personal convictions God's people blend in with those around them and miss many opportunities to be used by God.

Defiance and rebellion against authority accomplish little. God uses convictional people who operate under authority and who learn how to appeal and offer acceptable alternatives.

Summary

God speaks through providence as He allows particular hardships to occur in the lives of those He plans to use greatly.

God acts on behalf of those who graciously resist personal and spiritual defilement by granting them favor with others.

God reveals His sovereignty over believers' difficult circumstances believers and reveals His interest in their spiritual development.

Discussion Questions

Name areas where believers today compromise biblical convictions for the sake of blending in with this world.

How do believers sometimes use worldly force to push their convictions on others? What does Daniel's example teach?