

BE TRUE TO CHRIST

1 ³Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials, to bring some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility—⁴young 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 instructed to teach them the literature and the language of the Chaldeans. ⁵The king assigned to them a daily ration from the king's choice food and from the wine that he drank. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service. ⁶Now among these [young men] were [some who came from] the people of Judah, [namely,] Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. ⁷But the chief official gave them [new] names: to Daniel, he gave the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, the name Shadrach; to Mishael, the name Meshach; and to Azariah, the name Abed-Nego.

⁸Now Daniel resolved in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food, nor with the wine he was given to drink; therefore, he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself. ⁹Now God caused Daniel to find favor and compassion in the sight of the chief official. ¹⁰But the chief of the officials said to Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and your drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? [If that were the case,] you would be endangering my head before the king." ¹¹Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the officials had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, ¹²"I beg you, test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the king's choice food; and treat your servants in accordance with what you see." ¹⁴So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days. ¹⁵At the end of ten days their appearance was healthier and they were better nourished than all the young men who ate the king's choice food. ¹⁶So the steward took away their [portion of] choice food, along with the wine they were supposed to drink, and gave them vegetables.

¹⁷To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding in every branch of literature and learning; furthermore, Daniel could understand all kinds of visions and dreams.

¹⁸At the end of the period that the king had appointed [for preparing them] to be presented before him, the chief of the officials brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹The king conversed with them, and from among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore, they stood before the king. ²⁰In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king consulted them, he found them to be ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in his whole realm. ²¹Daniel remained [in his position] until the first year of King Cyrus. (Dan. 1:3-21)

Introduction

Suppose you were a track star who proved to be good enough to make the Olympic team. Now it's an Olympic year and you find yourself aboard a jumbo airliner with the rest of the team heading for the Olympic games. You register at the Olympic

village and immediately proceed to check the schedule of track events. To your dismay you discover that your best event is being run on a Sunday; and it is your Christian conviction that you should not participate in an athletic event on the Lord's Day. What do you do? Think of all the pressure. You have trained four years for this moment, success here will open up a whole world of fame and fortune; and how can you let down your country that has sponsored you and is rooting for you? But can you sacrifice your deeply held Christian conviction? In Paris, back in 1924, a Christian athlete faced this very dilemma. Eric Liddell refused to run on the Lord's Day rather than violate his Christian convictions.

We may never face precisely the same challenge that Eric Liddell faced, but throughout our lives—maybe even on a daily basis—we face very seductive challenges to compromise or deny our Christian faith or principles. Will you cheat on an exam to get into graduate school? Will you compromise your Christian principles in order to make a lucrative business deal? Will you conceal or even deny your Christian faith so as not to offend certain influential people and thereby ruin your chances of advancement or social acceptance?

As Christians, we must prove ourselves true to Christ, despite the seductive challenges of the world to compromise or deny our loyalty to Christ. Daniel and his friends faced just such a challenge; and by the grace of God, they successfully met that challenge. Let us learn from their example, and, by the grace of God, let us imitate them as they were true to Christ.

I. Be True to Christ, in the Face of “Babylon’s” Challenge (Dan. 1:3-7)

Certain of the captives of Judah were offered the opportunity of a lifetime by their Babylonian captors; but at the same time they were confronted with a great challenge to their loyalty to Christ.

A select group of Hebrew youths were chosen for “re-education,” to prepare them for royal service in the courts of Babylon. In verses 3-4 the necessary qualifications are specified: 1) they must be from the Hebrew nobility; 2) they must be handsome and without physical defect; and 3) they must show an aptitude for a broad range of learning. The prescribed course of instruction is specified as the learning and the language of the Chaldeans (vs.4;) this would consist of courses in astronomy and astrology, mathematics, natural history, agriculture, architecture, and Babylonian mythology. Then there is outlined the process of training. For a three-year period these young men would be nourished on the royal diet—consisting of food that had been consecrated to the idols of Babylon: half of the meat was sacrificed to the idol, the other half was eaten as a daily communion meal with the idol (vs. 5.) Then, at the end of the three-year period, they would appear before the king for a royal examination.

Among this elite group of Hebrew youths we find Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. These four are singled out for mention from the whole sum of Hebrew

youths chosen for this special honor and training (vs. 6.) The reason why these four are singled out for mention appears to be that of the whole number of Hebrew youths who were selected, only these four remained faithful to the LORD, and these four were honored by the LORD.

Note that in dealing with these youths the first order of business was to create a change of identity. The giving of Babylonian names was intended to accomplish two things. First, it was intended to sever these young men from their Hebrew background. Second, it was intended to thoroughly initiate them into the culture and religion of Babylon. The meaning of the names (both the Hebrew and the Chaldean) is highly significant. “Daniel” (God is Judge) is changed to “Belteshazzar,” (a name derived from the chief god of Babylon, “Bel.”) “Hananiah” (“the LORD is gracious”) is changed to “Shadrach,” which means, “the command of Aku,” the Moon god. “Mishael” (“Who is like God?”) is changed to “Meshach” (“Who is like Aku?”) “Azariah” (“the LORD helps”) is changed to “Abednego,” which means, “slave of Nebo,” another of the main gods of Babylon. Note, however, that throughout this chapter the Hebrew identity of these four young men is steadfastly maintained, whenever they are mentioned, they are referred to by their Hebrew names (1:11,19.)

In the courts of Babylon these four Hebrew youths were confronted by three tremendous challenges at their young and impressionable age. First, there was the religious challenge: “If your God is greater than our gods, why are you our captives?” Second, there was the intellectual challenge: “We are introducing you to a new and alternative way of looking at the world: Babylonian history, science, and mythology.” Third, and most intense of all, there was the hedonistic challenge: “The glory, the power, the opulence of Babylon can all be yours, ... if you become one of us.”

What are the seductive challenges of “Babylon” with which we are tempted? Despite those challenges, let us rely upon the Holy Spirit for the grace to be true to Christ.

II. Be True to Christ, by Remaining Faithful to God’s Commandments (Dan. 1:8)

Thus it is that Daniel and his three companions are severely confronted with the temptation to deny the LORD and become conformed to this world, and thereby gain its much-coveted benefits. How did Daniel—and how can we—meet this challenge?

Verse eight reports, *“Daniel resolved in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king’s choice food.”* Daniel resolutely determined to be faithful to Christ, rather than yield to the temptation of denying Christ by compromising or abandoning his “Christian” convictions. Contrast the position of Daniel with that described in Revelation 2:14. In that passage of Revelation, the Lord Jesus

confronts to the church in Pergamum: *“I hold a few things against you, because you have some people there who adhere to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the children of Israel [to sin] by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality.”* Within the church at Pergamum were those who counseled that it was permissible for a Christian to acquiesce to the demands of the imperial cult of Rome and bow down and offer incense before the shrine of the emperor. Christ identifies these people with the Old Testament false prophet, Balaam, who instructed the king of Moab to seduce Israel into the practice of idolatry. Their reasoning no doubt was along such lines as these: Just go through the motions of emperor worship; if you believe in your heart that Jesus is the true and only Lord, that’s what really matters; just pay lip service to the worship of the emperor for the sake of peace. There are always some within the church who advocate a policy of accommodation with the world: sacrifice obedience to the commandments of God in order to live at peace with the world or get ahead in the world; invent a false distinction between internal conviction of heart and external practice in life. But what does the Lord Jesus Christ say about such accommodation and compromise? To the church in Pergamum He declared: *“Repent, therefore; otherwise, I will come to you swiftly and I will wage war against them with the sword of my mouth”* (Rev. 2:16.) Consider, also, the teaching of the Apostle Paul, *“If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved”* (Rom. 10:9.)

Consider what effect Daniel’s Christian conviction had upon his life: *“Daniel resolved in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king’s choice food, nor with the wine he was given to drink; therefore, he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself”* (Dan. 1:8.) Genuine conviction of heart reveals itself in acts of commitment, no matter what may be the potential outcome. An attitude of loyalty to Christ that never exhibits the accompanying acts of loyalty is merely self-deception. For a true example of Daniel-like commitment to Christ, consider the case of a Christian schoolteacher: When a reading program that featured the occult was introduced into the Sioux Falls, South Dakota, public schools, a Christian teacher announced her refusal to teach it to her class—she acted upon her Christian convictions.

Note, too, that Daniel did not succumb to the rationalization that the eating of food offered to a pagan idol was “only a little thing” and not a major issue. The Lord Jesus declares, *“He who is faithful with a very little will also be faithful with much; but he who deals in an unrighteous manner with a very little will also deal in an unrighteous manner with much”* (Lk. 16:10.)

Daniel exhibited this firm determination to be true to Christ, despite being in exile—he could have become bitter against God, or concluded that God had forsaken him, so why should he bother to maintain his commitment to the LORD? Daniel maintained his commitment to the LORD despite being confronted with the glories of Babylon—glories to be won at the price of forsaking his allegiance

to Christ the Lord. Daniel maintained his commitment to the LORD despite risking the danger of incurring the wrath of the king—and thereby not only forfeiting the benefits of Babylon but in all likelihood forfeiting his life.

The commitment to the LORD exhibited by Daniel and his companions also involved some measure of personal deprivation, and possible alienation from their peers. According to verse 12, Daniel and his companions requested a diet of vegetables and water, while all the others feasted on the king’s delicacies. These four Hebrew young men very well may have suffered mocking and scorn from their peers and have been considered by many to be fools—but at the same time they may have gained the respect of some, as well as an opportunity to witness for the LORD. By way of contemporary example, a Christian teen was mocked by many of his classmates because of his refusal to engage in drinking and immoral conduct; nevertheless, he maintained his commitment to Christ.

Like Daniel and his companions, let us be true to Christ by remaining faithful to the commandments of God; may we ever look to Christ for the grace and strength to do so.

III. Be True to Christ, and You Will Be Honored by the LORD (Dan. 1:9-21)

The LORD caused Daniel to find kindness and compassion in the sight of the Babylonian prince (vs.9.) Daniel determined to be true to the LORD, and the LORD took care of him. On this occasion the LORD turned the heart of the prince toward Daniel to look favorably upon him and deal kindly with him. On a later occasion the LORD will shut the mouths of the lions when Daniel is cast into the lions’ den because of his faithfulness to Christ:

Then Daniel answered the king, “O king, live forever! ²²My God has sent his angel and he has shut the lions’ mouths. They have not harmed me, because I have been found to be innocent before him; and, also, I have done nothing wrong before you, O king.” (Dan. 6:21-22)

The more severe the trial, the more powerful the defense that Christ provides for those who are true to Him, as the Psalmist testifies, *“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble”* (Psl. 46:1.) Consider the Apostle Paul’s testimony to the LORD’s faithfulness to him in his times of trial:

But the Lord stood by me, and strengthened me ... and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. ¹⁸The Lord will deliver me out of every evil work and will save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (2 Tim. 4:17-18)

The LORD blessed these four young men—in distinction from all the others—*“with knowledge and understanding in every branch of literature and learning”* (vs. 17.) Verses 18-19 indicate that **none** could compare with Daniel and his

companions; therefore, they stood before the king (i.e., they were appointed to the chief positions of honor in the empire.) Ironically, by faithfulness to the LORD these four young men acquired what the others desired and compromised their faith in a futile attempt to attain. Men deny the LORD in the hope of gaining the world, but those who are true to Christ shall finally inherit the world.

Verse 21 informs us that Daniel continued even until the first year of King Cyrus—i.e.; the year of the Jews' deliverance from Babylon, the year of the overthrow of the Babylonian empire. The great king Nebuchadnezzar would die, the great empire of Babylon would be conquered, but this young man who was true to Christ would endure to see the salvation God had promised to accomplish for His people Israel. The LORD declares through the prophet Samuel, *"Therefore Jehovah, the God of Israel, declares ... those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be distained"* (1 Sam. 2:30.)

Conclusion

Relying upon the Holy Spirit and His all-sufficient grace, let us be true to Christ our Savior despite the challenges of the world that would seek to induce us to compromise and deny our Christian commitment.