

**BIBLE
STUDIES
FOR LIFE®**

Leader

Guide

ADULTS • KJV
FALL 2023

STAYING TRUE IN A WORLD FAR FROM GOD
CONFIDENT IN THE FACE OF HARD QUESTIONS

S • M • T • W • T • F • S

Develop Strong Convictions

THE POINT

Our convictions, not our circumstances, define who we are.

THE PASSAGE

Daniel 1:3-13,17-19

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Why couldn't I have a pet dragon that lived under the stairs? Eddie Munster had one. The Munsters' stairs opened like the hood of a car, and Spot would appear, usually breathing fire.

Mere technicalities kept me from owning a dragon. First, where to find one? Local pet stores sold goldfish and hamsters—no dragons. Second, food probably cost a lot more than we could afford. Third, we lived in a one-story house, hence, no grand staircase.

Of course, Spot was a fictitious pet on the 1960s sitcom "The Munsters." The show portrayed a family of harmless monsters who faced challenges as they lived in a world vastly different from what they had previously known in Transylvania. Several 1960s TV shows depicted people living in an unfamiliar place, such as "Gilligan's Island," "Lost in Space," "The Beverly Hillbillies," and more.

Sometimes we look at our world today and say, "This is not the world I have known! Something is vastly wrong here." The Old Testament prophet Daniel was transported into a foreign and ungodly place. His example can help instruct us how we too can live faithfully in a seemingly unfamiliar world.



THE POINT: OUR CONVICTIONS, NOT OUR CIRCUMSTANCES, DEFINE WHO WE ARE.

GET INTO THE STUDY

LEADER PACK: Display **Pack Item 1**, the “**Staying True in a World Far from God**” poster, to introduce the major theme of this study, along with the focus of each session.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, play a video showing someone who has experienced culture shock. Then ask **Question #1**.

NOTE: A video option can be found at BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra.

DISCUSS: **Question #1** on page 13 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG): “**When have you experienced culture shock?**”

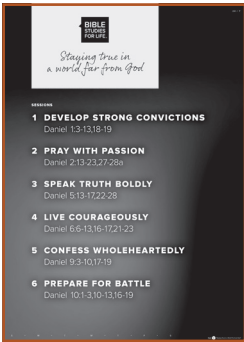
GUIDE: Direct someone to “**The Bible Meets Life**” on page 13 of the PSG. Introduce the importance of holding fast to our convictions by reading or summarizing the text or by encouraging group members to read it on their own.

RECAP: Sometimes we look at our world today and say, “This is not the world I have known! Something is vastly wrong here.” The Old Testament prophet Daniel was transported into a foreign and ungodly place. His example can help instruct us how we too can live faithfully in a seemingly unfamiliar world.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Use the “Stress Ball” option on page 25 of this Leader Guide to set the stage for “**The Point.**”

GUIDE: Call attention to “**The Point**” on page 13 of the PSG: “**Our convictions, not our circumstances, define who we are.**”

PRAY: Transition into the study by asking God to help us see our culture with His eyes. Thank Him for giving us a trustworthy guide to navigate these times through His Word.



STUDY INTRODUCTION

TIP: When helpful, use this “Notes” column to record additional discussion questions, concepts, and activities that connect the study content with your specific group.



10 MINUTES

NOTES



ALTERNATE QUESTION:
What are some ways we might feel like foreigners in this world?

DANIEL 1:3-7

³ And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king’s seed, and of the princes; ⁴ Children in whom was no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king’s palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans. ⁵ And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king’s meat, and of the wine which he drank: so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king. ⁶ Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: ⁷ Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abednego.

READ: Ask someone to read aloud Daniel 1:3-7 on page 14 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use the commentary for the verses on the next page of the Leader Guide to give further background on the purpose and setting of the book.

RECAP: The book of Daniel, being autobiographical, gives firsthand snapshots from the prophet Daniel’s life. The Babylonians conquered the ruling Assyrians in 605 BC. The nation of Judah found itself under Babylonian domination. One of the first acts of King Nebuchadnezzar was to capture choice citizens from Jerusalem, Judah’s capital city, and bring them into his royal household. Daniel, who was likely a teen at that time, was among those taken.

LEADER PACK: In advance, make copies of **Pack Item 2**, the “**Book of Daniel**” handout, to give further background on this book. Invite volunteers to read bullet points aloud.

RECAP: The Hebrew youths’ experience in Babylonian serves as a cautionary tale for us today. As modern culture moves further from God-honoring traditions, increasingly the world will expect people of faith to abandon any loyalty to God. They will pressure us to embrace lifestyles that violate God’s Word. Will we remain faithful like Daniel and his friends?

DISCUSS: **Question #2** on page 15 of the PSG: “**In what areas do you find your Christian worldview challenged these days?**”

TRANSITION: The world expects us to conform to its expectations. In the next verses, we see that we must draw the line where we will not compromise.

DANIEL 1:3-7 *Commentary*

The book of Daniel. The book of Daniel was written during the Babylonian exile. It covers a period of about seventy years—from Nebuchadnezzar’s first conquest of Jerusalem in 605 BC to around the third year of the Persian king Cyrus in 536 BC. The book of Daniel divides neatly into two equal parts. Chapters 1–6 are historical and inform us of events that happened to Daniel and a few other young Hebrew exiles in Babylon. Chapters 7–12 are prophetic and record four visions given to the elderly Daniel concerning the kingdoms of this world and God’s coming kingdom.

An outstanding feature of the book that English readers might miss is that it is written in two languages—Hebrew and Aramaic. Chapters 1:1–2:4a are in Hebrew, as are chapters 8–12. Chapters 2:4b–7 are in Aramaic. Significantly, chapters 2–7 relate to what Jesus called “the times of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24) and outline the course of secular world history. Thus, they were written in Aramaic, the language of diplomacy and commerce of that time. Chapters 8–12 concentrate more on the future of God’s covenant people, and so were written in Hebrew.

Purposes of the book of Daniel. A number of purposes can be discerned for the book Daniel wrote. First, as chapters 1–6 demonstrate, Daniel recorded some of the history of a group of the Jewish exiles who were taken from Jerusalem to Babylon in 605 BC, of which Daniel himself was a member. Second, chapters 7–12 reassure God’s people that while the kingdoms of this world will come and go, God is moving the course of human history along to His desired goal. The world situation is not out of His control, and it will end in the coming of God’s kingdom on earth. A third purpose of Daniel’s book was to provide insight, guidance, and principles to God’s people as to the extent of cultural accommodation they properly could make in a dominantly secular society that often was hostile to their faith.

The Setting of Daniel 1. Verse 1 states the setting as “the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah.” In Jehoiakim’s time, two rival empires dominated the world—Egypt and Babylon—both at opposite ends of the Fertile Crescent, with Israel in the middle. As the Egyptian army moved north toward Assyria, it attacked and defeated Judah, killing its king, Josiah, in 609 BC

at the Battle of Megiddo when Josiah tried to inter-vene. Josiah immediately was replaced by his son, Jehoahaz, but pharaoh Neco, within three months, removed him, transported him to Egypt, and placed his brother, Jehoiakim (also known as Eliakim), on the throne of Judah in 609 BC (2 Kings 23:28–24:7; 2 Chron. 35:20–36:8). In 605 BC at the Battle of Carchemish, the Babylonians defeated Egypt, conquered the whole of Syria-Palestine, and made Jehoiakim a vassal to the Bab-ylonians under Nebuchadnezzar. However, Jehoiakim soon rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. That brought the Babylonian army against Jerusalem. Thus in 605 BC, when Nebuchadnezzar first conquered Judah, he imposed a forced exile on some of the Jewish popula-tion. Daniel and others from the nobility and royalty were among those in this first wave of deportees to Babylon in 605 BC. (Under Nebuchadnezzar, two other waves of forced deportation occurred in 597 BC, which involved Ezekiel, and in 586 BC at the final fall and total destruc-tion of Jerusalem.)

Babylon (v. 1). From the root meaning “to confound,” Babylon goes back in Bible times to the tower built there and God’s act of confusing the languages (Gen. 11:9). The ancient city was first founded by Nimrod (10:8-10), then many centuries later was ruled by the famous Hammurabi from 1810–1750 BC. The height of its splen-dor and fame, however, came under Nebuchadnezzar, who built great temples and canals, fortified the city’s double walls, and constructed the magnificent hanging gardens. The great city was perhaps the first to reach a population of 200,000 and is estimated to have been up to a half a million people in Daniel’s day.

Daniel . . . Belteshazzar (vv. 6-7). Babylon commonly imposed new names on foreigners who entered govern-ment or public service (see 2 Kings 23:34; 24:17). *Daniel* means “God is my judge.” His name was changed to *Belteshazzar*, meaning “Protect his life!”—or if a refer-ence to the Babylonian god Bel, then either “May Bel protect his life!” or “Bel’s prince.” Daniel was re-named specifically after the name of Nebuchadnezzar’s god (see Dan. 4:8).



10 MINUTES

NOTES

DANIEL 1:8-13

⁸ But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. ⁹ Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs. ¹⁰ And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which are of your sort? then shall ye make me endanger my head to the king. ¹¹ Then said Daniel to Melzar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, ¹² Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink. ¹³ Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king’s meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants.

READ: Ask someone to read aloud Daniel 1:8-13 on page 15 of the PSG.

SUMMARIZE: Highlight the main points from page 16 of the PSG: Why did Daniel think the king’s food would defile him? Two possibilities emerge.

- 1. Daniel, having been raised in a Jewish home, would have understood certain foods were not kosher and certain animals were “clean” and others “unclean” (Gen. 7).
- 2. Ancient pagan religions often compelled adherents to leave food before an idol. After it had been presented to the god, the priest or leader would consume it. When God gave the Law to Moses, He prohibited the consumption of food offered to idols (Ex. 34:15).

RECAP: If the young Hebrew lads had eaten from the king’s table and afterwards appeared vigorous, alert, and robust, then their condition would be attributed to what the Babylonians had furnished. If, however, they were in that same healthy condition after eating the minimized and modified diet, then the credit would have to be attributed to what God had done.

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 16 of the PSG: “How do we navigate the tension between standing in our convictions and not isolating ourselves from the world?”

DO: Direct group members to **Engage** with “A Line in the Sand” on page 17 of the PSG (page 25 of this Leader Guide) to help group members consider their convictions.

TRANSITION: In the next verses, we see we are to serve and stand for the Lord no matter what the culture does.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:
How can we determine when to compromise and when to stand firm?

DANIEL 1:8-13 *Commentary*

Connection to The Point: Daniel determined he would not let his circumstances redefine who he is or his relationship with God.

Purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s meat, nor with the wine (v. 8). Whereas Daniel seemingly did not object to being given a pagan name or assigned pagan learning, he made a decision based on principle when it came to the food and drink he was offered. Behind this rejection were two concerns. First, the food the Babylonians consumed did not meet the requirements of the Mosaic law and thus was considered unclean (Lev. 3:17; 11:1-47; 17:10-14). Second, the fact that the food and drink from the Babylonians was first offered to their pagan gods before being consumed. Thus, the meals were consecrated to their gods, and those who took part in them in effect worshiped those idols. For Daniel to participate in such meals would have been self-defiling. Further, in the East, to share a meal was to enter into a covenant friendship, to commit oneself to the allegiance of the person—in this case, to that of the king. This Daniel could not do.

In fact, well over a century earlier, Hosea had prophesied about this very situation for the exiles of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Hos. 9:3-4). Many Jews during the period of Greek dominance between the Old and New Testaments made a similar commitment to Daniel’s. We are told, “Many in Israel stood firm and were resolved in their hearts not to eat unclean food. They chose to die rather than to be defiled by food or to profane the holy covenant; and they did die” (1 Maccabees 1:62-63). Fortunately, this was not the outcome for Daniel.

Favour and tender love (v. 9). While the chief eunuch showed Daniel favour and tender love, it was God and His intervention that caused the eunuch to treat Daniel in this way. The word *favour* is the important Hebrew word *hesed* that has many shades of meaning, including “goodwill.” *Tender love* is used in the plural to add intensity to the term. Thus, it refers to a deep-seated sympathy. Because God caused the chief eunuch to respond in this way, it opened the door for Daniel to propose an alternative suggestion.

Endanger my head to the king (v. 10). Not only could the course of action Daniel suggested endanger the lives of the captives, but also that of the chief eunuch, because he was solely responsible for these captives’ care and would be held accountable for them with his life. Ashpenaz could lose his life for changing the king’s orders and directions. He might also face the consequences of siding with those who were rejecting participation in this show of loyalty to the king by not eating his food.

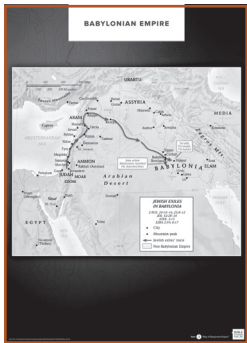
Melzar, . . . set over (v. 11). When Daniel did not succeed with Ashpenaz the chief eunuch, a guard, a person lesser than and under the authority of the chief eunuch, was the one to whom Daniel pitched his idea. This man agreed to test Daniel’s proposal for ten days. He no doubt enjoyed the king’s rich food and wine himself while he substituted vegetables and water for the young men’s portion of meat and wine. According to verse 16, it seems the guard apparently not only substituted their food for the ten-day test period, but also for the course of the next three years!

Pulse to eat (v. 12). *Pulse* literally is “things sowed.” Neither the vegetables nor the water would have been offered to the pagan gods, nor would eating them have violated the Mosaic food laws. The vegetables likely would have included a variety of grains and greens, not just peas, beans, and legumes.



15 MINUTES

NOTES



ALTERNATE QUESTION:
How might others
benefit when we stand
our ground?

DANIEL 1:17-19

¹⁷ As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. ¹⁸ Now at the end of the days that the king had said he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹ And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king.

READ: Ask someone to read aloud Daniel 1:17-19 on page 18 of the PSG.

LEADER PACK: Display **Pack Item 3**, the “**Map of Babylonian Empire**” poster, to explain the context surrounding Daniel’s captivity. Invite the group to refer to the map throughout the unit, especially as other kings and kingdoms are introduced.

GUIDE: Use the commentary for the verses on the next page of the Leader Guide to give further background on King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.

RECAP: Daniel and his Hebrew friends had been taken captive. Certainly, they had every reason to question God and wonder why He had abandoned them in such a life-altering crisis. Daniel, though, recognized that God was actively at work, even in their current threatening situation.

DISCUSS: **Question #4** on page 18 of the PSG: “**What are some things that help us stand firm in our convictions?**”

RECAP: The four youth surpassed both the king’s expectations and the other captives’ abilities. Nebuchadnezzar thus handpicked them to serve in his palace. Although Daniel had learned about Babylonian culture, he refused to compromise in his faith and his faithfulness to God. The Lord hadn’t abandoned Daniel; He blessed both him and his friends. Daniel wasn’t where he planned to be; he was, though, right where God needed him to be.

DISCUSS: **Question #5** on page 18 of the PSG: “**How can we help each other stand against the culture when it conflicts with our faith?**”

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Use the magazine option on page 25 of this Leader Guide to help the group consider answers to **Question #5**.

GUIDE: Refer back to “**The Point**” for this session: “**Our convictions, not our circumstances, define who we are.**”

DANIEL 1:17-19 *Commentary*

Connection to The Point: Daniel’s conviction to stay true to God did not waver, and he used the gifts and skills God gave him to serve.

Knowledge and skill . . . and wisdom (v. 17). Once again the text stresses that it was God who gave these four young men knowledge and skill or understanding. We are not told how hard they studied or how difficult the material was over their three-year course of study—incredibly difficult in both cases most likely—but all four of these young men were given insights and comprehension that their comrades could not achieve by their own means. *Knowledge* here refers to the God-given ability to discern what is true from what is false. *Skill* relates to the mastery of the entire corpus of the Babylonian writings—in **all learning** (v. 17). *Wisdom* is the ability to apply wisely and correctly the knowledge they acquired. Such gifts were given to all four young men. In this sense, they were like Moses, who was skilled in all the wisdom of Egypt (Acts 7:22).

Visions and dreams (v. 17). Something more was given to Daniel. God gave Daniel understanding of all kinds of visions and dreams. Daniel had the ability to see, understand, and interpret what dreams and visions meant. This will become important in the chapters that follow. Dreams occur while one is sleeping. Visions normally occur when one is awake. The reference here includes not only the dreams and visions that came to Daniel, but also those that came to others. Daniel now lived in a culture and society that placed great emphasis on dreams and visions and on their interpretation. So this was an important gift of God to Daniel that would help him significantly as the years went by.

Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon (v. 18). King Nebuchadnezzar was the son of King Nebopolassar. He defeated pharaoh Neco of Egypt in 605 BC at the Battle of Carchemish, thereby gaining domination of Syria-Palestine and the Euphrates valley for the Babylonian Empire. Nebuchadnezzar became king upon his father’s death and proceeded to put down further revolts in Judah in 597 BC and 586 BC, eventually destroying the Jewish kingdom and its capital city of Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar instituted a policy of forced deportation, and thus took many Jewish captives to Babylon.

Found none like (v. 19). With that short comment, these four young men **stood** (began to serve) **before the king**. But after saying that, Daniel returned to make a further comment on the king’s final examination of these four young men: “And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm” (v. 20). “Ten times” is a standard idiom for absolute superiority. These four were absolutely superior to “all”—not just some—of “the magicians and astrologers.” And not just superior to those who studied with them for three years or who lived in Babylon. No, they were superior to all those “in all his realm”—which was a most extensive empire. The term *magicians* was used of soothsayer priests in Egypt; and the term *astrologers* refers to a conjurer. These were considered the wise men of Babylon.

LIVE IT OUT



5 MINUTES

NOTES

GUIDE: Direct the group to page 19 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the following applications:

- **Analyze your own life situation.** Is God working in an unexpected way? If so, pray and ask for His wisdom to see the bigger picture of what He is doing in your life.
- **Think about your own life.** Is there an area in which you have compromised and adopted the world’s unbiblical values? Pray and ask God for strength to know what to do in this situation.
- **Tell your story.** Share with your family or friends details of a time God led you into an unexpected or even uncomfortable place, opportunity, or situation, but you later saw His hand at work. Explain how this experience affected your life and your family. Pray with them, thanking God for letting them be part of your faith journey.

WRAP IT UP

TRANSITION: Read or restate “The Point” for this session: “Our convictions, not our circumstances, define who we are.”

PRAY: Thank God for the Holy Spirit’s wisdom and power to keep us strong in our convictions. Ask Him to help the group stand strong in a culture that often seems foreign to us.



SCAN ME

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

EXTRA!

Free additional ideas for your group are available at BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra

THE POINT: OUR CONVICTIONS, NOT OUR CIRCUMSTANCES, DEFINE WHO WE ARE.

ENGAGE

A Line in the Sand. Outlined below are a few areas in which today’s culture tries to convince believers to compromise either in action or belief. Rank them from 1 to 7 in the degree of struggle for you. Then answer the question.

- _____ Sexuality
- _____ Finances
- _____ Work ethic
- _____ Views or behavior toward “the least of these”
- _____ Abortion
- _____ Personal religious convictions
- _____ Substance abuse (tobacco, alcohol, drugs, and so forth)
- _____ What I watch and read

Who or what has God used in your life to help you avoid compromise?

BONUS CONTENT

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, bring a stress ball or a ball of molding clay to your gathering. Pass it around for group members to feel as an object lesson of something that is totally malleable—something that has no internal strength or convictions. Then pass around something more solid (like a baseball) as you read “The Point.”

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, gather some secular magazines and pass them around the group. Invite the group to find and tear out examples that demonstrate the world’s expectation of conformity. Consider the last question again in light of these illustrations.

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