

**BIBLE
STUDIES
FOR LIFE®**

Personal

Study Guide

ADULTS • KJV

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





Develop Strong Convictions

THE POINT

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

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.

QUESTION 1:

When have you experienced culture shock?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

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.

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.

- **The Best and the Brightest.** King Nebuchadnezzar specified the Hebrew captives were to be from Judah's noble families. Whether Daniel and his friends were members of the royal household or part of Judah's nobility is unknown. People from these social strata would have had the finest education of the day and would have been trained in matters of culture and tradition.

Nebuchadnezzar didn't want to bring people to Babylon whom he would have to support; he was looking for people who could strengthen his kingdom, power, influence, and reputation. Additionally, taking the strongest and most influential to Babylon would weaken Judah, making it vulnerable to future assaults.

What Nebuchadnezzar hadn't considered was the religious foundation that had been firmly rooted in some captives' lives, namely Daniel and his three Hebrew friends. They had grown up under the influence of Judah's godly King Josiah. His reign (640-609 BC) was marked by God's people renewing His covenant, a nationwide revival, and God's Word being reestablished as the core for Hebrew worship. Although not mentioned in Scripture, the youths' personal devotion to God and His Word certainly began in the pattern set out by their parents.

This is a reminder for us today to make sure we raise our children in environments that honor God and His Word. These godly foundations aren't easily abandoned. The apostle Paul reminded Timothy of the benefits of being raised in a God-fearing household: "When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also" (2 Tim. 1:5). Daniel and his friends' commitment and loyalty to God, having been firmly established in their homeland, would become evident in Babylon.

- **The Training and Teaching.** Why was Nebuchadnezzar determined to instruct captives "all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science"? He may have wanted to erase from their minds the beliefs and culture they had known in Judah. Changing their Hebrew names, each of which reflected the parents' faith in God, to names that honored various Babylonian gods highlighted Nebuchadnezzar's attempt to erase their God-fearing faith foundations.

Or Nebuchadnezzar may have been preparing these youth for future work in Babylon, knowing

that they would be prepared to instruct other captives who would be brought to Babylon later.

To further acclimate the youth to Babylonian life and potential service in the royal household, Nebuchadnezzar stated they were to receive the food and drink that was served at his table. He wanted to make sure these promising young men received the best he could offer in the way of food, education, and mentorship.

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?

QUESTION 2:

In what areas do you find your Christian worldview challenged these days?

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.

My wife and I have a friend, Karen, who went into anaphylactic shock when she drank lemonade as a child. Today, Karen is especially careful when she orders at a restaurant. Many times we have heard her say, "I want a glass of tea with no lemon. And when I say, 'no lemon,' I mean no lemon. You can't take a glass that has had lemon on the side of it and remove the slice. I am deathly allergic. So, no lemon." Hearing the alarm in her voice, servers are always understanding.

- **Decision and Defilement.** Daniel and his friends heard they were to have the same food and wine the king received (Dan. 1:5). This certainly would have been the finest cuisine in the land, prepared by only the most-talented cooks. Rather than be excited or pleased, though, alarm bells went off; Daniel saw the food as a source of defilement. 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 "clean" and others "unclean" (Gen. 7).
 2. Ancient pagan religions often compelled adherents to leave food before an idol. When God gave the Law to Moses, He prohibited the consumption of food offered to idols (Ex. 34:15).

Daniel took a hard stand for his religious convictions. Although he was gracious in his request, he had already decided in his heart he would not consume the king's food. Daniel's

resolve is a lesson for us. We must establish our convictions against unholy behavior *before* we face the moment of decision.

- **Time for Testing.** Refusing the king's food could be taken as a rejection of the king and as an act of rebellion. The king's chief servant rejected the idea. He was afraid if the youth appeared less than healthy then his own life would be in danger.

Daniel, undeterred by the servant's rejection, next approached the personal guard who had been assigned to him. Hearing Daniel's request, he agreed to feed Daniel and his friends only vegetables and water for ten days. Afterwards, the guard would evaluate the youths' condition. Establishing a "Plan B" highlights how determined Daniel was to avoid defilement. Not surprisingly, the youth looked robust after ten days. They continued with the diet for three years.

If the lads had eaten from the king's table and afterwards appeared vigorous, then their condition would be attributed to what the Babylonians had furnished. If, though, they were in that same condition after eating the modified diet, then the credit would have to go to God.

QUESTION 3:

How do we navigate the tension between standing on our convictions and not isolating ourselves from the world?

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?

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.

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.

- **Intellect and Insight.** Rather than merely acquire information (knowledge), the four young men gained insight (understanding) that was beyond normal, human capabilities. They received wisdom and understanding that comes exclusively from God.

QUESTION 4:

What are some things that help us stand firm in our convictions?

Beyond intellect, God also gave Daniel something He hadn't given Daniel's friends—the ability to understand visions and dreams. The Babylonians believed their gods conveyed messages through dreams. Daniel's ability to interpret dreams far surpassed what the king's priests, magicians, mediums, and sorcerers could do and impressed the king. Daniel's God-given ability to understand every kind of vision

and dream proved the superiority of his God, Yahweh, over the false deities of Babylon.

- **Superior and Service.** Nebuchadnezzar had requested the best and the brightest for his service, men who could grasp all kinds of wisdom and knowledge (Dan. 1:4). The time came for Nebuchadnezzar to inspect all the captives who had received three years of training. Scripture gives no indication that Nebuchadnezzar had ever seen any of the captives before this moment; likely, he had not. The king knew what he was looking for.

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.

QUESTION 5:

How can we help each other stand against the culture when it conflicts with our faith?

LIVE IT OUT

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

