

CHAPTER TWO

DANIEL OVERCOMES CULTURE SHOCK

A. MORE THAN A LION TAMER

When Christians hear about the prophet Daniel, most of us remember the story of how he was thrown into a den of lions for refusing to bow down before the king and to worship anyone but God. Because of his love and faithfulness to God, we know that he was miraculously spared. In fact, any Christian working in a secular environment may sometimes feel as though he is in the middle of a lion's den. Let's take a look at how Daniel remained faithful and consequently served as a vibrant witness, not only to the Babylonians but also the Persians who would later rule the empire. In fact near Sushan the palace in Sush, in present day Iran there is a mosque which claims to have the bones of the prophet Daniel. Of course, we as Christians do not look at tombs with bones of dead prophets, but rather to the living God to love, serve, and worship.

1. Daniel was captured in Jerusalem and taken to Babylon. We learn that Nebuchadnezzar took captives from Israel to Babylon three different times.
 - a. In 604 B.C. during Jehoiakim's reign at which time Daniel was taken. "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god." Daniel 1:1-2
 - b. In 597 B.C. during Jehoiachin's reign (II Chronicles 36:9-10)
 - c. In 586 B.C. during Zedekiah's reign (II Chronicles 36:18-21)
2. How long did Daniel serve God in Babylon and Persia? We know that Daniel was an honored public servant throughout the reign of the kings of Babylon and at least into the third year of the reign of Cyrus---all told, a span of more than 70 years.

"And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus." Daniel 1:21

"In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia, a revelation was given to Daniel (who was called Belteshazzar). Its message was true and it concerned a great war. The understanding of the message came to him in a vision." Daniel 10:1

B. FACING TEMPTATION

Culture shock is what refugees and those who move to a new country get when they are faced with the stressful changes of living in a different society. Fatigue, depression, and despair are a few of the symptoms that can overtake someone living as a foreigner. Chapter one of the Book of Daniel clues us into the pressures Daniel faced in the Babylonian culture. How are some of the examples below similar to the pressures faced by people today especially refugees, who move to different countries? Do Christians working and living in their own secular society face any similar pressures and feel like foreigners because of their faith?

1. Functioning as a Jew in the secular Gentile world, especially as a refugee was not easy. God's law commanded His people to live apart from the world and, as mentioned, prescribed dietary restrictions on foods which were clean and unclean.
2. Seeing Jerusalem destroyed and God's people taken captive must have tempted young Daniel to doubt the power and promises of his God. He must have questioned God about why Babylon was allowed to conquer Jerusalem.
3. Adjusting to captivity and new responsibilities in a strange land was thrust upon Daniel while only a teenager.
4. Surviving required learning the Babylonian culture and language which were influenced by their beliefs in foreign gods.
5. Serving the king was mandatory—Daniel's only option was to live in the royal palace and study hard.
6. Being given a new Babylonian name, Belteshazzar, which means "prince or protector of Bel," in place of his own name which means "God is my judge," must have made Daniel feel as though he was losing part of his identity. From now on he would be known by the name of a false god.
7. Being tempted to compromise put his faith to the test.

C. HOW DANIEL RESPONDED

1. **Daniel trusted in God.**
Daniel was a young, privileged Israeli noble when he and others were taken captive. They had to travel the 400 miles from Jerusalem to Babylon. They probably walked the distance, perhaps going hungry. They may have been mocked by the Babylonians. Some might have died along the way. What hope was there for prisoners of a heathen nation? Daniel was chosen to be one of the few who would study the Babylonian culture in order to serve in the king's palace. God had a plan for Daniel.

“Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring in

some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility—young 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 to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians.” Daniel 1:3-4.

2. **Daniel committed himself to pleasing God.**

Daniel 1:8 says, “But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way.” Daniel would not eat the rich food from the king’s table, probably because it did not meet the dietary standards prescribed in God’s law and was unclean. Wisely, he did so without causing offense, asking an official to test his health over a period of days and see if he would not be stronger simply eating vegetables and water. God honored Daniel’s commitment and consequently, the unclean food was no longer served to all of the captive Israeli men in the palace.

“So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.” Daniel 1:16

3. **Daniel lived with integrity.**

Daniel became an honored public official whose service survived the transition of an empire. He successfully served kings across cultures, from Babylonian to Median and Persian. In the trials of his first three years of study and throughout the next several decades, God sustained Daniel as he lived out his faith with integrity of character.

a. He was a man of prayer.

“Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.” Daniel 2:17-18

“Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.” Daniel 6:10

“So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed: O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands.” Daniel 9:3-4

“At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over.” Daniel 10:2-3

- b. He was righteous and godly. 1:8; 6:4-5
“But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way.” Daniel 1:8

“At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. Finally these men said, “We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God.” Daniel 6:4-5

- c. He was sociable with other people:

Believers

“Among these were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.” Daniel 1:6-7

Unbelievers

“Now God had caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel.” Daniel 1:9

4. He was an excellent student.

“The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king’s service. In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.” Daniel 1:19-20

- a. He was flexible, accepting his Babylonian name, Belteshazzar, even though it was the name of a Babylonian god, and learning a new language.

- b. He was humble, acknowledging that God was the source of his knowledge and wisdom.

“To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds. Daniel 1:17

“During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven.” Daniel 2:19

5. He was bold even to king Nebuchadnezzar.

“Therefore, O king, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue.” Daniel 4:27

D. MAKE A PERSONAL APPLICATION

Chapters 2-6 of Daniel reveal how God has worked beyond the borders of Israel, particularly in the Babylonian and Persian Empires. How are these principles still applicable in the modern world in the 21st century?

- Chapter 2 - God sets up and destroys governments and will replace them with His own.
- Chapter 3 - God gives deliverance from government religious persecution.
- Chapter 4 - God is in control of governments.
- Chapter 5 - God will judge evil in government levels.
- Chapter 6 - God will deliver believers from the plots of unbelievers so the whole world will know of His glory. This is what was written after Daniel was delivered from the den of lions:
“I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end. He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions.” Daniel 6:26-27

E. DIG DEEPER

1. Use the model of Daniel’s adjustment to Babylon to help you to understand the challenges faced by an immigrant to a foreign country. Perhaps God will give you an opportunity this week to help a person who has arrived in a new land recently. Some of the readers of this book have had to leave Iran and are now living in new countries. How can some of the principles of Daniel’s adjustment to a new country and culture help you to adjust to your new country?
2. Carefully read Daniel 1-6. These chapters were chosen by a group of godly Christian politicians who were leaders in one country to study how to serve God within the context of a political office. What points do you think the group may have discussed?
3. In what way were Daniel’s 70 years of political life unusual? Can you find any record of him taking bribes, lying, stealing, or using his political office to his own advantage to persecute others? A true follower of God will lead a godly life in his business and in his home, not just in the place of worship.
4. How might the way Daniel adjusted to his new situation in Babylon help you if you

and your family had to move to a new city away from friends and your home church?