

HOW TO AVOID COMPROMISING
WITH THE WORLD
DANIEL 1:5, 8-21

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

Serving as a youth pastor in my younger years, I learned that one of the most difficult situations for many Christian young people to handle is parties. A friend at school is having a party, and everybody is going to be there. So they go, and perhaps at one of these parties there is alcohol or drugs or a lot of making out. Often there is much peer pressure placed upon these young people to get them to indulge. How should Christian young people respond in that kind of situation? Sometimes as adults we have to deal with parties that involve temptations.

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My brother worked for a while in the Massachusetts for a high tech company that did work for Uncle Sam. He was working on one government contract, but he discovered that the company was spending too much money on that contract. So they were billing his time to a different government project. How should he have handled that situation?

Three different situations, but the same basic problem: How should Christians respond when they are faced with temptation, temptation to compromise with the standards of the world? What should we do when we are tempted to compromise our integrity?

I have suggested that one of the two basic questions that the Book of Daniel answers is: How should we live in an often godless society? Our lesson today focuses on that question. It describes the need for tactful resistance to temptation. But it also shows how God responds to a faithful approach toward an often godless society. That issue relates to the second question posed by the Book of Daniel: Is God worthy of our trust?

Last time we saw that Daniel and his three teenage friends were taken captive in Jerusalem and hauled off to Babylon (PROJECTOR ON--- BABYLON CITY), the capital of the Babylonian Empire. There in that pagan empire the Babylonians began to indoctrinate them and to train them for government service. In doing so these four godly young men were faced with three threats to their Jewish faith. First, there was a threat to their identity. (PROJECTOR OFF) The Babylonians changed the names of these four teenagers from names based upon the name of the God of Israel to names based upon the Babylonian gods. Daniel and his three friends responded to this threat simply by enduring it. They tolerated it.

The second threat came from their educational system. The Babylonians sought to subvert the faith of these Jews by exposing them to the literature and religion of Babylon. The four Jewish boys participated in the Babylonian educational system and mastered it, but it did not master them.

Today we are going to look at the third threat to their faith. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego responded to this threat by resisting it. On this issue they refused to compromise. It is this third threat to their faith and their response to it that we are going to consider this morning.

I.

Let's look then at THE TEMPTATION TO COMPROMISE (PROJECTOR ON--- I. THE TEMPTATION TO COMPROMISE) which they faced. Verse 5 of Daniel #1 says, "**The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king.**"

The problem here is not obvious. What's wrong with eating the king's choice food and drinking his wine? From the Babylonian perspective there may have been several reasons for providing the food and drink that they did to these young men and their fellow students. **First**, it would encourage the good will of the captive young people. Remember, one of their prime concerns was to win the loyalty of the foreign youngsters. This was the finest food and drink in the empire. It was prepared for the king and his entourage. These foreign young people being trained for government service were given these take-home meals from Outback. We would expect that the students would appreciate it.

Second, this daily ration would have insured that they received a healthy, well-balanced diet. No doubt it met the requirements of the Babylonian FDA for the recommended daily allowance of vitamins and minerals.

Third, this diet was designed to promote loyalty to the Babylonian gods. After the food was prepared, at least part of it was presented before the Babylonian idols, and certain rituals were followed. By having the leaders of the nation eat this food that had been blessed to the gods, it was thought that the favor of the gods would rest upon the country and its future leaders.

There is some uncertainty about the exact danger that this prescribed diet presented to these Jewish young men. The problem posed to Daniel and his three friends was probably twofold. **First**, some of the food would have been prohibited by Old Testament dietary laws. It was from unclean animals, or it had not been prepared according to Old Testament laws. For example, blood was supposed to be drained from meat before it was eaten. The Babylonians probably did not care about that.

Second, the young Jews knew that the food had been offered to idols. Idol worship was one of the primary reasons that God had given Judah into Babylon's hands. Judah had compromised with the religions of the surrounding nations, and the result was nothing but trouble. These four young men had witnessed the results of that waywardness.

Daniel as a child may have heard the prophet Jeremiah preach in Jerusalem. In the Book of Jeremiah we have a taste of what he said. In chapter 5 v. 19 (JEREMIAH 5:19) the prophet quotes the Lord as saying, **“And when your people say, ‘Why has the Lord our God done all these things to us?’ you shall say to them, ‘As you have forsaken me and served foreign gods in your land, so you shall serve foreigners in a land that is not yours.’”**

In #16 v. 11 (JEREMIAH 16:11) the Lord reinforces the reason for this predicted exile, **“Because your fathers have forsaken me, declares the Lord, and have gone after other gods and have served and worshiped them, and have forsaken me and have not kept my law.”**

Then in v. 13 (JEREMIAH 16:13) God says, **“Therefore I will hurl you out of this land into a land that neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you shall serve other gods day and night, for I will show you no favor.”** The perspective of Daniel and his friends was that to eat and drink this food dedicated to the Babylonian gods would be to compromise with sin, it was to participate in the activities which had landed their people in this bad situation.

II.

Consider then Roman numeral III in the outline THE TEMPTATION TO RATIONALIZE. (II, THE TEMPTATION TO RATIONALIZE) Imagine the considerable pressures that these young men must have faced to eat this choice food. What I would like to do is to have a little audience participation here and have you share some of the rationalizations that these young men could have used to justify eating this food. What are some of the reasons that they could have come up with about why they should go ahead and eat this food?

1. THE KING COMMANDED IT. That makes it law. Not only does the law permit this activity, but it also requires it. And doesn't the New Testament confirm that believers are to be in subjection to the governing authorities? Doesn't it also say that we are to obey our employers?

2. WE MAY BE PUNISHED for refusing to go along with the program. We could get in big trouble. Who knows what they might do to us? Maybe this is getting a little too fanatical about our faith to risk getting thrown into prison.

3. THIS COULD BE BLOWING A BIG CAREER OPPORTUNITY. If I just let this slide by, I will be able to get into a position of greater authority, and then I will really be able to serve the Lord.

4. THIS IS REALLY GOOD FOOD. It looks good. It smells good. It probably tastes great. Anything this good can't be all bad.

5. MY PARENTS WILL NEVER KNOW. They don't have to find out. They are a thousand miles away. I'm on my own now. I don't have to tell them what's going on.

6. GOD WASN'T FAIR TO US. He didn't save us from being torn away from our families and being carried off to this strange land. He hasn't been good to us. Why should I obey and serve Him? You ever hear that? God hasn't provided me with any Christians to date; so why shouldn't I date this unbelieving guy or gal? Or, God took away my parent or my mate or my child or my friend. He has been unfair with me. Why should I follow Him?

7. EVERYBODY ELSE IS DOING IT. Even the other Jewish captives are going to eat it. Why even Abe Goldstein's son says that he is going to eat it.

Many of these thoughts may have gone through Daniel's mind. Many of these thoughts go through our minds when we are tempted to compromise. But Daniel determined to resist the temptation to compromise.

III.

Look then at DANIEL'S TACTFUL RESPONSE (III. DANIEL'S TACTFUL RESPONSE), described for us in vv. 8-13. Notice v. 8: **"But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank."**

The first impression that I get is that Daniel did not wait until a four course meal was sitting in front of him before he decided what he was going to do about eating the king's food. It seems that he found out what was going to happen ahead of time. He thought through his response. Then we are told that he "resolved," or "made up his mind." Literally it says that he "placed," or "put," or "set upon his heart what he was going to do." He anticipated the situation and decided beforehand what he was going to do about it.

There is an important lesson here for us Christians. As young people if we wait until we find ourselves on a deserted, moonlit beach on a warm evening with a person of the opposite sex and suddenly think, "Perhaps it is time for me to develop standards for dating," we are in trouble. We are going to lose.

If I am placed in a sales situation where my boss had told me to represent product X in a certain way, and the thought suddenly enters my mind: "This thing is not nearly as effective as I am saying that it is. I wonder what is really right in this situation," the outcome will probably not be very good for our ethical standards.

As much as possible we Christians need to anticipate situations where we will be faced with temptation or compromise of our Christian convictions and decide beforehand how

we will respond. That's true whether we are talking about drugs, alcohol, the opposite sex, business trips, product sales, social situations or whatever.

Daniel's response is also instructive for what he didn't do or say. He didn't fly off the handle at the Babylonians. He didn't say, "If you think I'm going to eat that stuff offered to idols, buddy, you have got another think coming. I know what you're trying to do. You're trying to brainwash me with your religion. You're trying to undermine my faith. Well forget it, friend. I'm not going to touch that stuff. You will have to throw me in jail first."

Sometimes we Christians can be like that. We may correctly oppose something but go about objecting to it in a way that hurts our cause more than it helps it. We fail to use tact.

Daniel decides beforehand, doesn't lose control, and goes to the appropriate authority. He doesn't go around complaining to everyone except the right person. He talks to somebody who can do something about his situation.

Look at the end of v. 8: **"Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself."** Daniel goes to the right person with the right attitude. He doesn't go to ream him out. He doesn't go with a chip on his shoulder. He goes to seek permission that he might not defile himself. Apparently he explains the difficulty that he is facing in regard to the king's order.

Notice what happens in vv. 9 & 10. **"And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs, and the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, 'I fear my lord the king, who assigned your food and your drink; for why should he see that you were in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age? So you would endanger my head with the king.'"**

God is sovereignly at work in seeing that Daniel gets a favorable hearing from this official. He is showing Daniel that He is worthy of his trust. It is also apparent that Daniel has established a good relationship with this man, who is called Ashpenaz in v. 3. Imagine the job that Ashpenaz must have had in taking these teenagers away from their parents, hauling them off to a strange country, and getting them started in a training program. Most of these teens came from royal families where they were accustomed to royal treatment. They were used to getting the best of everything. They were used to having most people bow down to them. Some of the students may have been spoiled brats. They may have been difficult to manage.

It appears, however, that Daniel acted like a well-behaved, decent young man and that this earned him respect from Ashpenaz, the chief of the officials. When Daniel brought his request, he was met with a sympathetic ear.

But Ashpenaz also faced a potential problem. If Daniel and his friends ate a different diet and started looking worse than the rest of the students, his own neck would be on

the line. The text doesn't tell us what specific direction Ashpenaz gave to Daniel. We have to read between the lines. Perhaps he didn't say "no" and he didn't say "yes." Perhaps he implied that Daniel and his friends could do what they wanted in this matter as long as they stayed in good health and didn't get him in trouble.

In any case in vv. 11-13 Daniel goes to the person who is under Ashpenaz's authority and is directly responsible for the four Jewish boys, and he proposes a test: "Let us eat vegetables and drink water, and after ten days, see how we look." The Hebrew term for vegetables here would include fruit and grains as well as vegetables.

So Daniel decides beforehand how he should respond to the temptation to compromise. he doesn't get mad and ream somebody out. Instead he goes to the appropriate authorities, and he suggests a solution to his situation that will also be acceptable to his superiors.

IV.

What happens? How does the Lord sovereignly work things out? Verses 14-21 describe GOD'S GRACIOUS BLESSING. (IV. GOD'S GRACIOUS BLESSING) In v. 15 we find out that at the end of the ten days the four young Jews appear to be in better shape than all of the other captives. **"At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food."** My interpretation is that the expression "fatter in flesh" has an intended nuance of healthier, more robust. I don't understand how a vegetarian diet in comparison to a diet that included meat could produce a distinct advantage in improved health in ten days. There may be important details in these different meal plans that we just don't know about, but my suspicion and interpretation is that there was a divine element in this health situation. God was directly involved in this physical health difference. The result was an obvious advantage for the four Jewish boys and their diet choice.

So the overseer allows them to continue their diet. The young men grow in knowledge and intelligence. Daniel acquires the ability even to interpret visions and dreams, according to v. 17.

As we shall see this is not simply a skill that he develops. It is a supernatural gift from God. Daniel's counterparts, and Daniel himself, learned certain astrological principles about how to supposedly read the future from the position of the stars and from the cutting up of animals. There were Babylonian manuals that they followed which described principles of dream interpretation. But Daniel got special revelation from the God who is really there.

At the end of the three year training period the four men have their final examination. It is an oral test. Their examiner is the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar himself. How do they do? According to v. 19, **"And the king spoke with them, and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Therefore they stood before the king."** They finish at the top of their class, and they begin their government service.

Verse 20, I suspect, describes not their personal interview with the king but their conduct in the early years of their government service. It says that they were ten times better advisors than all of the magicians and conjurers in the empire.

Magicians were not performers who went around doing tricks. They were religious scribes. They were diviners, or foretellers, who would use charts--- sometimes astrological charts--- to try to foretell the future and to answer specific questions about it. Conjurers were priests of the Babylonian gods who would try to control future events by using certain rituals and spells. Many of these rulers of pagan countries in this era had a preoccupation with the future. They tried to use priests of the gods to both foretell and control the future.

Things perhaps aren't all that different today. Instead of magicians and conjurers we have things like the Council of Economic Advisors and the CIA and the Congressional Budget Office. In 2021 Fed Chairman Jerome Powell and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen assured us that the rising rate of inflation was only temporary. US intelligence last year predicted that Kyiv would fall to the Russians in a week or two weeks at most. Perhaps these modern groups and officials are not any more effective in predicting the future than were the Babylonian magicians and conjurers.

In the matter of advice and insight into the future Nebuchadnezzar found Daniel and company far superior to anyone else. God blessed Daniel and his friends because of their faithfulness and because of their refusal to compromise with idol worship.

The first question that the Book of Daniel answers for us is: How should we live in an often godless society? Our lesson today tells us that we should not compromise with sin. We should not give in to the standards of worldliness--- the ethics of the world around us which violate the standards of God's Word. There were all kinds of reasons that Daniel could have come up with for going along with the crowd. But he knew that it wasn't the right thing to do. Not only did he do the right thing, but he also did it in the right way. He didn't lose his cool. He decided beforehand what he would do. He went to the appropriate person--- someone with whom he had established a good reputation, and he suggested a possible solution.

The second question that the Book of Daniel answers for us is this: Is God worthy of our trust? Daniel found out that He was. He made a hard decision, but a right one, and God blessed him for it. He rewarded him and his friends with success in government service. God blesses His people's faithfulness.

(ROMANS 8:28) In Romans 8:28 the Apostle Paul writes, **“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”** Joseph was sold by his brothers into slavery in Egypt. There he was unjustly thrown into prison. But Joseph was a man who did the right things, and God eventually caused him to be second in command in the land of

Egypt. Job was a righteous man. he endured a time of terrible suffering, but because he acted righteously, God rewarded him greatly. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Vaclav Maly was one of the heroes of the Eastern European Velvet Revolution. He was a priest in Czechoslovakia who resisted efforts of the government to silence His preaching. In 1978 he became a founding member of "The Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Persecuted."

For some reason the Communist government did not like this guy. In January of 1979 he was forbidden by the government to lead church services. He was forced to do secular work to support himself, but still he secretly led religious services. Then he was put in prison from May to December of 1979. Upon his release Vaclav Maly continued to engage in peaceful protest. One day he was one of the leaders who led a parade of hundreds of thousands of demonstrators through the streets of Prague. He was then called upon to be involved with negotiations with the government. The end result was a peaceful transition to democratic rule. Maly turned down an offer to participate in the government.

Later a western interviewer told him that he had become a hero to many in the West. He replied, "**On, no. A hero is someone who does something he doesn't have to do. But me--- I was merely doing my duty.**" (*Christianity Today*, 11/22/1993) Such was the work of one who resisted the pressure to compromise with the world. And such was the evidence that God was worthy of trust.

God rewards His people for their faithfulness. He is worthy of our trust. This blessing, or reward, however, does not always take the form of public recognition or career advancement. Sometimes we do not even receive that reward in this life. Our Lord (PROJECTOR ON--- MATTHEW 11:11) once said, "**Among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist.**" Yet John was beheaded for his preaching.

According to the Book of Acts Stephen was stoned for his testimony about Christ before a group of religious leaders. (PROJECTOR OFF) But God is worthy of our trust. He has promised us eternal rewards for our faithfulness, and He has guaranteed us that we will live with Him in heaven one day.

There is one requirement for entrance into this heaven. This requirement involves the decision that God is worthy of our trust. In John #3 the Jewish leader Nicodemus asked Jesus how he could enter the kingdom of God. Jesus said (PROJECTOR ON--- JOHN 3:3) to him, "**Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.**" He went on to explain (JOHN 3:16), "**For God so love the world that He gave His unique (one of a kind) Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.**"

The Gospel is that God sent His Son to become a man. This God-man lived a perfect life and ultimately died on the cross to pay the penalty for sin. In doing that He became

the bridge between a holy God and human beings infected by sin. The one responsibility that we have is to believe in this God-man Jesus Christ. This required belief is not just an intellectual assent, an agreement in our mind that this is probably true. The belief that God requires is a trust that places our dependence upon Jesus Christ to forgive us from sin and to take us to heaven. When we exercise this trust, we are truly born again, and we become part of God's family. God is worthy of our trust. If you have never trusted in His Son as your Savior, why don't you do that right now?