

Distinctive Daniel

Reading: Daniel Chapter 1 *In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ² 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. ³ Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility— ⁴ 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. ⁵ The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service. ⁶ Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. ⁷ The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego. ⁸ 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. ⁹ Now God had caused the*

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official to show favor and compassion to Daniel,¹⁰ but the official told Daniel, “I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your[c] food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you.”¹¹ Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah,¹² “Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink.¹³ Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see.”¹⁴ So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.¹⁵ At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food.¹⁶ So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar.¹⁹ The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and

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Azariah; so they entered the king's service. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.

Introduction

A Chameleon lizard is famous for being able to adapt its appearance. By changing its colour, it can quickly become camouflaged against all kinds of backgrounds.

Sometimes Christians can suffer from a form of spiritual **Chameleon Syndrome**. People, adapt to whatever social background they are in to be the same as the situation they find themselves in. Some friends and work colleagues may not know that we are Christians. Under peer pressure we can remain undetected Christians for years camouflaged like lizards.

However, as Christians we cannot hide from being identified with Christ. We cannot just adapt to a secular culture. Paul wrote to the Ephesian church in 4:17 ***So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking.***

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Being a Christian means being distinctive. The Apostle Paul in Romans 12:1-2 says: *Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

Daniel challenges Christians to be distinctive. The central message comes in chapter 1 v 8 *But Daniel resolved not to defile himself.*

As a young man Daniel had been taken from his homeland to Babylon to be trained in Babylonian culture. He and his friend were under immense pressure to conform to this culture. It looked as if the faith and culture of Israel were now finished; pagan Babylon now ruled Jerusalem. The Temple had been desecrated and ransacked and the holy furnishings had been taken away to Babylon. 400 years of the royal line of Judah from Saul had now ended. It seemed that God had been defeated. No a hope of returning home. Everything had changed. Life would would never be the same again!

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Daniel and his friends found themselves amongst the finest intellectuals in the Babylonian Empire and were being trained by the best professors in the world: in language, literature, mathematics, science and medicine. New faith related studies were now on offer: Astrology, divination and all kinds of magic arts and of coarse prayers to other new gods. They were given the best treatment, the best food and lived in the palace itself. Graduates from this great academy would be promoted to lead the Babylonian government.

It seemed obvious that the best way to help the Israelites was, to fit in, and gain as much promotion as possible; in order to be able to influence what happened in Jerusalem. If they didn't fit in there were many others who could easily take their place and the alternative was slave labour.

Their names were changed to have Babylonian gods in their names, not just to blend them into the Babylonian culture but to change their allegiance from their God to the gods of Babylon. Daniel meant **God is my Judge** was changed to Belteshazzar which had the word Bel – protector of the king.

But Daniel knew in all that was happening around him

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that God was still in complete control. Daniel knew what Jeremiah had prophesied, that if Judah did not stop worshipping other gods, that Jerusalem would be destroyed and people would be exiled for 70 years. The destruction of Jerusalem made Daniel fear God more than Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel and his friends knew that God had planned this privileged position for them. It was no accident. God had a divine purpose in this.

Daniel would of coarse have known about the story of Joseph's moral faithfulness and promotion to become the prime minister of Egypt. He too had to make a stand like Joseph. A line had to be drawn in the sand.

Daniel 1:8 *But Daniel resolved not to defile himself.* Daniel and his friends choose not to eat the same food as everyone else. They wanted to stop the assimilation, stop the compromising, stop the assumption that they were going to become Babylonians. They were going to make a pubic stand and align themselves with the Lord God of Israel. **This was a matter of spiritual allegiance.** God blessed them for their stand. They were healthier and fitter than anyone else, He also granted them knowledge and understanding. Daniel could understand the meaning of visions and dreams. Daniel finished the academy with first class honours.

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Even though Daniel lived 2600 years ago, his situation is very familiar to Christians living today. Christians are under immense pressure to conform to this world. Young people in universities are being educated in pagan pluralism, they are constantly coming under pressure to compromise and adapt and become assimilated into a worldly culture.

Like Daniel we must resolve not to defile ourselves. **Illustration of a frog boiled in water.** Apparently, if you heat water slowly enough, frogs will allow themselves to be cooked, boiled to death because they don't recognise the change that is slowly going on. Some Christians today are being spiritually boiled to death and don't realise how morally compromised they are becoming. There has to come a point where we say. **That's enough. I will not compromise any further.**

Ephesians 5:3-5 says *But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. ⁴ Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. ⁵ For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of*

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Christ and of God.

At OCC we need to stand by what the scriptures teaches and distance ourselves from any teaching or stand point that denies scripture. This will keep us distinctive from this world.

Daniel wasn't fooled by the power of Babylon. He knew that God ruled over all the kingdoms of men. Human kingdoms come and go. One day Jesus will return and those who have chosen not to defile themselves, those who are distinctive like Daniel will be blessing in the coming kingdom of God.

We are not promised God's blessing are guaranteed this side of death. The most distinctive man of all, Jesus Christ was crucified for his resolution to remain undefiled! But God can reward in this life if He chooses too.

In Daniel's case, this first test of his resolution was critical in preparing him for a bigger test to come – the lion's den. It may be that faithfulness in resolving not to be defiled in small things today will prepare us for greater tests to come.

What an epitaph to have on our gravestone – he / she

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resolved not to defile themselves. Daniel challenges all of us to consider where we are becoming compromised and what we must resolve to do in order to remain distinctive.

Personal Study Questions on Daniel

- ✚ What are the pressures upon us to conform to the world around us?
- ✚ How should Christians today be distinctive?
- ✚ What should we resolve to do in order to remain distinctively Christian?