

DANIEL

Week One

Living Above the Culture While in the Culture

Introduction: The Book of Daniel is one of the most intriguing books of the Old Testament, not easy to understand, full of prophecies, and written to show how Daniel remained obedient to God in a culture that clashes with God. The essence of the clash is not so much Daniel against the Babylonian culture as it is king Nebuchadnezzar's pride against God's power. Each week we will examine a selected chapter from Daniel based on the following:

1. Read the entire chapter.
2. Pray that God would open your heart to receive His word.
3. Summarize the chapter in your own words focusing primarily on the faithfulness of Daniel and the challenges confronted in a strange and hostile world.
4. Read the background material and lesson plan.
5. Answer the questions for that chapter

Our objective is to grow our faith to help us become overcomers in a hostile world.

Chapter One

We live in a world more and more resistant to God, putting a heavy burden on believers. Why? We are confronted each day with demands that defy God's word. Today's culture is complex, complicated, radical, and built around contrasting viewpoints that clash with God. It creates tension among politicians, factions, and hard-core protesters. If you act or live outside their bubble, you are considered the enemy, subject to verbal abuse, ridicule, and shame. We face tremendous hostility as believers forcing us to be bold and courageous dealing with today's issues. Daniel understood how to reconcile the dilemma of living in a hostile world demanding people to blend in and accept it. How was he able to find his way in Babylon? How will we maneuver through this world gone astray? How do we stay true to God? Let's review how Daniel remained faithful even in a Babylonian empire that did not know God.

1. A culture that rejects God, will demand that people worship the things of the world.

Daniel is under Babylonian control in a culture that resists God. The Babylonians immersed Daniel into Babylonian culture, attempting to assimilate him into a life that demands he worship king Nebuchadnezzar. If accomplished, Daniel would be useful to the king.

Do you see any parallels today? Consider colleges, universities, and even some of our high schools. We raise our children, send them to university to provide them the education they need to become productive. Ironically, we pay money to these universities as they reconfigure our children's thought patterns, turn them against God - sometimes against their own families - to become accustomed to the ways of the world. They become captives of the world and when we seek to reason with them, they resist. They seem to worship the creation - not the Creator - and reject whatever they knew about God. Examining Daniel's life, we see that he did not compromise his faith and lived his life in total obedience to God while blending into the Babylonian culture. That is the faith we should have in this world and the strength of faith our children should take to college. A faith that allows them to live above the culture while in the culture.

2. What does Daniel, Chapter 1 teach us?

- **Establish a deep and compelling resolve to protect and project a life of morality.** In verse 8, Daniel *“resolved not to defile himself with royal food and wine.”* This verse is key to Daniel’s ability to remain steadfast and faithful to God. It shows the inner resolve and commitment that sets him apart and shows us the continued conflict between the aggressiveness of the world and God’s servants. Daniel made it clear that the most important responsibility he had was to protect his character.
- **Refuse to compromise by being fully committed to God’s word.** Daniel took a strong stand by requesting that he be tested. (Verses 12-15) Daniel’s heart was firmly grounded in the word of God. To be like Daniel requires us to rise above the world and live a life that is obedient to God, refusing to compromise His word simply to gain favor in the world.
- **Maintaining excellence in all areas of life will impact the culture with optimal results.** Be the best you can be given the circumstances knowing that when you rise above the rest, you will be noticed and gain respect from others. Daniel and his friends demonstrated that they understood all kinds of literature and learning. (verse 17) Their excellence allowed them to blend into the Babylonian culture but at the same time remain obedient and faithful to God.
- **Resist the temptation to follow immoral behavior advanced by a culture that ignores the righteousness of God.** The world is corrupt, always stalking and forever tempting the believer to compromise God’s word and seek that which the world offers. *“For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile, and their foolish hearts were darkened.....”* (Romans 1:21) Do not follow the world, resist and conquer the desires of the flesh and know that when you compromise with the world, you will become captive to the world and separated from God. Stand strong and resist. Know that Jesus is with us for *“having been crucified with Christ, I no longer live, but it is Christ who now lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live in faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”* (Galatians 2:20)
- **Every challenge we face and overcome should be to bring glory to God.** Our chief end is to glorify God. This truth is found in 1 Corinthians 10:31: *“Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”* For the believer then, success is when God is glorified above everything else. The goal of each believer should be God’s glorification. Glorifying God requires us to resist temptation, meet every challenge head on with Jesus guiding us, avoid the urge to compromise morally, and stand with Jesus.

Questions:

1. What are some benefits Daniel received as a result of his remaining faithful and obedient to God?
2. What steps might you take to assimilate in the world but protect your character? Is living above the culture something that you find difficult to do? Why?
3. Think about a time in your life where you were uprooted and ended up in a new environment challenging for you? Did you compromise your integrity or your relationship with God in order to better fit in? Share that experience with someone.
4. What challenges do young people face as they leave for college or leave home? How might we better prepare them to live in the college environment but yet live above it? Name three steps that can help them protect their character and stay obedient to God.