

Daniel 1:8-21

*How to Say No*

In 1995, 6-foot-2-inch, 280-pound Clay Shiver, who played center for the Florida State Seminoles, was regarded as one of the best college football players in the nation. In fact, one magazine wanted to name him to their preseason All-America football team. But that was a problem, because the magazine was Playboy, and Clay Shiver is a dedicated Christian.

Shiver and the team chaplain suspected that Playboy would select him, and so he had time to prepare his response. Shiver knew well what an advantage this could be for his career. Being chosen for this All-America team meant that sportswriters regarded him as the best in the nation at his position. That kind of publicity never hurts athletes who want to make it to the pros and to multimillion-dollar contracts.

But Shiver had higher values and priorities. When he was informed that Playboy had made him their selection, Clay Shiver simply said, "No thanks." He flatly turned down the honor.

Why? Clay didn't want to embarrass his mother and grandmother by appearing in the magazine or give old high school friends an excuse to buy that issue and he quoted Luke 12:48: "To whom much is given, of him much is required." "I don't want to let anyone down," said Shiver, "and number one on that list is God."

Last week we began to study one of the most exciting and challenging books in the Bible. We began to look at the book of Daniel.

The prophet Daniel is unquestionably one of the most remarkable men in the Bible. He is recognized by Christians and Jews as one of the outstanding men in Jewish history.

The book that bears his name traces his life from his teenage years through his 80s. This man lived through the 70 years of captivity of Judah, spending his life in the glamorous city of Babylon. He served in the ruling courts as prime minister under five rulers (two of which are named in the book).

He lived on into the days when the Medes and Persians overthrew Babylon and released the Jews from captivity. When the Jews finally returned to their land

Daniel's life, work, and ministry ended.

As we saw last week the book of Daniel begins on a sorrowful note. For centuries the chosen people of God had been drifting farther and farther away from the truth. Repeatedly God had spoken to the kings of Judah through His messengers, the prophets, but the pleasure-loving Israelites refused to listen.

The Lord Jehovah is a God of grace and mercy. With loving-kindness and long-suffering He patiently appealed to these faltering Jews to repent and turn to Him. It has always been true that when someone rejects the Lord continually, sooner or later time runs out and sin must be punished.

Persistent sin results in promised judgment. That was the sad story of the kingdom of Judah and the capital city Jerusalem in the days of Daniel. *In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.*

What's amazing is the Jews were surprised when Nebuchadnezzar besieged the city. They shouldn't have been because Jeremiah had given a specific prophecy of the downfall of Judah. In this prophecy Jeremiah 25 it's explicitly stated that Nebuchadnezzar would come upon them and carry them to Babylon for a period of seventy years. The wicked king Nebuchadnezzar was the instrument God chose to bring judgment upon the Jews.

Daniel is one of those who were taken back to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar.

### **Turn with me to Daniel chapter 1 pg 855**

At this point Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah have been chosen to go through an intense training program. It was common for a conquering ruler to choose out nobles of the captured lands and incorporate them into his court.

The plan was to take these 4 guys and totally immerse them in Babylonian culture, religion, and learning and erase their past. Change their identity. Cut them off from all of their religious associations. Try to get them to forget their homes, their lifestyle, and everything else about their godly Jewish heritage.

Daniel didn't protest when they changed his name to a Babylonian name. He didn't protest being enrolled in the schools of Babylon. But there was a line he knew he couldn't cross.

### **Read vs 8**

Name changes and studying at foreign universities aren't prohibited by God, but eating non-kosher meat was. For a godly Jew living under the Mosaic law it would have been a sin for Daniel to eat. Not only that but the king's meat and wine would have been offered up to pagan gods.

Daniel saw that if he cooperated, he would both be spiritually defiled as well as giving recognition to a false god thereby blowing his opportunity to give "testimony" to the true and living God.

Here's a test that was definitely heavy duty. Daniel was a young man, far from home, and responsible to a king who could have him flayed alive. The king held the power of life and death. There was no court, no jury and no trial necessary to put a man to death. Just the whim of the king.

What would you have done if you were in Daniel's place? Would you have passed the test?

Life is full of tests. We're not normally faced with life and death decisions but every day we face the question: "Do I do what God says, or what I think is best? Do I do what God says, or what I want to do?"

How do we make those choices? How do we pass the tests that life puts us through daily?

I want you to see this morning how Daniel dealt with this one. There's a pattern here that will help us no matter what form the tests take.

There were three steps involved in handling this challenge:

I. We will do what God wants us to do if we begin with an inner conviction.

**look at vs 8 again:** *But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies...*

The principle is: "Resolution must precede temptation." We must resolve, make a decision and commitment beforehand. When you are there looking at the temptation and your heart and desire is moved, you don't think "should I" or "should I not". You won't debate. You'll go and do it. But if you already make a resolution you'll just walk away. Resolution must precede temptation.

Don't get into the rushing current of temptation and say "Help". You're already headed down stream. Don't play with a stick of dynamite with a lit fuse. It's gonna explode. Don't even touch it. Don't even entertain your curiosity. If you can't say "No" in ch. 1, when you get over to ch. 6 and the lion's den you won't say "no" there either.

Daniel drew the line. It was as if he saw the lions in the king's banqueting hall. If Daniel hadn't been faithful there he would not have survived the lions' den. Few will. If you eat with the Devil then the lions are going to eat you.

Young Christians sometimes think, "How could I cope with martyrdom? How could I cope with wild beasts in the arena. Would I stand?" The answer to the question is, how are you managing today? What happens when you fill out those income tax forms? How honest are you with those deductions? What about at the office party at Christmas? How do you manage at school? On the football field? Do you give your employer an honest day's work? Why torment yourselves about lions' dens in distant places if you're failing in the dining room today?

I see this as the big decision that was the guiding light of Daniel's life. The approval of God was dearer to him than the favor of the most powerful king, dearer than life itself.

"Keep thy heart with all diligence for out of it are the issues of life." Prov. 4:23  
"Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him;.." Ps. 37:5 "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever." Ps. 111:10  
This is quite a promise to those who are faithful in little things. I have statement written in the front of my first Bible. I thought it was so profound when I heard it 28 years ago that I wrote it down, It says, "Little things are little things, but faithfulness in little things is a big thing."

Daniel's strength of character was the result of decided, determined, committed, dedicated purpose of heart to do the right thing because it is right, leaving the results with God. He knew how to say NO to temptation because he was controlled by an inner conviction.

What controls you? Have you purposed in your heart to follow God or do you just take life as it comes? If you're just taking it as it comes, I can tell you what your track record's been in respect to temptation.

*I. God Will Strengthen Us to Do His Will if We Begin With an Inner Conviction*

*II. God Will Strengthen Us to Do His Will if We Operate Within the Bounds of His Word*

### **Read vs 9-13**

Daniel was an unusual man. He had hard, strong convictions but he handled them in a humble way.

The prince of the eunuchs, who was in charge of them, was named Ashpenaz. Daniel went to him and requested that he might not have to defile himself.

Do you see Daniel following any Biblical principles here?

### **Proverbs 18:12 pg 621**

*PSA 10:17 LORD, You have heard the desire of the humble; You will prepare their heart; You will cause Your ear to hear*

The American Heritage Dictionary defines *humble* as 1. Marked by meekness or modesty in behavior, attitude, or spirit; not arrogant or prideful. 2. Showing deferential or submissive respect.

Humility isn't weakness. In fact it's a sign of real strength and self control.

### **Titus 3:1+2 pg 1146**

God places a high premium on showing respect for authority. Daniel may have been in Babylon, Daniel may have been under a godless government, but he was still to respect authority.

Peter says: "...be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." The Bible places a high premium on humility and submissiveness to authority.

Daniel had a gracious, respectful, and humble approach. We ought to take a stand, we ought to be firm, unyielding in our convictions, (if you don't stand for something you'll fall for anything) but we need to be careful to be gracious and humble when we stand for those convictions. Often people who have strong convictions become hard, unyielding, and obnoxious in the way they hold their beliefs. They turn people away from the Christian faith and its standards by the rude way they express their views. One doesn't have to be a crank to have convictions. We can be kind in the way we hold them.

Maybe you've seen Pastor Fred Phelps and his congregation from Westboro Baptist Church on the news. They go around protesting homosexual events with signs that say things like "AIDS cures Fags."

They even showed up at Matthew Shepherd's funeral with signs saying "Fags die, God laughs." Their church web address is [godhatesfags.com](http://godhatesfags.com).

I can respect people with convictions even if I don't agree with their convictions. I'm politically conservative but I can respect a liberal if they honestly believe that their way is the best for the country. What I can't respect is rudeness and haughtiness.

When Christians stoop to nastiness and rudeness they are violating God's commands and playing right into the hands of those who want to brand us a intolerant bigots.

Daniel obeyed God by respecting the authority he was under and using a gracious approach.

## **Back to Daniel 1**

Notice that God was already working in this. God had already brought Daniel into the favor and good will of the prince of the eunuchs.

But the prince of the eunuchs did what most of us do. He made his decision in the light of how it was going to affect him personally. He said, "If I keep that

king's meat and wine away from you, might show it. You might look inferior to the others and I'll lose my head." Daniel's request was denied. Now what!

The information the chief of the eunuchs gave Daniel was valuable. Daniel understood that his actions would affect his superiors as well as himself. He needed to act in a way to please God and to protect and prosper his superiors.

What he does is act on his convictions and the information which the commander gave him. The goal of Daniel's Babylonian superiors was to feed them the best food they had so they'd be in the best shape possible. No one really cared what Daniel ate as long as he prospered, physically and mentally.

So Daniel sought out his immediate superior. This was the steward that Ashpenaz had put in charge. Since he was directly involved with Daniel, Daniel sought him out, not to try to get around Ashpenaz, but because he was in a position to evaluate Daniel's plan of action.

The goal was peak performance, physically and mentally. The "control group," against whom Daniel and his friends could be compared, was the rest of the Hebrew trainees. Daniel proposed that he and his friends be allowed to eat vegetables for ten days and then their condition could be compared with the rest. If Daniel's group could match or surpass the others, then the goal of the Babylonian officials was reached without defiling them.

Daniel's proposal is submissive, humble, respectful, and based on faith.

The proposal was accepted. Daniel's plan not only preserved the purity of these four Jews, but it did so in a way that benefited their superiors. If Daniel and his friends were so obviously superior to the rest, the king would give some of the credit to those in charge of them.

When someone wants to buy a used car they take it on a test drive. The people of this world do not know much about our God. They need evidence that he is who he claims to be. Many of them don't think it is worth following Christ.

They're looking to those who represent him on earth for evidence of the relevance of Christianity. We are the test of the gospel in this world.

Now we often say, "Don't look at us; look at Jesus." But before looking at Jesus, many people will first look at his followers to see whether what he has done for them makes Jesus worth looking at. Jesus knew that. That's why He said, "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven"

### **Read vs 14**

The steward took the test drive.

*I. God Will Strengthen Us to Do His Will if We Begin With an Inner Conviction*

*II. God Will Strengthen Us to Do His Will if We Operate Within the Bounds of His Word*

*III. God Will Strengthen Us to Do His Will if We Depend on His Power*

### **Read vs 15-16**

What are you willing to trust God for in order to live in His will? Daniel must have thought long and hard about that question and prayed for courage to do the right thing. At some point he decided to take the risk.

John MacArthur writes: "Daniel really believed that God would make his request possible. Where did he get that confidence? Do you know what I believe?

As a basic spiritual principle, I believe that although sin brings doubt -- purity brings confidence. When a person is living a holy life, I think there is almost a sense of invincibility in that life which believes that God will deliver. Daniel had this unblemished faith . . . this sense of being invincible."

Daniel knew he was in God's hands. Daniel knew his trust had to be in the Lord. And God strengthen Daniel's resolve as Daniel depended on Him.

Now notice the progression: Daniel lived a godly life. Sin wasn't causing him to doubt God. Therefore he believed God was going to allow him to live out his commitment not to defile himself. He was strengthened to do God's will because he had the faith to believe the power of God would see him through.



I've known Christians who really struggled with doubt when it came to God's promises. Now we all have doubts at some time. A little doubt can be healthy once in a while because it forces us to check out the evidences for the truth of the Bible and the reality of Christ. No harm done there. In fact, blindly taking everything without checking it out can lead to disastrous results.

Just look at this horrible Ugandan cult situation in which hundreds lost their lives. They were following two women who said the Virgin Mary was giving them messages. God wants us to check things out.

The Bible tells us that there's only one way to heaven and the forgiveness of sins. Old Testament or New Testament that way was by faith in God through the sacrifice of His Son. We've had thousands of religions that have said we get to God by some form of works.

Only Biblical Christianity says, "that's not true." Only Biblical Christianity says *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

Only Biblical Christianity puts its hope in Jesus words, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."*

Not by works, only through Christ. If you doubt me today there's a challenge. Check it out for yourself. See if that's what the Bible really teaches. That kind of doubt leads to a search for truth.

But, there's also a kind of doubt that can be harmful. I watched a friend of mine who allowed a particular sin to creep into his life and grow and grow. He knew the Bible. He had been a leader in his church. He had taught others. But this is what he said to me: "I don't even know if I believe anything the Bible says anymore."

He sat before me as a broken man who had seemed to have lost the ability to depend on the power of God. The story actually has a bit of happy ending. After a lot of struggle and persistence in the scripture he dealt with the sin problem. Unfortunately he also lost some things in his life that were most precious to him.

King David went through this same experience. he sinned before God and then

tried to cover it up. He was a leader. He knew the Bible. But I want you to see what sin did to him.

**Turn to Psa 31 pg 530**

**Read 31:9–10 32:3-4**

Sin put us in a position of spiritual weakness. compare David's statements about himself to Daniel's boldness. Because of a pure life and faith in God's promises Daniel depended upon the power of God to see him through. **Back to Daniel 1**

God will strengthen us to do his will if we depend on his power.

**Read vs 17**

Do you believe God will ultimately bless your faith and obedience! At times, that's a difficult question to answer. The fact is, that God does bless us, even when we may not experience that reality immediately. His timetable may be quite different from ours, but God will reward us in a special way--even though it may be in eternity. For Daniel and his three friends, the blessings came immediately and throughout their training program.

As time went by the Lord gave Daniel and his three friends "knowledge and skill in all literature and learning." As they diligently studied, they learned faster than the others. Not only did they stand out physically but intellectually. In addition, God gave Daniel a special spiritual gift: the ability to "understand all visions and dreams."

God did something else too. He protected these young men from intellectual and spiritual contamination in spite of their exposure to false and evil information. King Nebuchadnezzar had inherited a remarkable library from the Assyrian emperor, Ashurbanipal (669-626 B.c.). Much of that great source of knowledge included methods of divination--ways to communicate with the unseen world and to determine the will of various gods. Obviously, Daniel studied these methods and understood them thoroughly, but as a God-fearing Jew he never used them. To do so would be to dabble in satanic activity which was strictly forbidden in the Law of Moses.

Ironically, God enabled Daniel to eventually use this exposure to these evil

practices to demonstrate God's true power through his own supernatural gift to "understand visions and dreams." In other words, we're going to see in chapter 2 that the Lord demonstrated to the Babylonians through Daniel that He was the one true God.

Is it always possible for Christians to become distinguished and respected leaders in a totally pagan environment? Not always, but Daniel and his three friends demonstrate that with God's help, things can happen that are beyond our ability to grasp or comprehend.

### **Read 18–20**

The time finally came when Daniel and his friends completed the three years of intensive training. Ashpenaz must have been excited, looking forward to this day, knowing that these four young men would stand out. And they did! When "the king interviewed them,... among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah." No one measured up or even came close to their ability to answer questions. In fact, we read that the king "ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all his realm."

What the king didn't know was that their confidence was in the God that they loved and trusted, not simply in themselves and not at all in false gods.

Finally we're told this in verse 21 **Read 21.**

Here's a little glimpse into the future. Daniel was present for the entire 70 years of captivity that was fulfilled. He was approximately 85-90 years old when Cyrus decreed for the Jews to return to their land.

Leon Wood writes, Daniel lasted, by the grace of God, "through all the plots and intrigues that regularly exist in oriental courts; through all the jealousy and envy that could only be expected toward a foreign captive in high office; through a series of four rapid successions of Babylonian kings, two of which had suffered assassination; and through the fall of Babylon itself to the genius of Cyrus, the Medo-Persian."

Satan's plan was that Daniel wouldn't stay the course, that he wouldn't be God's great prophet speaking up in Babylon. Satan's plan was to assist Nebuchadnezzar so that everything about the Lord disappeared - his name, his

law, his covenant, the record of his mighty works, and his people all gone. But God's plan was different; it was that this young boy Daniel who was taken as a slave and a refugee to Babylon should have an extraordinary influence in that empire.

75 years later and he's there ! Nebuchadnezzar is forgotten, but Daniel is still there. Kings come and kings go, world empires rise and fall, but Daniel's still there until the first year of King Cyrus. The greatest single reason why in 70 years' time God's people still existed as an entity in Babylon was because Daniel had refused to eat the king's food. Through the grace of God this boy knew some things better than the greatest men in all the world.

What would you have done if you were in Daniel's place? Would you have passed the test?

Life is full of tests. We're not normally faced with life and death decisions but every day we face the question: "Do I do what God says, or what I think is best? Do I do what God says, or what I want to do?"

How do we make those choices? How do we pass the tests that life puts us through daily?

*We Begin With an Inner Conviction*

*We Operate Within the Bounds of His Word*

*We Depend on His Power*

And we have this resolve: *I don't want to let anyone down and number one on that list is God.*